

I Am Mouse

- by Judith Nolan

“Necessity is the mother of invention...”

- Plato

“Name...” The small, thin boy laid his hand carefully on the cover of the closed book. Sitting on the bed beside Vincent in his friend’s chamber, he shifted his position, leaning closer.

“The Velveteen Rabbit,” Vincent replied quietly. “I thought you might like me to read it to you. It was one of my favourite books when I was growing up. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

“Rabbit...” The boy worried the word. “What?”

“This is a rabbit.” Vincent showed him the cover of the book. He pointed to the illustration of an upright, velveteen toy sitting on a small hill. “To be safe, it likes to live below the ground in a burrow, just like we do. This underground world keeps us all safe and warm.”

“Safe?” the boy queried, his round, smudged face working to understand the concept represented by the word.

“It’s where no one can hurt you. And where you have lots of friends and people who care about you. That is what you have here now, with us. If you chose to stay among us.”

“Friends?” The boy frowned. “What?”

“You and I are friends.” Vincent pressed a hand to his chest before laying it carefully on the boy’s thin arm. “You like being here with me, don’t you?”

“Vincent...yes.” The boy nodded slowly. “Like Vincent.”

“There you are, then.” Vincent smiled.

“Name...” The boy put his hand on Vincent’s arm. “Vincent.” He smiled briefly, no more than flicker in his blue eyes. He became solemn again. “Book name. Velveteen Rabbit,” he continued, enunciating each word carefully. He pointed to the illustrated cover. Then he sighed, his gaze filling with confusion. “Name?” He pressed a hand to his own thin chest. “What?”

“I...” Vincent frowned. It had never occurred to him until this moment that the boy didn’t know his own name. He shook his head, feeling completely at a loss. He was well aware of the name the tunnel com-

munity had given the child when Vincent had first enticed him to live among them. And he was forced to agree, by his quick, furtive movements and hunched, secretive manner the boy looked very much like a large mouse. But was that a name you gave to an orphaned and abandoned child who was barely socialised?

“Name?” The boy persisted, straining upwards to peer into Vincent’s thoughtful face. “My name... What?”

Vincent looked down into his friend’s worried blue eyes and released a defeated breath. He’d drawn a blank. What could it hurt anyway? A name could always be changed later. The boy might like to pick his own once he had settled into his new world. His need right now was immediate.

“Mouse...” Vincent replied carefully, watching for any sign of distress in his young charge. “Your name is Mouse.”

“Mouse...” The boy blinked, shaking the unkempt fall of blond bangs from his eyes. “Mouse...” he tested the word again slowly. Then he sat upright, thin shoulders going back. He smiled and nodded.

He turned to his tall friend, sitting silently beside him, watching him carefully. “Vincent,” the boy announced proudly. “I am Mouse.”

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