

The Second Adventure Captain Cashel and the Company of Frogs

“Do you like living in the house?” Thimble asked Chickpea on a day last Summer when the sun was so hot that everyone in the garden had searched out places to sleep.

Each animal had found their own special patch of shade, at the bottom of the flower beds, or in the nooks of tree trunks. Thimble was enjoying the natural shade of the Todd House from the tabletop next to Chickpea. The house was kept quite cool with the breeze flowing through the open windows, and it seemed to Thimble a most luxurious thing to live out these hot days in such a temperate place.

“Not at all. I get so bored here. I want to go out and play in the garden with you. Then I wouldn’t be inside for the Todd girl to pick me up, and pull my tail, and do all the awful things she does.”

It wasn’t that the Todd girl was so bad, she was just young, and not as gentle toward a mouse as she might have been, and Chickpea had very little patience.

Peter, who had been dozing in his cage, opened his eyes and called to the mice, “I believe I just heard the front gate, and Mr. Todd will be in soon.”

Thimble put his paw up to Chickpea’s cage, and she, on the other side met his paw with her own, “If you want to live in the garden, come live in the garden.”

“How would I ever get out?” she asked, holding Thimble’s paw.

“We can find a way. Next time that little girl pulls your tail, perhaps you should bite her, and then Mr. Todd will put you out into the garden and that will solve that!”

Chickpea laughed at that, Thimble loved her laugh. It was not in her nature to bite, even if she did sometimes want to. Then she sighed and stroked Thimble’s little finger. It would be so nice to go with him and live like a wild mouse in the garden. Chickpea had never known what life outside of a cage was like. Since her friendship with Thimble had begun, he had come every day full of stories about finding food with his brother, Ladle, and climbing to the tops of bushes, and coming across all sorts of creatures, nuisance making rabbits, militant frogs, and squirrels who could read.

Thimble heard the front door latch open, and Mr. Todd’s heavy steps came into the hall. He blew Chickpea a kiss and then dropped off the side of the table, sliding down its leg to the floor. He had come in through the window, but wouldn’t risk being seen on the way out, and so he scampered toward the back door where there was space to squeeze under.

Before leaving the Todd house, he looked back. Mr. Todd was in the kitchen making himself a sandwich. He wore a shirt from work that Thimble had seen several

times. It was dark green, and had the image of an animal Thimble had never encountered, an animal that had hands almost like a human being's, but, in the image, used them to hang onto a vine. It's feet also held the vine, its toes wrapping around it. It had a long tail, and very large, round eyes that never failed to cause Thimble to give a little shiver. So with a sense of unease, Thimble slipped out that back door.

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By the time Thimble came back with the monocle, Ladle had heard the news about what Thimble was up to in the Todd house, and he was waiting with Garlic for Thimble's return, when the mouse saw his brother running through the garden he exclaimed, "You've made it! Glad to see that dog didn't get you!"

"She absolutely tried," said Thimble a little breathlessly. Garlic affixed the monocle to his eye and examined the newspaper.

Ladle nodded toward the picture on the paper and whispered, "are you sure it's her?"

"Positive," said Thimble.

Garlic was quiet for some time examining the paper, and Thimble and Ladle waited beneath the Snapdragons. Thimble was full of anticipation. He could not forget the day he had come through the Todd's window to find the table empty, Chickpea's cage nowhere to be found. He had rubbed his eyes, as though he was just seeing wrong, and when that hadn't worked he had cried out, "Chickpea!" but she did not answer.

"She's gone," said Peter from his cage.

"What do you mean 'gone?'" asked Thimble who was now near tears.

"The girl pulled her tail, and she swung about and bit her on the finger."

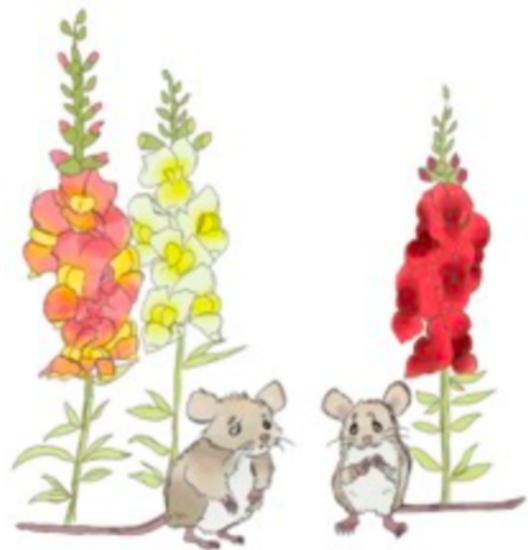
"Oh no," said Thimble, and he put his paws to his mouth.

