

The Parable of Miles Kitty and the Gilgamesh Mouse

When he encountered the Gilgamesh Mouse, Miles Kitty was a young cat, less than a year old. We did not know it at the time, but Miles was not long for this world after their meeting. Miles Kitty was not much of a hunter, probably due to inexperience, and this gave rise to the heroic ending of his struggle with the Gilgamesh Mouse. Perhaps the Gilgamesh Mouse lives yet, while Miles has passed on to the far reaches.

Miles was a very athletic cat. He would run at a completely vertical oak tree, and keep running straight up it for 4 or 5 meters before his impetus was slowed by gravity. When he would jump onto his balcony, he would effortlessly clear the distance, and land on the small platform that had been erected there for this purpose. He could balance with all four feet on the narrow edge of the top of a chair. A cat in all of his physical splendor.

One day, while puttering around outside, I saw Miles underneath our trampoline. The trampoline is set into a basin with a poured concrete floor, in order to reduce the distance between its bed and the surrounding ground, to protect careless bouncers from falling off and hurting themselves. The basin in which the trampoline is sunk is around 40 cm deep, smooth-walled, with no exit but one, a small drainage hole in the middle of one end. The basin is around 3.5 meters long by 2.5 meters wide.

Miles occasionally went under the trampoline, but never stayed there for long. It must not have been very interesting down there. On this particular day, however, he stayed longer than usual, and I wondered what he was up to, so I went to look. What I saw arrested me. Miles had company under the trampoline, a small mouse. Small in size but great in heroism, as I was to discover.

Miles was “playing” with the mouse, in that cruel and unconscious manner specific to cats. He would bat the mouse with his mighty paw, sending it sprawling a meter away, rolling its little mouse body like a log rolling down a hill. The mouse, stunned, would then right himself, and run around, fruitlessly looking for a place to exit from this gladiatorial arena, but the walls were too high and there seemed to be no way out.

I just watched. I do not remember if the impulse to intervene crossed my mind, but not enough time went by for me to act on it. Twice or thrice Miles batted

the mouse, and the mouse rose up again. Miles clearly did not know mice, or he would have ended the duel more quickly. But the mouse was tiring from his herculean exertions against an impossible adversary, and he began to move more slowly.

Miles backed the mouse into a corner and tentatively moved in for the kill. Suddenly, from some well-spring of courage possessed in unknown measure by creatures until the moment it surges forth, the mouse advanced on Miles! This tiny mouse moved forward, springing into the air five or six times his own height with each step, almost to the level of Miles' head, as if riding a crazed pogo stick, covering nearly a meter horizontally while Miles retreated in confusion. The mouse, through his sheer will and courage, had forced Miles to move back, and in the split second before the initiative shifted back to Miles, this heroic rodent sought and found the only escape route from the arena, and was gone!

I was dumbfounded. It would be hard to imagine greater odds than those I had just witnessed. Consider it for a moment. A predator at least a hundred times your mass, with superior physical prowess and superior intelligence as well. And yet this Gilgamesh among mice advanced upon him, raw courage in the face of an overwhelming adversary. And this attack strategy, this seizing of the initiative, worked, and saved the life of the Gilgamesh Mouse. This is indeed a lesson in how to approach life's adversity: take your courage in hand and bring the fight to your enemies. Go forth to meet your destiny.

Not long after this event, Miles disappeared from our home. We never knew what happened to him. He was a good cat, the nicest I have had in my life. He, and his encounter with the Gilgamesh Mouse, will form memories for my children of their growing up, and a lesson that they will hopefully take with them when they go.

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