

## The First Adventure Garlic's Monocle

The task would be absolutely impossible to anyone bigger than two thimbles set side by side on a table. That was the exact size at which someone would be too big to retrieve the bit of glass that Garlic used as a magnifier whenever he had to read something. As it happened, Garlic had, last Autumn, taken to letting himself into the Todd house via a jaunty climb up the orange clad maple tree, and a tight but manageable squeeze through an upstairs window which had grown a tad loose at the hinges in the summer sun. The Todd family had a little girl who lived on the second floor of the house, and Garlic had, in Autumn, become irrepressibly engrossed in one of her chapter books. When asked about it now, he would say something to the effect of, "I recall there being a horse," and then stop, scratch his claws against his little chin thoughtfully, and gaze up into the leaves.

Garlic was not entirely at fault for forgetting the book he had gone to such extreme lengths to read, he had been, after all, interrupted midway through. One day in late September, having managed the squeeze under the window pane, Garlic had been sitting happily in the sun on the empty bedroom floor. The chapter book was spread before him, and he was holding the bit of glass up to one eye as a monocle. He had been so fully enjoying the story and the sunshine that he hadn't heard the sound of the Todd girl romping up the stairs toward her bedroom until she was on nearly the final step.

Now anyone would receive a jolt upon bursting into their bedroom to find a red squirrel sitting in the middle of it, but the shock would be all the worse upon bursting into your bedroom to find a red squirrel *reading* by use of a monocle in the middle of it, and Garlic knew this. Human beings were a clever animal, but were generally understood to be a bit panicky about the thought of not being the cleverest. So most creatures who could read (and there were not very many, Garlic was the only one in the whole garden who had ever learned), for the sake of sparing the feelings of the human beings, hid their ability most diligently. And Garlic attempted to do the same as soon as he realized he was about to be discovered.

He took the monocle in both paws and looked this way and that for a hiding place. He thought at first about simply popping the bit of glass under the rug, but Mrs. Todd was commonly understood to be a thorough housekeeper, and he could not be positive she would not put it out in the bin with the rest of the dust the next time she swept (she certainly did seem like the type of woman who would sweep under the rug). Then he saw it, the knot in the floor board that had just enough space to slip the monocle. It was only a few feet away behind the third bedpost. He raced to it in a second, and quickly shoved the glass inside, but it clanked with a horrible sound, down much further than Garlic had expected. He tried hurriedly to retrieve it, but it was just

out of reach. His longest claw could just touch its slick surface.

The door to the bedroom swung open, and for a moment the Todd girl and Garlic gaped at one another with the exact same expression. She left her hand on the doorknob, and he left his paw in the knot, still trying helplessly to retrieve his precious reading glass. The moment seemed long, but when it ended it was replaced by the horrified wail of the Todd girl.

Garlic had abandoned his glass at that point, and run, but where to? Everywhere he turned the wail of the Todd girl had pursued him. Squeezing under the window would take time, and Garlic was desperately afraid of being squashed. He leapt about the room. He jumped up on her desk, she screamed. He jumped up on her bed, she screamed louder. Garlic's heart pounded. Finally, Mrs. Todd came rushing in, and upon seeing Garlic, flung open the window. He jumped for his life, and before he could blink, was back in the big orange maple.

The Todd's did not take to red squirrels letting themselves into their daughter's bedroom, as it turned out, and replaced the hinges on the window making sure it shut most securely. For weeks after, until the weather began to grow cold, and Garlic, like all squirrels took to sleeping all day and night long, he would sit in the maple tree, the leaves falling about him, staring through the shut window. He was wondering, he explained to Thimble, what had happened to the horse.

"It's no use without my glass," Garlic said today, staring up and down at markings on the torn piece of newspaper Thimble had brought him, "it was bent just the right way. When I looked through it I could see."

Thimble had seen the torn newspaper float past on the breeze just a little while before. He'd been sitting, forlornly, by himself, contemplating the spring day at the edge of the garden where it met the lane. Thimble watched the paper blowing idly towards a puddle, when it turned just the right way for him to see the photo on the front. Thimble had sprung immediately to action, raced into the lane, snatched the paper out of the air with his teeth, just saving it from the muddy wet that it had been heading for, and without a thought he had run as quick as he could to find Garlic.



"But you have to tell me what it says," Thimble was smoothing out the edges of the paper with his paws.

