

LEVELED BOOK • Q

Morty and the Oatmeal Babysitter



Written by Kathy Hoggan
Illustrated by Joel Snyder

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Morty is a very mischievous mouse who always does very mischievous things.

Morty's day started off badly at breakfast. Morty poured Cheesie O's into his bowl. All three Cheesie O's that is. Someone had eaten the rest and left the empty box in the pantry. He may have done it. He wasn't sure. Now his options for breakfast were bleak.

Mother placed a bowl of hot oatmeal in front of Morty. He didn't look up. He was staring at *Where in the Attic Is Marvin Mouse?* on the back of the Cheesie O's box, trying to decode the clues. When Morty finally stuck his spoon into the bowl, the oatmeal was cold and thick. He didn't dare eat it—it could get stuck in his throat! *I'll skip breakfast*, he thought. Besides, his favorite television show was about to start.





"Morty, I have a special favor to ask you," Mother said, turning down *Mega Mouse* at the most exciting part. "I need to go help Aunt Edna for a bit. Would you please mouse-sit your brothers and sisters?"

"Uh-huh," Morty answered, without taking his eyes from the TV.

"I don't want you to have any friends in the house. Don't let your brothers or sisters leave the yard either. I should be home in just a few hours." Mother paused and added, "If all goes well while I'm gone, I'll take you, Ben, and Fred to the circus tomorrow."

At this, Morty looked up. "Really? The circus? That sounds great!" What could be better than going to the circus with his two best friends? Morty could already smell the cheese popcorn and feel the excitement of the big tents, arcade games, and daring tricks.

Mother planted a kiss on Morty's ear and made one final request: "Please be good."

After she left, Morty cranked up the volume on *Mega Mouse*. His six brothers and sisters were outside playing. *Maybe I'll just stay on the sofa and watch TV until Mom gets home*, he thought. *But it sure would be great if there were some Cheesie O's to munch on.*

A little while later, Morty heard the doorbell ringing. He scampered to the door. When he opened it, Ben and Fred began squeaking at once.



"The circus—it's here!" Ben said. "You have to come now. They're setting up. We can sneak under the back fence to see everything!"

"Yeah, everything—elephants, tigers, the sword swallower, and the fire-breathing mouse!" Fred added.

"Come on! Right now! We can see the stuff that most mice never get to see!" Ben said.

Morty thought, *I'll go for only a few minutes, but who can watch the mice if I go? I'd have to be home before Mom comes back.* Then Morty had a very mischievous idea.

"I can go," Morty said. "Send my brothers and sisters inside. I'll need a couple of minutes with them."

"Oh, and don't come in the house," Morty added, remembering that his Mom had said 'No friends in the house.'

Morty ran to the pantry and got the bulky bag of oatmeal. Then, he started running nice, warm water in the bathtub. As his little brothers and sisters came in, Morty said, "Time for a bath. You want to be nice and clean when Mother gets home. Hop in!" Soon the tub was lively, with six little mice splashing in the warm water.



