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an extract from

Rats!

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For Tim and Sarah ~ D R

For Mark and Sarah – wishing you a long and happy married life together! ~ A M



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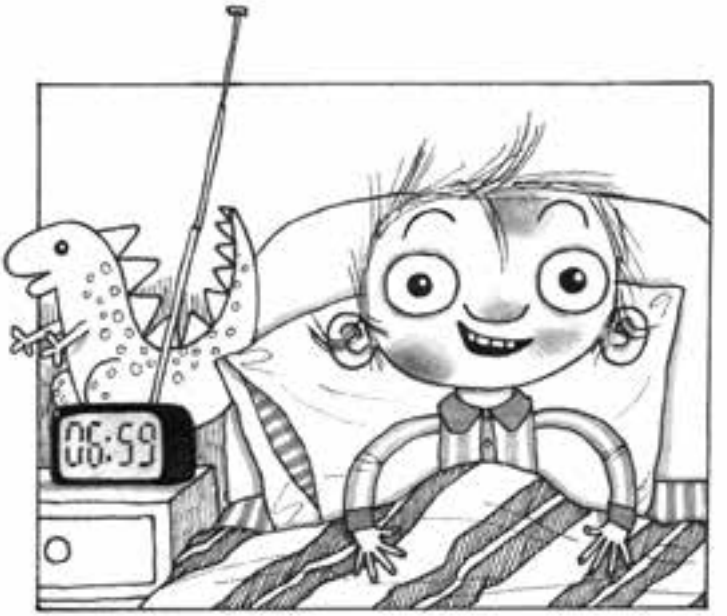
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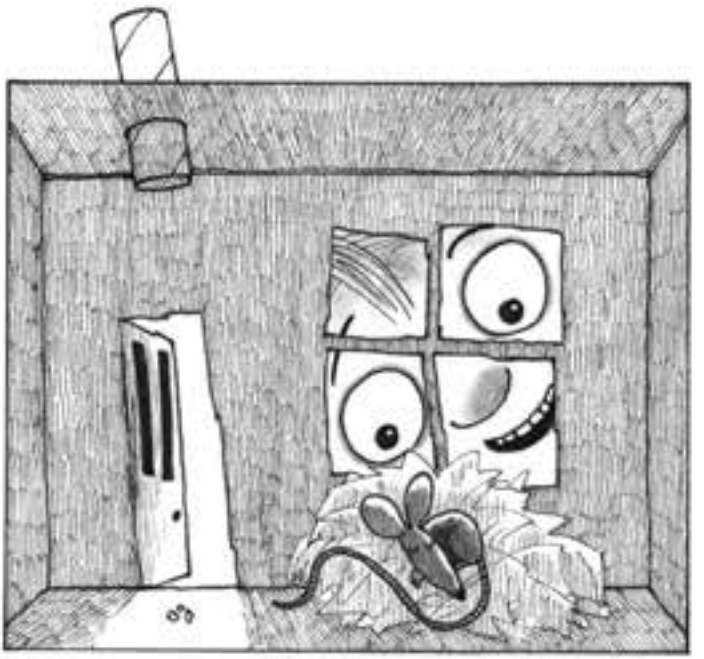


CHAPTER 3

Bertie woke up. Light was spilling through his bedroom curtains. What time was it? Oh no! He shot out of bed – he had to get down to the kitchen before anyone else.

Downstairs the Super-Safe Mouse Catcher was still where he'd left it. Bertie tiptoed closer and kneeled

down. Holding his breath, he listened for mousey squeaks. Nothing. He lay on his belly and peeped through the tiny doorway. The lump of cheese had vanished. But there, asleep in a heap of tissue paper, was something small, brown and furry.



Bertie could hardly believe it. His mouse catcher had actually worked! Wait till he told Darren and Eugene about this! Carefully he lifted the shoebox and scooped up the sleepy little mouse. It twitched in his hand. Just then he heard footsteps on the stairs. Someone was coming! Quickly he replaced the mouse, jammed on the lid and hid the box behind his back.

"Oh Bertie! You're up early," said Mum.

"Yes, I was just um … getting a drink," said Bertie. "I'm going back to bed now."

Mum frowned. "What's that?" she said.

"What?"

"That thing you're hiding behind your back."

"Oh this," said Bertie, bringing out the shoebox. "It's, you know … just a box."

Mum folded her arms. "What's in it?"

"Nothing!" said Bertie.

The lid moved. The mouse must have woken up. Mum was staring at the box.

"Open it," she said.

Bertie sighed. It was no use arguing, he'd been rumbled. He removed the lid.

Mum peeped inside. "EEEEK!"



"SHH! You'll scare him!" said Bertie. "He's only just woken up."

"It's a mouse!" said Mum. "Where did you get him?"

Bertie proudly explained how he'd made the Super-Safe Mouse Catcher where he'd found Monty asleep.

"Monty?" said Mum.

"That's his name," said Bertie. "Isn't he cute? Look at his little paws!"

Mum shook her head. "I know what you're after, Bertie, but you are not keeping him."

"He's tiny! He won't be any trouble!" pleaded Bertie.

"NO!" said Mum. "He's got to go."

Bertie looked sadly at Monty, who was now sniffing around his box.



"I won't let him out," he promised. "He can stay in my bedroom!"

"Not a chance," said Mum. "Take him outside and let him go. And don't do it anywhere near the house!"



Bertie took the box to the back door. It wasn't fair. He never got to keep any of his pets. Even when he tried to keep dog fleas his mum squashed them. He went outside. Mum had said to release Monty away from the house, but where exactly? If the mouse got next door, the Nicelys' mean old cat might catch him.

Bertie looked round the garden. Where would be safest? The flower beds? The vegetable patch? No, of

course, the shed! It wasn't near the house and better still it was filled with piles of junk. Nobody would notice a tiny little mouse house hidden under a blanket. If he was careful he could visit Monty every day!