"The girl made such a fuss when it happened. Her finger bled, Mrs. Todd had to clean it and bandage it, and then this morning, Mr. Todd dressed for work and took the cage with him."

"Took it with him? Where? Where has he taken Chickpea?"

"I'm sorry, Thimble," said Peter, and the parakeet shook his head and looked down at his perch, "I do not know."

When it had happened, Thimble had feared the worst. All winter long he had wondered if Chickpea was still alive, but the picture in the newspaper proved she



was, and maybe, just maybe, it also contained a clue to her whereabouts.

Finally, Garlic cleared his throat and began to read. He was a little out of practice and the paper was badly torn, but this is what he said:

Research Facility on Path to Cure Forgetfulness

Scientists at the Terrarium Lab and Research Center for the Preservation of our Global Ecosphere believe they have the answer to maintaining cognitive abilities into old age. Currently fourteen mice are being tested with the drug some doctors are calling miraculous.

Garlic stopped.

“Well,” said Ladle.

“That’s it,” said Garlic, “that’s all it says.”

“That’s all?” Thimble snatched the paper up in his paws, “that can’t be all.”

“That’s all,” said Garlic, “The Terrarium Lab and Research Center.”

“What is a lab?” Ladle was looking unnerved.

“I don’t know,” Thimble was still holding the paper, and was staring at the photograph intently, “but I think I know where to start looking.”

Garlic and Ladle looked over Thimble’s shoulder. There was something in the background of the photo none of them had seen before. Behind the fourteen frightened looking mice, behind Chickpea, the wall was painted dark, and on it was the image of a strange creature. A creature that held a vine with its front and back feet, that had a long tail, and looked out at them with big, round eyes.

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“Attention, Company!”

In the middle of the garden where the greenery was most lush, Mr. Todd had built a charming stone path that encircled a lily pond, and this is where the garden’s amphibian population reigned. It consisted of three Smooth Newts, whose watery skin were all in spots, and who the Todd girl enjoyed looking for on warm days. She would sometimes spend hours sitting by the side of the pond shouting, “There’s that one!” and “There’s that one!” as the newts swam here and there beneath the lily pads.

More importantly, no offense to the newts, the amphibian population of the garden also consisted of no less than thirty common garden frogs. You would never know there were so many, for the frogs had organized their life amazingly well.



Sometimes a few would be sunning themselves on top of lily pads, but beneath the surface, several others would be scheduled to be snacking in the algae below. Whilst several others were scheduled to be hiding, their eyes the only thing popping out from the water, vigilantly on the lookout for danger.

They signaled each other through a series of complicated bubble formations: two little bubbles meant the coast was clear, two little bubbles and a big bubble meant the Todd girl was sitting at the edge of the pond, three bubbles of equal size meant someone found some good food to eat, and several bubbles all at once meant an emergency meeting had been called. Every frog knew what they were supposed to be doing and when they were supposed to be doing it, and it was all run by the captain of their company, Cashel. Who was actually a bit of a runt.

Today the pond was a mass of bubbles, signaling, as was their custom, that an emergency meeting of the frog company was being called to order. Cashel stood on the stone that sat above the surface of the pond on most days, but stayed wet the way frogs liked stones, and was shaded over by another stone that hung a few inches above. This was where he liked to address his company. One by one all the little heads of the twenty-nine other frogs surfaced in the still water of the pond just enough to look up at Cashel and listen to what he had to say.

Thimble and Ladle had climbed down the mossy stones to stand beside Cashel as he addressed the company. Ladle was wincing and holding up one paw at a time. The water pooling at his feet was awfully chilly. Thimble, on the other hand, stood most still. He looked out at all the little frog heads, hoping they would be able to help.

