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TRAPPED!

Even though Ralph woke up feeling sick and dizzy, his first thought was of the motorcycle. He hoped it was not broken. He sat there at the bottom of the wastebasket until the whirly feeling in his head stopped and he was able, slowly and carefully, to stand up. He stretched each aching muscle and felt each of his four legs to make certain it was not broken.

When Ralph was sure that he was battered but intact he examined the motorcycle. He set it upright and rolled it backward and forward to make sure the wheels still worked. One handlebar was bent and some of the paint was chipped off the rear fender, but everything else seemed all right. Ralph hoped so, but there was no way he could find out until he figured out how to start the engine. Now he ached too much even to try.

Wearily Ralph dragged himself over to the wall of his metal prison and sat down beside the apple core to rest his aching body. He leaned back against the side of the wastepaper basket, closed his eyes, and thought about his Uncle Victor. Poor nearsighted Uncle Victor. He, too, had landed in a metal wastepaper basket, jumping there quite by mistake. Unable to climb the sides, he had been trapped until the maid came

and emptied him out with the trash. No one knew for sure what had happened to Uncle Victor, but it was known that trash in the hotel was emptied into an incinerator.

Ralph felt sad and remorseful thinking about his Uncle Victor getting dumped out with the trash. His mother had been right after all. His poor mother, gathering crumbs for his little brothers and sisters while he, selfish mouse that he was, sat trapped in a metal prison from which the only escape was to be thrown away like an old gum wrapper.

Ralph thought sadly of his comfortable home in the mousehole. It was a good home, untidy but comfortable. The children who stayed in Room 215 usually left a good supply of crumbs behind, and there was always water from the shirts hung to drip-dry beside the washbasin. It should have been enough. He should have been content

to stay home without venturing out into the world looking for speed and excitement.

Outside in the hall Ralph heard footsteps and Matt, the bellboy, saying, "These new people in 215 and 216, somehow they got the idea there are mice in the hotel. I just opened the window and told them the management wouldn't stand for it."

Ralph heard a delighted laugh from the second-floor maid, a college girl who was working for the summer season. "Mice are adorable but just the same, I hope I never find any in my rooms. I'm afraid of them." There were two kinds of employees at the Mountain View Inn—the regulars, none of them young, and the summer help, who were college students working during the tourist season.

"If you don't like mice you better stay away from that knothole under the window in Room 215," advised Matt.

The sound of voices so close made Ralph more eager than ever to escape. "No!" he shouted, his voice echoing in the metal chamber. "I won't have it! I'm too young to be dumped out with the trash!"

In spite of his aches he jumped to his feet, ran across the wastebasket floor, and leaped against the wall, only to fall back in a sorry heap. He rose, backed off, and tried again. There he was on the floor of the wastebasket a second time. It was useless, utterly useless. He did not have the strength to tip over the wastebasket.

Ralph was not a mouse to give up easily. He considered his problem a moment before he rolled the motorcycle over to the wall of the wastebasket. Then he seized the apple core by the stem and dragged it over to the motorcycle. By putting his shoulder under the stem end, he managed to raise the core until it was standing on its blossom end, but when he put his front paws around

it and tried to lift it, he found he could not. The core was too heavy to lift up onto the seat of the motorcycle. Ralph was disappointed but when he stopped to think it over, he saw that even if he could manage to get the apple core on top of the motorcycle, it still would not be high enough to allow him to climb out of the wastebasket.

Bruised and defeated, Ralph dropped the core and decided that he might as well be thrown out with the trash on a full stomach as an empty one. He took a bite of apple and felt a little better. It was the best food he had eaten for several days—juicy and full of flavor and much better than the damp zwieback crumbs the last guests had left behind. He took several more bites and settled down to a hearty meal, saving the seeds for dessert.

Two ant scouts appeared on the rim of the wastebasket.

“Go away,” said Ralph crossly, because

he did not like to eat food crawling with ants and because it embarrassed him to be seen in such a predicament. The ants left as silently as they had come.

When Ralph had eaten his fill of the apple he curled up beside the core. He only hoped that someone might happen to drop a Kleenex over him. It was bad enough to be carried to one's doom in a wastebasket, but to be carried to one's doom by a shrieking maid was unthinkable. There was one tiny ray of hope—if someone did happen



to drop a Kleenex over him, he just might have a chance to jump and run when the maid tipped the basket up to empty it into the incinerator.

The thought that the boy was sure to miss his motorcycle and start looking for it kept Ralph tossing and turning behind the apple core until, stuffed and exhausted, he finally fell asleep.