"I'll tell you what it says, but you'll have to get my monocle. You're just small enough to fit."

Thimble looked at the Todd house. It loomed magnificently over the garden. Ivy grew over the gables and brick work. It had lemon cream yellow paint that chipped in places, and it was not without beauty, even to a mouse. Although, it did look very big to someone so very small. He'd been inside, of course, but he was not, after all, a house mouse. A trip all the way up to the bedroom. That would take some luck. Especially with Tuppy on guard. The Todd's terrier was quick on her feet when it came to the littlest of the garden residents. He took a deep breath, and looked back at the newspaper.

He would get that monocle. He must. The picture on the paper was in black and white, and not easy to make out as up close it was made up of millions of little dots in different gradations of gray, but Thimble could still see the image. It featured a small glass cage, lined with wood chips, and out of it stared about a dozen mice. The mice each wore an eerily similar expression. They looked distant and nervous, a look of uncertainty creasing their brows, and there, standing right in the middle of them, was Chickpea.

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When Thimble was a pup, he and his brother Ladle had taken themselves into the garden for one of their first excursions after leaving the nest. Thimble had wanted to see everything. The garden was new and fresh and bursting with adventure. Ladle had come along for the food. And there was plenty of that, too.

Back by the wall, where the grass grew unwieldy, the two mice pups had discovered a feast. Raspberry bushes, their berries full, and ripe, and just a little too high off the ground.

"It's too bad," Ladle had sighed, sitting himself in the dirt under a dandelion, "they do look so very juicy and plump."

"Come on then," said Thimble, "If I can just reach the first thorn here at the bottom, I can use the rest to get my footing, and I can climb right up."

The first thorn on the bottom Thimble referred to was lodged in the stalk of the bush just a few inches over Thimble's head. Which, to be sure, is a long way to reach for a mouse just out of the nest.

"Come over here, I'll stand on your shoulders."

"Are you mad?" said Ladle, "you'll skewer yourself alive on one of those sharp



thorns, or you'll climb way up and fall all the way down, and then I'll have to explain to Mother how you died trying to get us a raspberry."

"Ladle, come over here and give me a lift, and then, if I die, at least you can tell Mother I did it getting us twenty raspberries."

Ladle scurried over at the thought of twenty whole raspberries, and boosted Thimble up on his shoulders to where he could just reach the first of the thorns. There was a moment of getting his footing, but after a little struggle, Thimble was off up the bush. He reached from thorn to thorn like a ladder up, up into the leaves higher and higher.

"Thimble," cried Ladle who was standing below and starting to feel rather bored, "I don't have even one raspberry yet."

Thimble leapt out, one paw grasping a leaf, and with his teeth, cut loose a raspberry. It plummeted to the ground and Ladle, who had not been fully paying attention, jumped with a start, and then was overjoyed. A whole delicious raspberry. Then there was another, and another, and another, falling to the ground all around Ladle who sprung victoriously into the air. It was raining raspberries! Thimble went higher, and higher. He bit a raspberry stem and let it fall, he didn't watch it go down, because he was off onto another. He was laughing, and not giving a thought to how high he was climbing, but suddenly his laughter stopped with a jolt, and he had to cling tightly to the stem he was holding so as not to fall. Thimble's eyes widened, and his little jaw dropped open.



Somewhere way down below he could hear his brother calling, "Thimble, don't stop! We'll have enough for every mouse in the garden!"

There was no need to pay attention to Ladle, Ladle could not see it, but way up where Thimble had climbed, high enough to see through the leaves, nearly to the top of the raspberry bushes, the whole of the Todd house had revealed itself to the mouse pup, and it was glorious. Thimble had never seen anything so big. The window of the breakfast nook was wide with white trim against the house's lemon cream paint. It was open, letting the breeze in on this summer day, and Thimble almost couldn't believe his eyes. A little cage was sitting on the table in the window, and in the little cage was a little white mouse, about his age, and she was waving at him.

Thimble stared, and then he raised his paw to wave back, promptly lost his footing and started falling headlong through the



raspberry bush leaves. The leaves whipped past his whiskers and he grasped the air with his paws every which way, finally, finding one he could hang on to. Which, as it turned out, was just a little ways from the ground, and he dangled in the air just above Ladle's head.

"My goodness are you alright?"

"No, I don't think so, I've been struck."

"By a thorn?"