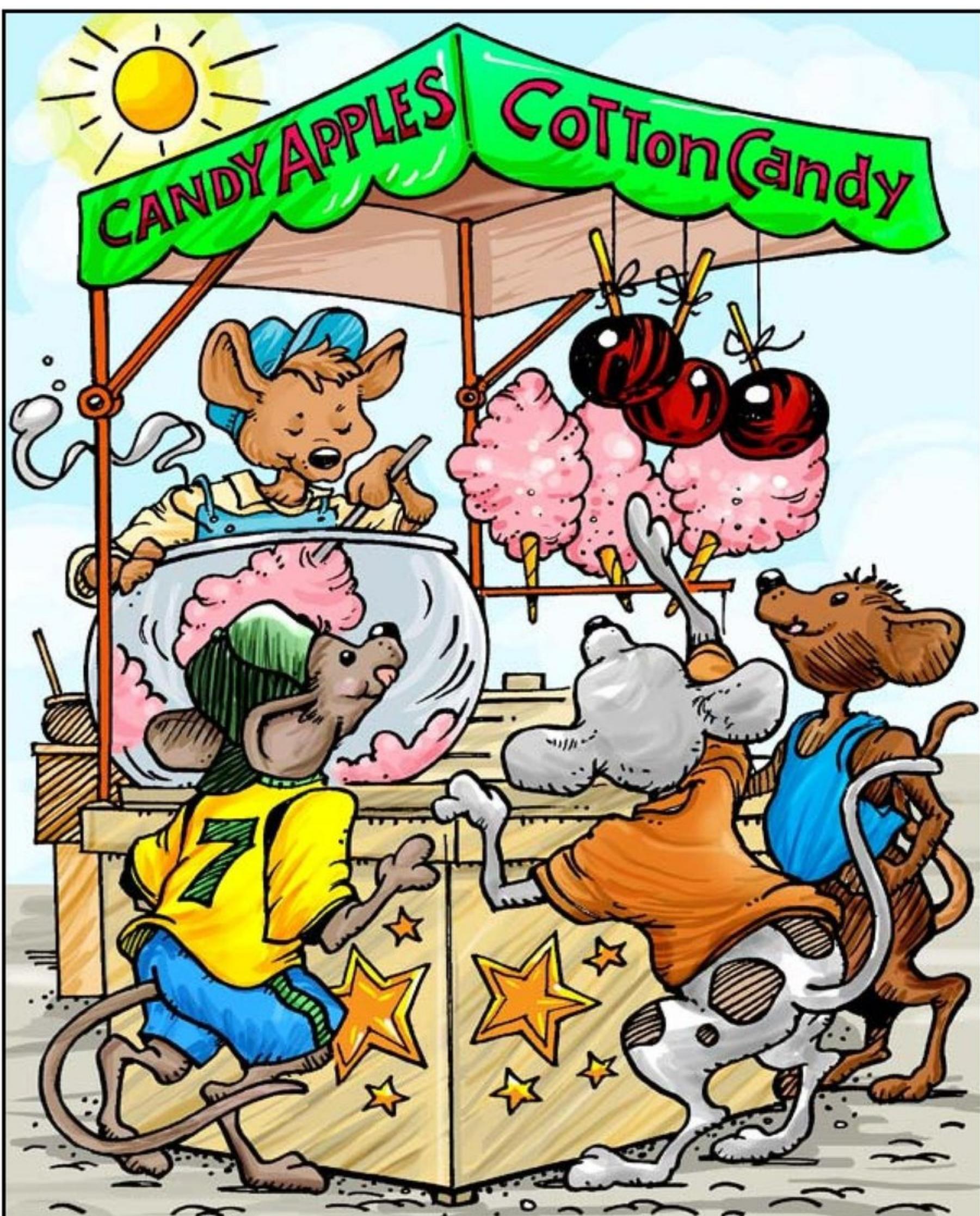


Morty poured the oatmeal into the tub. *Oatmeal will make the perfect mouse-sitter, he thought. They won't get into any trouble, and I'll be back in time to free them before Mother returns.* Next, Morty turned on the cool water for a quick, almost cement-like thickening. Then he shut off the water and snuck out of the house before the mice had time to squeak.



Ben and Fred led the way as the three mice explored every tent and animal cage. If they weren't helping with the setup, the circus animals were napping, and even the scary lion looked peaceful. On a dare from Fred, Morty squeezed himself through the bars of the cage to gently touch the lion's mane. His heart felt like it would pound right out of his chest with fear. It beat so loudly, he was sure it would wake the lion.

After that bit of daring, Ben, Fred, and Morty scurried around the snack stands. They wanted to stuff themselves with warm cheese popcorn and candy apples. But that would have to wait until tomorrow when the circus opened for business.



Morty quietly peeked into the back of a noisy tent. There were a few mice practicing silly moves. "Ben and Fred, come check this out! They're clowns without their face paint. Don't they just look like regular mice?" Morty said.