The frogs listened silently as Cashel regaled them with the story of Thimble's brave storm on the Todd House in a mission to retrieve Garlic's monocle, and they stared as Cashel talked of the kidnap of Chickpea, and how she was still believed to be being held at the Terrarium Lab and Research Center. They were most captivated, however, when Cashel spoke of the plot he and Thimble had been discussing to rescue Chickpea.

"Why?" croaked a voice from the water when Cashel had finished speaking.

"What do you mean, 'Why,'" said Cashel. Thimble bit his lip, and clasped his front paws together, but Cashel remained very still, and very calm, and looked out at the frogs.

"Why," croaked another voice, "should we risk frog lives to save a mouse?"



“Yes,” said another frog from the water, “why should frogs be asked to help mice?”

“The mice are not like us!” exclaimed yet another voice.

“To the contrary,” Cashel’s words rang out over the stillness of the water. He expressed himself as steadily and calm as the pond before him, “the mice are very much like us. It is true, they do not swim the way we do, they do not eat, or hop, or *ribbit* as we do, but they are small like us, and they live in the garden like us. In the garden, all of us, from the tiniest aphid, to the great squirrels and rabbits, we are all of us connected. We frogs cannot stand by and allow pain to befall the other inhabitants of the garden simply because they are not frogs, for the garden is more than frogs, and if hardship comes to one of us, it will, in time, come to all of us. Thimble is not a member of our company, it’s true, but today I prepose, we think of the whole of the garden as our company, for today there is a creature in the garden who needs our help.”

The frog voices were quiet, all eyes were on Cashel.

No more words were said. The frogs, all at once submerged. They were in agreement, tomorrow morning, when it was time for Mr. Todd to leave for work at the Terrarium Lab and Research Facility, the frogs would be there. They would be there to help a mouse.

Cashel turned to Thimble and gave him a solemn nod before hopping off the stone and submerging himself into the hazy muck of the pond. Thimble could see how such a small frog had become captain of the entire company.

“Can we go?” said Ladle, still favoring one paw and that, “my feet are cold.”

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The very next morning Thimble sat with Ladle beneath the Morning Glories. The flowers were open and resplendent in the morning sun.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Ladle was looking sober.

Thimble and Ladle had lived their whole lives in the garden. Who could say what dangers lay beyond its walls. Ladle wondered how far away this adventure would take his brother, and how long before they would see each other again.

“I’m more sure than I’ve ever been about anything, Ladle, old chap,” Thimble said, looking up. He enjoyed the way the sunshine glinted through the Morning Glory leaves, “I’d go anywhere to find her. I would follow her to the very end of the earth, though I don’t know where the end could possibly be. It’s a big world, Ladle, it’s a very big world, but I’ll find her out there. I have to.”



The two mice regarded one another. Ladle reached out and pulled Thimble into an embrace, and they stood like that for some time. One brother holding the other.

Soon Cashel emerged from the garden with his precise little leap, "It's almost time now, Thimble. Are you ready?"

Thimble and Ladle broke apart. Thimble took one last look at the garden, and nodded to the frog.

The plot was like this:

Mr. Todd had a morning routine. He would come out the front door of the Todd House headed for work, usually with a box of paperwork in his hands, or a lunch box, or his briefcase, or sometimes all three. He would juggle all his things toward his vehicle which sat in the drive, and he would open the passenger side door which faced the Morning Glories. Then he would attempt to arrange all his things in the passenger seat as best he could before heading to the driver side and driving away. If Thimble was to stowaway in Mr. Todd's things undetected, he would need a diversion to stall Mr. Todd for as long as possible.

That's where the frogs came in.

Right as expected at seven o'clock in the morning, Mr. Todd emerged from the house. Thimble and Cashel smiled at once. Mr. Todd was carrying a great many things this morning. He had his briefcase precariously clutched in one hand, his lunch pail under one arm, an enormous box of files was being balanced in the crook of his elbow above the hand that held his briefcase, he held a thermos of coffee in one hand, and in his teeth was a single pencil.

Mr. Todd staggered in this unsteady balancing act toward the passenger side door. With the steadiness of a contortionist, he deposited his thermos of coffee on top of the car, and used his free hand to swing the door open. He was slowly lowering his box of files into the empty car seat when he heard someone say:

Ribbit!

Mr. Todd peered over the box to see, to his surprise, a common garden frog sitting squarely in the middle of his front seat.

