

TRUDGE and ZIPPY

Zippy was getting impatient. Today the carnival had come to the great forest, and he had been looking forward to going for the past week. But it seemed like it had taken forever for his parents and brothers and sisters to finally get ready. Now they were all waiting out by the road for him and his friend, Trudge. But where was Trudge?

“Trudge! Trudge, where are you? You’re supposed to be ready so we can leave early, so we can get around to all the rides. Come on! Let’s go!”



A lily pad moved, and suddenly Trudge's head popped out from under the water.

"Oh, hi, Zippy! Everything's cool, I'm here!"

"Ahem."

"Uh-oh. I'm sorry, Zippy. I was just having so much fun taking my morning swim that I forgot what time it was."

"Ah, that's all right, Trudge. We all forget sometimes. But come on! Everyone is waiting for us. My mom and dad want to talk to all of us first before we go."



"Oh, Zippy, you're such a friend. Hey, on the way to the carnival you can ride on my back."

"Gee, thanks, Trudge!"

"Ahh, no sweat, dude."

You see, Trudge was a turtle and had a nice hard back that Zippy could climb up and sit on, with a spotted green and yellow shell. Zippy, his friend, was a field mouse. He was a dull gray color, with short fur, cute little ears, and a long wiry tail. He lived near Trudge's pond, and they played together every day.

"Okay, let's go. I'll tell the others we're ready." Zippy hurried back up the road, while Trudge lumbered slowly behind.

Everyone was excited. The plan was that they'd all go there together. But Trudge and Zippy had permission to see the carnival on their own for a while.





When Trudge finally reached the road, Papa Mouse began. “Now listen, children, the forest and carnival area will be packed with animals today. The rides and amusements are all over the place, so it will be very easy to get lost in the crowds and the confusion and the forest trails. So, in case we get separated, let’s agree to meet up again at 4 o’clock in the main clearing by Shadow Rock.

“Now, I’ve drawn out a little map of the forest and carnival grounds for each of you to have. And Mama has written your names and address on a slip of paper, in case any of you have trouble and need to ask someone for help.”

Papa Mouse always liked to be sure everyone knew what to do if they ever had any problems when they were out. “Oh, and one more thing; everyone has agreed to be on their best behavior today, and be kind and considerate during the carnival.”

“But I still want you to be watchful. Remember Grandpa Mouse’s warning, ‘Cats are cats, even at carnivals.’”

“Oooohhh!”

“Oh, Papa, don’t frighten the children with too much talk about cats.”

“Oh, all right, Mama Mouse. Okay, everyone, let’s go and have fun!”


“Yay!”

“Trudge and Zippy, stick together and be careful. I guess you’ll probably be behind us, but try to keep up if you can, and remember to be at Shadow Rock at 4 o’clock.”

“Hop on, Zippy, I’ll give you a ride!”

Once Zippy was seated, Trudge set off at what seemed like a jog to him, but his top speed was still not fast enough for a mouse like Zippy.