They turned at every sight, smell, and sound. Morty was most curious about the games on the midway, where the sideshow tents were. *How come it seemed as if no one ever won?* Morty spotted a row of stuffed Mega Mouses ready to lure anyone with a few quarters to play. "I'll win one of those tomorrow when I come back with Mother," Morty said to himself.





Mother? Oh no! Morty had completely forgotten about his brothers and sisters. He had to hurry home to get everyone out of the tub before Mom returned! It was nearly dark. “This is bad,” Morty screamed at Ben and Fred. “I’ve got to go RIGHT NOW! I am in BIG TROUBLE!”

Ben and Fred had heard that line from Morty before. They weren’t going to leave yet—the trapeze act was about to practice.

Returning from Aunt Edna's, Mother was surprised to find no mice playing in the front yard. When she opened the front door, the television was blaring, but there was no one watching it. Clicking off the TV, she heard the faint sound of whimpering coming from the bathroom.





"Oh dear, what have we here?" Mother said, using her calming voice. Her precious children weren't harmed, but felt hurt that their big brother would play such a mean trick on them.

Mother quickly turned on the hot water. As the oatmeal got runny, she lifted out each of her little mice and gave them a big hug.

Morty skidded around the corner and scampered up his street at full mouse speed. Spotting the mouse minivan, his heart sank. Mother was home.

"Hi, Mother," Morty called out, stepping through the front door.

"I'm in here," Mother called from the kitchen.

Morty's brothers and sisters were sitting around the table eating cheese chowder. The soup smelled delicious. Morty was so excited to tell them about the circus, but he knew that would have to come later.



"Morty, I was going to make some yummy oatmeal cookies as a little treat," Mother said. "I thought it would be a nice reward if everything went well here while I visited sick Aunt Edna at her house."

Gulp. Morty could feel the color rising in his cheeks, and his ears were turning red, too.



"But all the oatmeal is gone," Mother continued. "Do you know anything about the very long oatmeal bath your brothers and sisters took?"

Now, there's one thing about Morty.
HE ALWAYS TELLS THE TRUTH.

"Yes," he murmured.
"You see, I really wanted to watch the circus being set up. And I know I promised to watch the mice for you."

Morty looked at his brothers and sisters. They had stopped slurping their soup, and all twelve wide eyes stared at him.



"I'm sorry. I was thinking only about myself. I broke my promise to you, Mother."

Morty couldn't tell if Mother was disappointed or angry. "Morty, you let me down, and you played a very mean trick on your brothers and sisters." For the second time that day, Morty's heart felt as if it would beat right out of his chest.

Maybe now was a good time to change the subject, he thought. “You know the fire-eating mouse? He rinses his mouth with ice cold water first, and . . .”

“Morty, I am glad you enjoyed yourself because you will not be going to the circus tomorrow,” Mother said. “You are grounded. You will use the money you saved for the circus to buy a bulk bag of oatmeal.”

“Yes, Mother,” Morty murmured.

“Also, I believe you have a bathroom to clean before dinner.”