"Oh hello," said Mr. Todd around the pencil in his teeth, "what are you doing there?"

To which the frog replied, "*ribbit.*"

"We can't have you riding along, little friend, you'd be happier in the garden," Mr. Todd placed his briefcase on the ground, and then the box of files, and then his lunch. He returned to the car seat, and gently swept his hand behind the frog sending

her leaping out of the car and back toward the garden. Mr. Todd smiled. He knelt to gather his box of files, but when he got back to the carseat he heard someone say:

Ribbit!

“What the blazes?” said Mr. Todd around the pencil which was still in his teeth. He peered, again, over the box of files to see, he believed, the same frog sitting squarely in the middle of the carseat.

“How on earth did you get back there so quickly?” asked Mr. Todd. To which the frog replied, “*ribbit*.” Mr. Todd put the box of files back on the ground. He again, brushed his hand gently behind the frog, and *he* leapt from the car back toward the garden.

“That was quite strange,” Mr. Todd said aloud to himself around the pencil in his teeth.

He knelt to, once again, pick up the box of files, only to hear someone say:

Ribbit!

“Alright, this is absolutely mad,” exclaimed Mr. Todd, and he looked up to see, what he thought to be, the same frog sitting squarely in the middle of the car seat, “no, no, no, no, NO!”

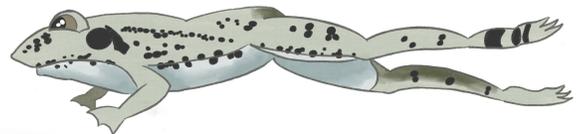
Mr. Todd swept his hand behind the frog and she jumped from the car seat onto his shoe. Mr. Todd wiggled his foot in the air, and she leapt from his shoe back toward the garden. Mr. Todd was breathing a sigh of relief and turning around when he heard someone say:

Ribbit!

“Alright, you, if you want to come so badly, I suppose there’s nothing I can do about it,” said Mr. Todd, and he knelt to take up the box of files. When he returned to the car seat, the frog was nowhere to be seen.

“Oh, thank goodness,” Mr. Todd sighed, for the ordeal had started to become rather disturbing.

He was kneeling to pick up his briefcase next when he heard someone say:



Ribbit!

“*Ahhhh!*” cried Mr. Todd, for there was a frog sitting directly on the handle of the briefcase, and she was staring up at him with big froggy eyes. No sooner had he swept her away, than he heard someone, who he still perceived to be the same frog, say:

Ribbit!

A frog was sitting, again, in the car seat, right next to Mr. Todd’s box of files.

At this moment, *Mrs.* Todd was washing dishes from breakfast and gazing out the kitchen window, which had a view of the drive. She watched, quietly perplexed, as her husband, picked his things up off the ground, shrieked wildly, and put them back on the ground again, over and over. *Something very odd must be happening*, thought *Mrs.* Todd who kept placidly washing a dish. For the life of her she could not imagine what was going on.

As Mr. Todd had been doing battle with many frogs, who he thought was one, extremely determined frog, Thimble had scurried, quickly and silently up Mr. Todd’s pant leg, he climbed to his knee, and launched himself into the open passenger side door. He had crept around to the backseat, and was clutching one of the safety belt clasps.

Cashel, who was still standing beneath the Morning Glories with Ladle observing intently, waited until he perceived Thimble to be safe and hidden in the vehicle. He let out a loud *Chirp!*, and just like that, all thirty frogs retreated toward the garden.

Mr. Todd stood still beside the car, his eyes darting about, his ears attentive. He breathed quickly. He knew at any moment he would hear another *Ribbit!*, and his torture would begin all over again.

All remained quiet, however, except for the morning sounds of near and distant birdsong. So Mr. Todd sighed again. He finally put all his things into the car. He made sure his lunch, his box of files, and his briefcase were all tightly secured. He even removed the pencil from his teeth and placed it in a cup holder. He climbed into the driver side and drove away, forgetting only his thermos of coffee, still atop the car, which flew off, and bounced bottom over top three or four times before coming to rest in the middle of the drive.

All was quiet. The frogs had retreated to the pond, and Mr. Todd had driven away with Thimble in the backseat. Only Ladle remained, under the Morning Glories, watching the place the car had been, hoping it would be back soon with his brother and Chickpea safe inside.

