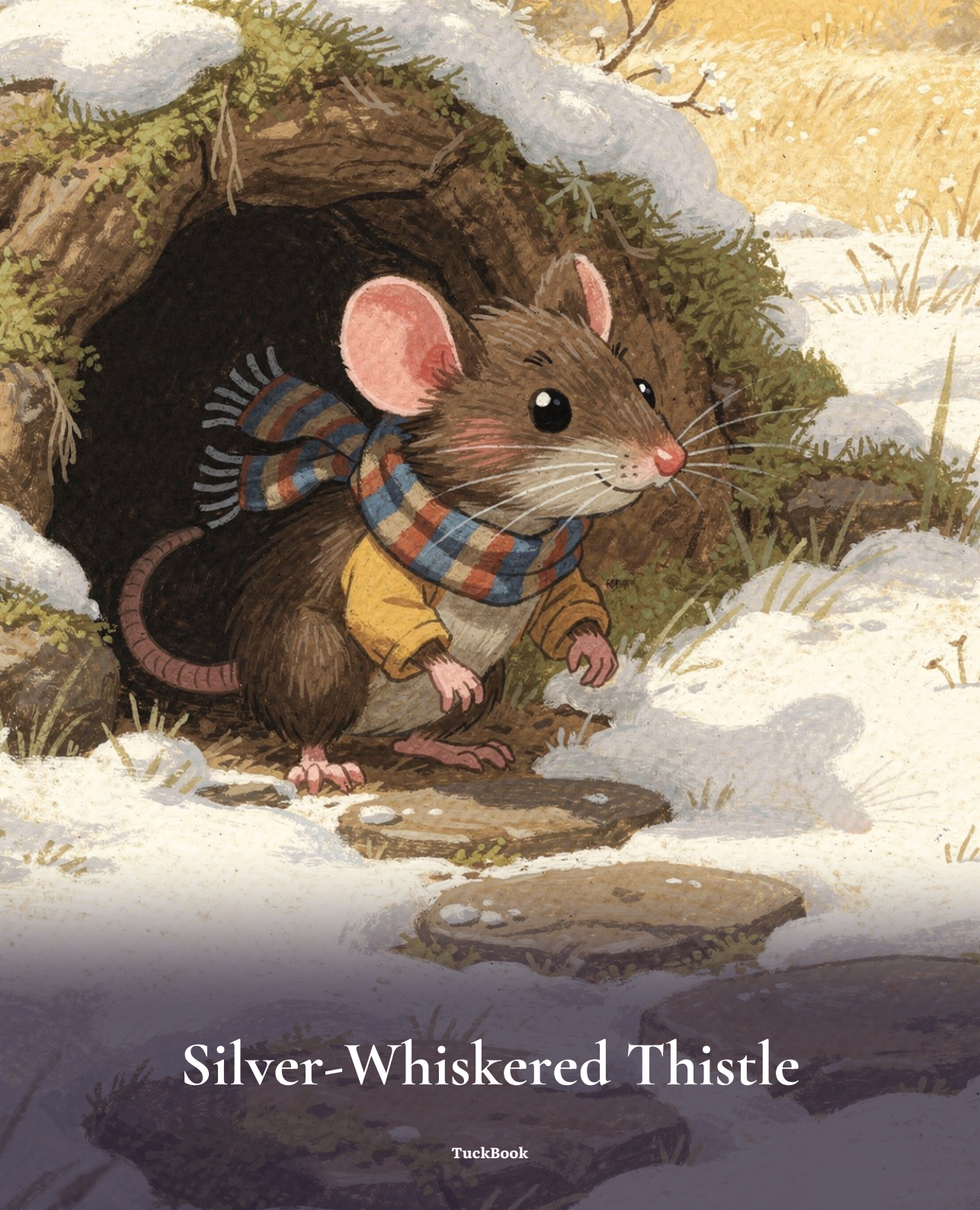




Silver-Whiskered Thistle

Thistle Mouse pushed open his burrow door and squeaked, “Oh no! The sky has dropped its cloud!” Right across the meadow lay a great soft white heap, smooth over the moss, smooth over the stepping-stones, smooth even over the twisty path to the blackberry bush. Thistle’s silver whiskers quivered. He had never seen the meadow disappear before.