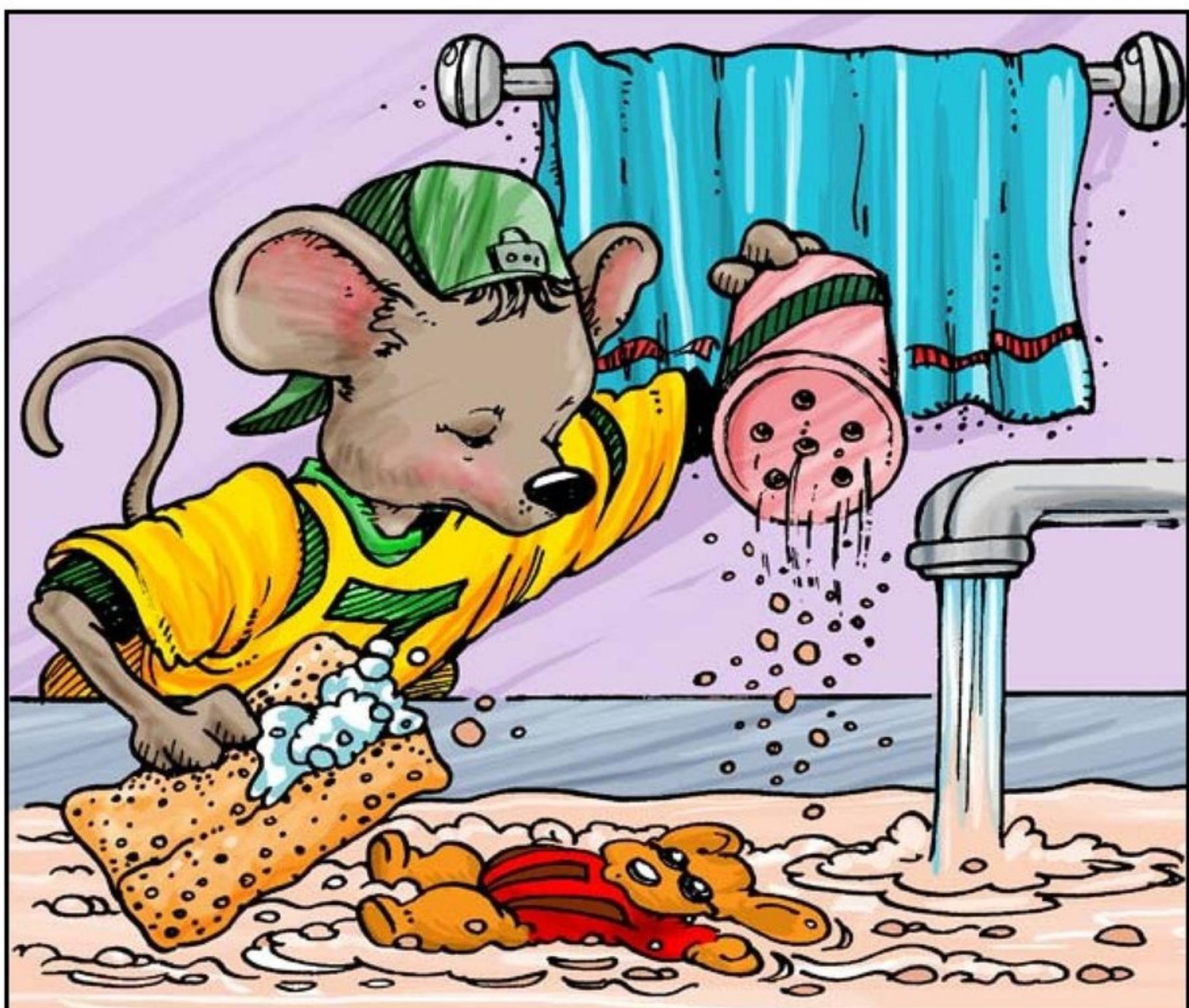
“Okay,” Morty said as he turned to leave the kitchen. Tears started to fall. He didn’t want his brothers and sisters to see how disappointed he was.



The bathroom was a mess. Hardened oatmeal covered the walls and floor. Morty used a shovel from the sandbox to get all the drain-clogging oatmeal out.

He could hear his brothers excitedly talking about the lions and elephants they would see tomorrow.

Up to his elbows in oatmeal slurry, all Morty could think about was that stuffed Mega Mouse. He knew he could win it, but now, he wouldn't even get the chance to try.



Morty Mouse's stories began with author Kathy Hoggan telling her children about the adventures of a mischievous mouse, inspired by her grandmother's tales of Suzette Scamper. Now, more than a decade after she shared the first Morty Mouse stories with students, you too can enjoy the exciting adventures of mischievous Morty Mouse in this series from ReadingA-Z.com.

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Level Q Leveled Book

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