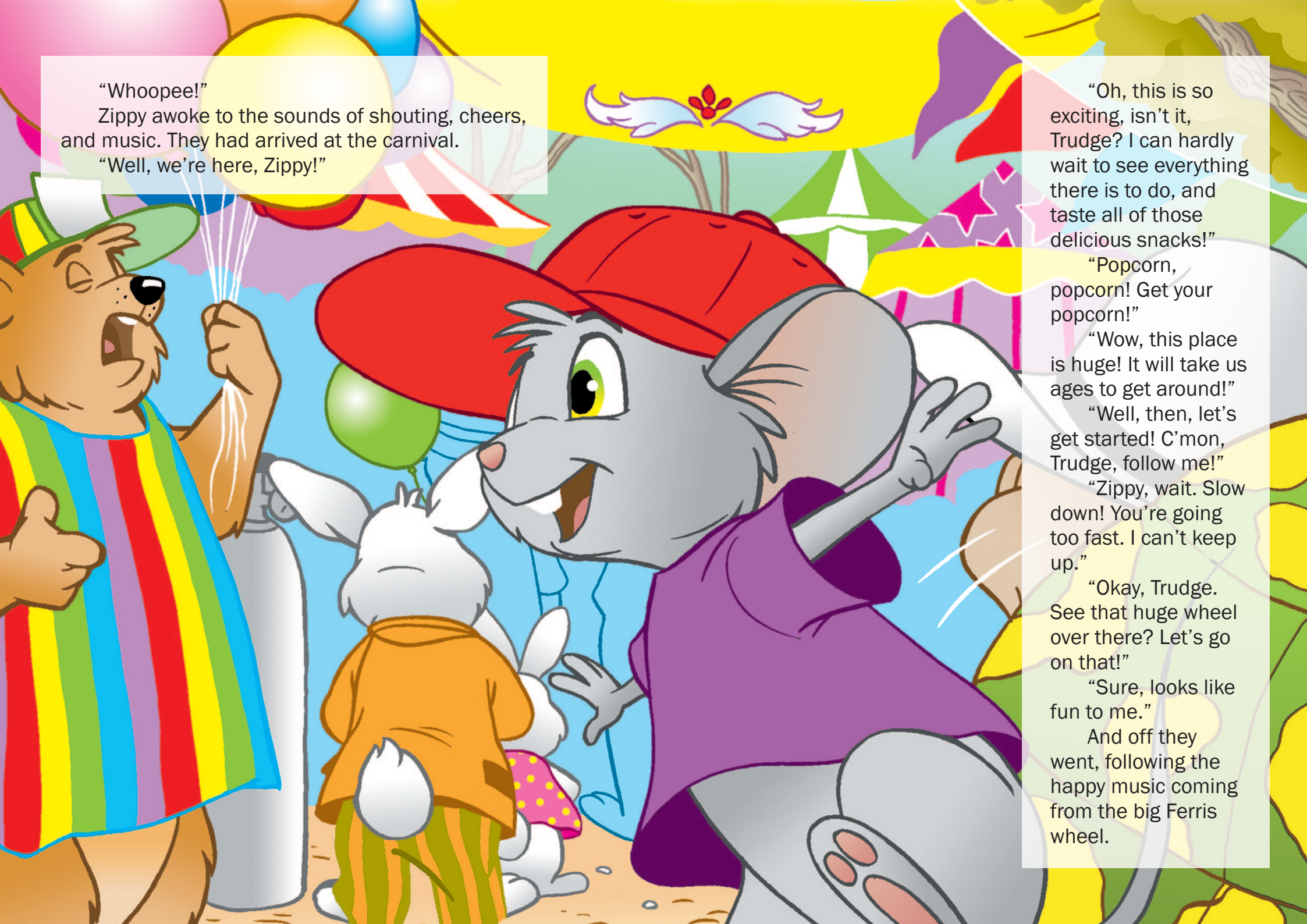


“Oh, Trudge, can’t you walk any faster? I can hardly wait to get there.”

“Oh, I know I’m a little slow compared to you, Zippy. But at least I’m steady and careful! Well, we’ll get there sooner or later, don’t you worry.”

“Well, let’s hope it’s sooner rather than later. My family is out of sight already.”

Zippy liked Trudge a lot, but one thing you need plenty of when your best friend is a turtle is patience, lots and lots of patience. As Zippy laid back and watched the fluffy white clouds float by, he soon became drowsy and fell asleep, dreaming of a delicious giant cheesecake.



“Whoopie!”

Zippy awoke to the sounds of shouting, cheers, and music. They had arrived at the carnival.

“Well, we’re here, Zippy!”

“Oh, this is so exciting, isn’t it, Trudge? I can hardly wait to see everything there is to do, and taste all of those delicious snacks!”

“Popcorn, popcorn! Get your popcorn!”

“Wow, this place is huge! It will take us ages to get around!”

“Well, then, let’s get started! C’m on, Trudge, follow me!”

“Zippy, wait. Slow down! You’re going too fast. I can’t keep up.”

“Okay, Trudge. See that huge wheel over there? Let’s go on that!”

“Sure, looks like fun to me.”

And off they went, following the happy music coming from the big Ferris wheel.



The Ferris wheel took them way up high, high, high into the sky. They were even up above the trees. They could see far into the distance. And when they looked down, everyone looked so tiny.

“Wow! Look down there! That must be what we look like to the birds when they are flying in the sky, Zippy.”

“Yes! And look over there in the clearing, and the big rock in the center is Shadow Rock where we need to meet the family at 4 o’clock.”

The two friends did so many things that day. They went on the merry-go-round.

“Ain’t this fun?”

They rode in bumper boats, and twirled in giant teacups. They even watched Tom Cat the Magician’s Magic Show.

“Zippy, remember what your father said about cats? We better keep a safe distance away.”

“You’re right, Trudge. We can just watch from the back.”

“Look, Zippy, over there, some otters. Yes, they’re otters dressed like clowns.”

“Otters! They’re so funny!”

"All aboard."

"Freakiest ride ever. It will scare you straight out of your shell! Turtles only."

"Popcorn, popcorn! Get some popcorn!"

"Natural juices."

