

# Charlie Meets His Match

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

A chipmunk twitched his tail as he lay hidden deep under the fallen leaves. It was cold outside, wintertime was approaching, but he was snug in his den in the woods, tucked underground beneath a fallen log and covered by a crunchy carpet of faded autumn leaves.

Charlie had a stash of acorns and nuts ready to eat over the long winter months, and a cozy place to snooze most of the days away. What Charlie didn't have, however, was a mate. He had left his family nest earlier in the year since he had become an adult. All summer he had been on the lookout for a girlfriend, so they could start their own chipmunk family. But summer had come and gone, and Charlie had not met the right mate. He had introduced himself to a few females, but they had paired up with some other fellows, leaving Charlie wishing he was maybe a little bigger, or stronger, or had prettier stripes along his back to attract them. His mother had always said that what Charlie might lack in size or looks, he made up for with a good sense of humor and a kind heart. That might be so, but that didn't seem to matter to the ladies, thought Charlie with a sigh.

He settled down to take another nap. Above ground, there was some scratching. Small clumps of dirt began to fall on Charlie's head. He opened his eyes and looked to see what was happening. With a squeak and a thump, a shower of debris and a startled chipmunk fell from above and landed beside Charlie.

"Oof!" groaned the small creature. She stood up and shook the dirt out of her fur. She inspected her tail for damage. Finally, she noticed Charlie. "Oh, hello!" She smiled. "Excuse me."

Charlie wasn't sure if he was angry or amused. "Are you okay? How nice of you to – ah – drop in like this."

The chipmunk began to laugh. It sounded like the chirping of baby birds. Charlie was charmed by it.

"How funny you are! Yes, I seem to be fine. I am a bit clumsy, my family is always telling me so. They call me Clumsy Connie. That's me. Not clumsy, just Connie. Well, I *am* clumsy, but my name - it's just Connie. Hold on." She took a breath and started over. "Hi. I'm Connie. Nice to meet you." She grinned and reached out her little black paw. Charlie took it and held it. It was warm and soft. They shook hands, and Charlie reluctantly let hers go.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I was foraging for food. I thought I could smell some nuts under that fallen log. I wondered if I'd buried some and forgotten about them; I'm always doing that. So, I started digging, and ta-da, here I am, an unexpected visitor in your lovely home. Well, it could use a little tidying up, to be honest, but that might be my fault." She laughed again.

Charlie gazed into her bright black eyes and smiled. "Well, you might be unexpected, but you are certainly welcome. That fall must have upset you. Can I offer you a snack?" He scurried into his storeroom and came back with a couple of peanuts. He offered one to Connie.

They talked for a long time. Finally, Connie stood up and got ready to go. "Thank you so much, Charlie. You treated me kindly when I crashed through your roof. Let me at least help you clean up." She picked up the small branch Charlie used for a broom and began sweeping up the dirt and leaves. Charlie gathered up the empty peanut shells. Together they tidied up the little burrow and fixed the hole in the roof Connie had made when she fell.

"We work well together, don't we?" Charlie asked her when they were done.

"It seems that we do," she agreed, meeting his warm gaze with her own.

"Perhaps we could work together all the time?" Charlie suggested. His heart was beating like a little hammer in his chest.

She twitched her ears, thinking for a long while. Then she smiled. "Perhaps we could," replied Connie.

**Questions**

1. Describe Charlie in your own words.
2. Describe Connie in your own words.
3. Explain the simile "His heart was beating like a little hammer in his chest." Why was it beating like this?
4. What does foraging mean here: "I was foraging for food"