Behind him, his mother was stirring oat porridge in their cozy burrow. “What is it, Thistle?” she called. But Thistle was already tying on his tiny blue scarf. A cloud belonged up high, where it could float safely above the oak tree. What if this one was lost? What if the whole sky was looking for it?

He stepped outside and put one paw into the white fluff. “Brrr-rrr!” Thistle leaped backward so fast that his scarf flapped over one ear. The cloud was icy cold. Clouds had never looked cold from his window. He tried blowing it toward the sky, puff-puff-puff, but the white stuff only puffed back at him and settled on his nose.



Thistle rubbed his nose. Then he saw a row of marks across the white ground: two long prints, two long prints, two long prints. They were not his own mouse tracks. “Someone has walked on the cloud,” he whispered. Perhaps they knew how to put it back.

Carefully, Thistle followed the tracks. The familiar path was gone, so he kept the burrow door in sight behind him and pressed his own neat little pawprints beside the long ones. Soon the tracks led to a round hole under a bent fern. From it popped a pale snow hare with ears as tall as leaf-stems.





“Excuse me,” said Thistle. “Have you found a fallen cloud?” The hare shook snowy specks from her ears. “This is snow,” she said gently. “I make tunnels in it.” She dived into a little white hill and came out the other side, leaving a neat arching tunnel. “It is cold at first,” she added, “but it can make a fine roof.”

A roof? Thistle looked at the white hills again. Still, he could not see why the sky would send down roofs. He thanked the hare and followed a new trail: tiny three-toed scratches that led toward the frozen puddle. There, a brown wren was hopping among the reeds, pecking at bright red berries.





“Is snow really not a cloud?” Thistle asked. The wren gave a quick little chirp. “Look up when the air grows still,” she said. Thistle looked up. From the gray sky came one white speck, then another. Each one turned and twinkled as it drifted down. One landed on his silver whisker. It was a snowflake, shaped like the tiniest star.

Thistle did not brush it away. More snowflakes floated down and joined the white meadow. The cloud had not fallen at all. It was sending snowflakes, one by one, like a slow, sparkly shower. His worried tummy loosened a little. Yet the white ground still covered every path, and Thistle wanted a place where his paws would not feel so cold.





He noticed the hare's tunnel had a roof, and he remembered the fluffy snow that stayed in a soft mound when he patted it. "I could make my own little roof," he said. Near the burrow door, where his mother could see him through the round window, Thistle pushed snow together with both paws. He made a low wall, then another, then pressed a curled rim around a hollow in the middle.

At first Thistle made the walls too tall. When he leaned in, the whole thing tipped over with a plump, powdery flop and buried his scarf. Only the blue end stuck out. Thistle pulled it free, laughed despite himself, and tried again. This time he made the walls low and wide, like the cupped hands of the meadow.

He tucked a few dry grass threads inside the hollow and sat beneath the little snowy rim. It was his snow nest. Snowflakes drifted past its opening, bright for one blink before they joined the white ground. The pale hare bounded by and nodded. The wren sang one small, pleased note from the reeds.



Thistle's mother came to the door with a wooden spoon in her paw. "Porridge is ready," she said. Thistle climbed out of his snow nest, leaving clear mouse tracks all the way to the burrow. Before he went in, he looked up once more. The clouds were safe above the oak tree, and their beautiful snowflakes had made the meadow new.







He hung his tiny blue scarf beside the door and watched the snow nest through the window while he ate. Outside, it shone quietly in the meadow, a little white friend with a roof of its own.

Good night.



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After the story



WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

When Thistle Mouse mistakes snow for a fallen cloud, he bravely explores the winter meadow. With new understanding and gentle persistence, he builds a cozy snow nest beside his burrow.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

The next morning, Thistle finds a row of unfamiliar star-shaped tracks circling his snow nest.





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7 minutes of reading



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