"Caramel for sale. Caramel, come and get your caramel."

"Boy, I'm hungry. Let's go over to that food bar and get something to eat."

"Food! Yeah, let's go. I'm hungry too."

"What would you two boys like to eat?"

"Hmm, I'll have that yummy-looking cheesecake and some popcorn, please."

"What about you, Trudge?"

"Let's see. Oh yeah, I'll try some of your bug-in-a-bun special."

"Coming right up. Anything else?"

"Well, on the side, I'll have an order of fried algae, please."


"Here you are, boys."

"Thanks a lot!"

"Mmm, this cheesecake is delicious!"

"Try this bug-in-a-bun special; it's really good."





What a wonderful time the two friends had. The day came and went all too quickly. The sun had moved well down in the sky, and it was time to head for Shadow Rock. They were about to set off for the big clearing when they noticed one more amusement they had not seen yet.

Tangled Trails

“Hey, Trudge. Look at that sign over there by the forest. It says, ‘Tangled Trails.’ We haven’t been there yet.”

“Well, uh, it looks a little dark and spooky to me. Besides, I think we need to start making our way back to the clearing. You know it takes me a little longer to get to places than you.”

“If my guess is right, the clearing is directly on the other side of this overgrown forest. Tangled Trails would be the shortcut to where we want to go.”

“Well, I don’t know. What if it isn’t and we get lost? Let’s look at the map your father gave you.”

“Well, okay. Hmm, I’m sure it’s here somewhere. Umm. It’s gone! I must have dropped it on one of those rides or something. Oh well, who needs a map. I’m a mouse, remember? I can find my way around in the dark. Where’s your sense of adventure anyway, Trudge?”

“Sense of adventure. Well, I think I must have lost it on one of the rides as well.”

It took some serious coaching, but finally Trudge agreed to try out Tangled Trails.

“Well, all right, I guess if you say so.”

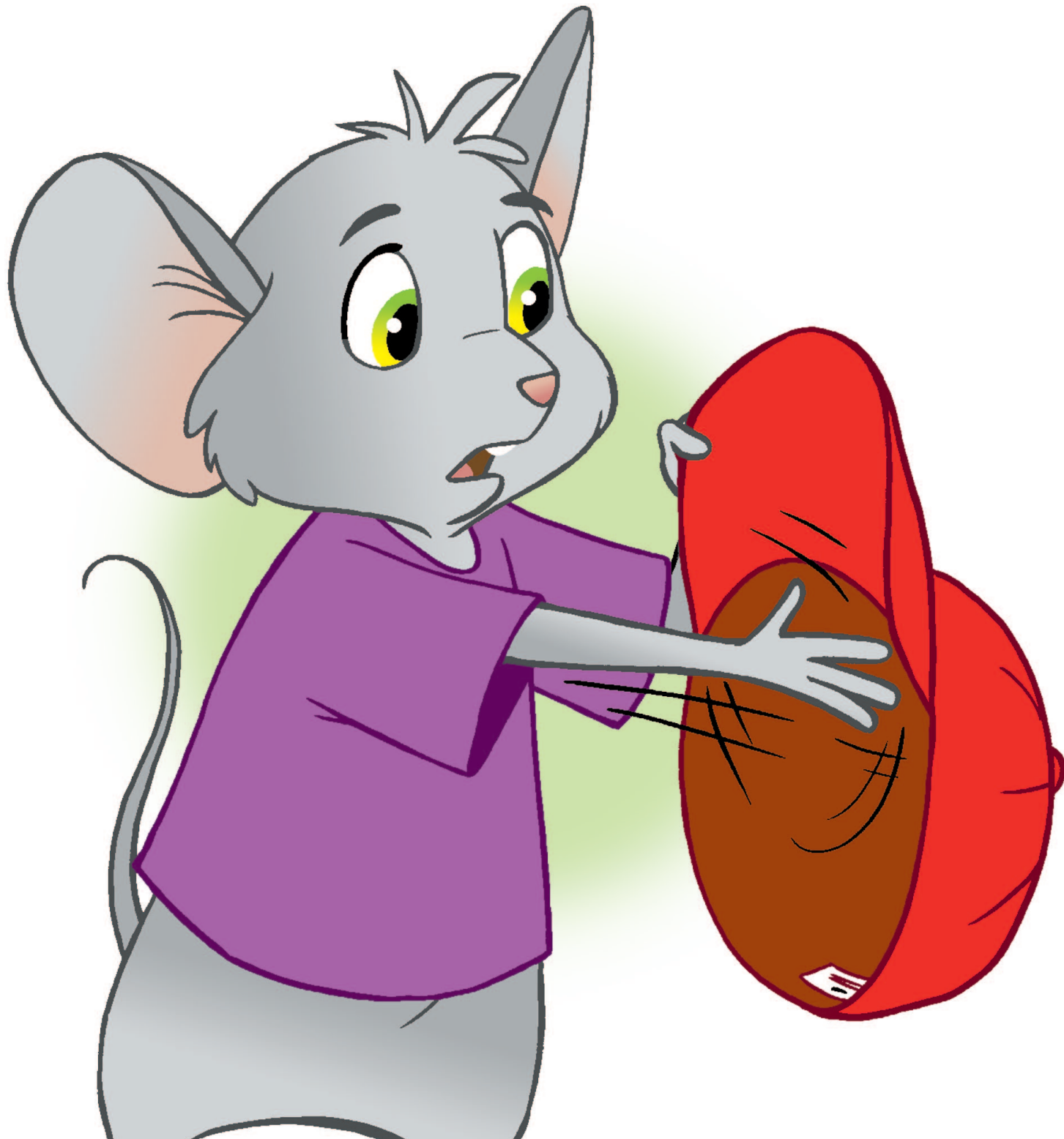
Deep into the thicket the trails became much more confusing than Zippy had imagined they would be.

“Uh, Zippy? Where are we? Uh, I’m not sure where we’re going.”

“Uh, I think it’s this way.”

“Oh.”

“Or maybe over there. Uh, I think it’s this way. Or maybe over there!”





They were all turned around. Which path or paths would take them back to the opening in the forest? The trees and bushes grew so thickly all around them and up above that they could hardly get a peek at the sky or see for any distance.

“Oh no! How do we get out of here, Zippy?”

“Uh, I know, I know, let’s go this way. Quick, quick, back, left, no, right Let’s go straight, quick, quick, it’s this way...”

Zippy would zip first in this direction and then that way and then another way, peeking here, peeking there, trying to see if there was anything familiar that would help him find the way. Poor Trudge would turn and would walk and walk and walk up one trail and then down another until he was so tired. Still, they could not find their way out.

“Oh, Zippy, it’s no use. We’re lost! I know we shouldn’t have come this way.”

“It was sort of fun at first, but now it’s scary, and it’s getting late, and I want to go home.”

“Me too, Trudge. Me too.”

“What are we going to do?”

“I-I don’t know, Trudge. I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. You were right. It was wrong for us to go into Tangled Trails when it was so late. N-n-n-n-now there isn’t even anyone else around to ask for help!”

“Wait, Zippy. There is someone we can ask for help.”

“Wh-who-who?”

“Well, my mommy used to tell me if I get into trouble or have a problem and need help that I should tell Jesus about it.”

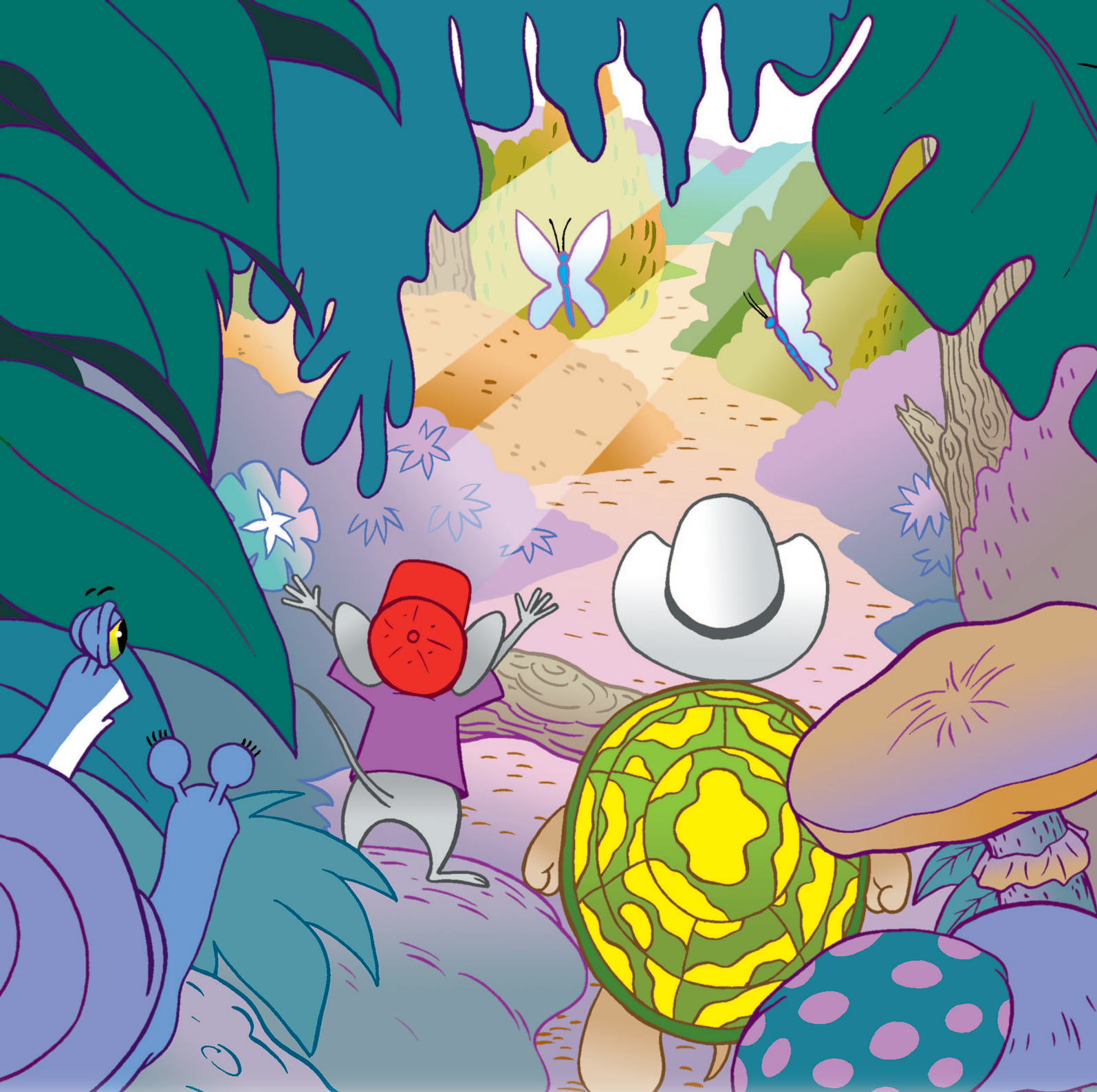
“Good idea. He for sure knows the way out of here. Let’s pray and ask Him to help us.”

“Okay, let’s pray.”

“Dear Jesus, we’re lost, and we need some help. Please help us to find our way back to the meeting place.”

They stayed silent with their heads bowed for several moments.





Suddenly Zippy looked up, all happy and smiling.

“Do you hear that?”

“Hear what, Zippy?”

“Music. I hear music from the Ferris wheel, coming from that direction. And the Ferris wheel is not far from Shadow Rock!”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“So if we just head for the music, we can find where the Ferris wheel is. Then it will be easy to find the big clearing.”

“That’s a great idea. Let’s go, Zippy!”

Stopping every now and then to listen and try a new path going in the right direction ...

“This way!”

... the two friends at last came out on a well-beaten forest path.

“Look, up above those trees. It’s the top of the Ferris wheel!”

“Yes, I see it too!”

Zippy and Trudge were so relieved.
“Let’s go!”

Zippy took off running toward the Ferris wheel in excitement, and even Trudge managed an amazing speed for a turtle. At last they reached the base of the wheel.

“Look, Trudge, there’s the way to the clearing. It’s right over there! Jesus helped us to find our way.”

In a few more moments, they were happily reunited with the rest of the mouse family.

“We were starting to get so worried about you! Weren’t we, Papa?”

“My goodness, yes. I was about to call the woodpecker patrol for help.”

“Thank God you’ve made it here safely.”

“Okay, is everyone ready to head home?”

“Yes, we sure are!”





As the two friends watched the stars that night twinkle in the sky, they thought back on the adventure they'd just had.

"I'm glad everything turned out okay, Zippy."

"Me too! I'm very thankful not to be spending the night trapped in Tangled Trails."

"You know, Trudge? I think we make a great team. Although I get a little impatient with you sometimes because you go a little slow, I'm glad you're my friend. Thank you for being my friend, Trudge!"

"I was thinking the same thing, Zippy. Even though I can't always keep up with you, it doesn't really bother me, because you are my very best friend, and we've had so many good times together."

"Yes, and I'm very glad that we both have Jesus as our very best friend too!"

"Me too, Zippy. Me too."

And they both drifted off to sleep under the twinkling, starry sky.

S&S link: Character Building: Social Skills: Friendship-1a; Christian Life and Faith:

A Personal Connection with Jesus: Jesus, Your Best Friend-1c

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Illustrations by Hugo Westphal and Ana Fields.

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