"No," said Thimble, dropping to the ground with a *pip*, "by the most lovely creature I've ever seen. I have to go find her, Ladle, she's in the house."

"The house? But what about all these raspberries?"

"Never mind the raspberries!" cried Thimble as he began to run full tilt toward the Todd house, "let the birds have them!"

"The birds?" called Ladle, who could only stand sadly amidst all the beautiful food watching his brother rush away. He sat on the ground with his twenty raspberries and said to himself, "the birds don't need to go to nearly so much trouble."

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Today the house was shadowy and empty. Thimble had flattened his body as much as he could and squeezed, oh so quietly, through the crack under the back door, where Mr. Todd's gardening boots sat caked with soil. He'd hugged the edges of the walls. Quietly, quickly, he had scuttled from one piece of furniture to the next, peering out from behind a chair leg here, or a box there, but the house was totally quiet. He did not hear the chirping clicks of Tuppy's nails along the boards. That was the sound that woke Thimble in the night, his pink nose wet, and his tiny paws set trembling. Those nights he had to remind himself he had only been dreaming. Today, mercifully, it was quiet. Perhaps the Todd's had taken Tuppy with them on an outing, or perhaps, the terrier was somewhere dozing, and Thimble had only to make one misstep to wake her.

He reached the breakfast nook now, and though he knew the strictest attention must be paid to ascertaining the whereabouts of Tuppy, Thimble couldn't help but look up toward the bottom of the table staring back at him, and the window through which he had first seen Chickpea. It was closed now, against the somewhat wet spring day. She used to be there, in the cage atop the table, warming her white fur in the sunshine, always happy to see him. Today the emptiness of the house felt hollow. It should have made him feel safe, but instead it only reminded him that it had been nearly three months since her cage had disappeared from the table, and her with it.

There was hope now, Thimble reminded himself, he'd seen her picture in the newspaper, and if he could get Garlic's monocle, maybe the paper would tell him where

she was. Thimble looked toward the base of the stairs. He only needed to make it to the second floor without alerting Tuppy.

*Now is the time to be a very brave little mouse*, Thimble thought, and he took a step toward the middle of the room.

Mice can be very, very quiet. Because mice are very, very light. No one can tip-toe like a mouse, except a mouse. It was just a matter of moving slowly. Thimble considered his path. If he could cross the floorboards of the breakfast nook, scuttle past the kitchen by way of the back of the sofa which faced the living room, quietly run the length of the rug in the hall, and get to the stairs, he could most likely hike the stairway by climbing up the base of the bannister. It was far, but he could do it.

Thimble tried to make his body as low to the floor as he could. He walked on the pads of his paws, if his claws touched the wooden floor, he'd make a *clickity, click, click* noise, and that might wake Tuppy. Thimble could imagine her ears perking up immediately, the way they did when she had been alerted to something exciting, or something scary, or something delicious. That last one was troubling. There would be no finding Chickpea if he was eaten by the dog.

Step, step, step, Thimble crossed the floorboards. He was just reaching the edge of the kitchen as he made progress along the back of the sofa, when a most delightful smell reached his nose. He paused, whiskers up, his only motion the tiny twitching of his nostrils. Oh, this smell was heavenly. Slowly, slowly, he let his eyes drift to where it beckoned him. It was somewhere low to the ground, he scanned the floor until they rested under the cabinet below the sink in the kitchen. Cheese. Out in the open. A nice big morsel of cheese. Which Thimble knew was meant for a mouse, because it was sitting, tantalizingly, on a mousetrap.

Thimble's tummy rumbled. He suddenly realized he wasn't sure the last time he'd eaten. He looked back toward the stairs, but the cheese smelled so, so very good.

He stayed beneath the cabinets where he was covered, moving quickly, keeping his nails off the floor so as not to make a sound. The cheese looked so good. A big shiny bit of cheddar. Mousetraps weren't so hard to trick. He'd done it loads of times. It was all a matter of taking care to not step on the trigger, and pulling the cheese off quick. He reached out for the cheese, and stopped. The trap would make a big sound when it slammed shut. If Tuppy was asleep somewhere in the house that would surely wake her.

Thimble's tummy rumbled again, but it would have to wait. He turned away, and clumsily bumped the edge of the trap, and it slammed shut with a loud *SNAP!* and sent the little block of cheddar rolling and thumping across the kitchen floor.

Thimble froze.

The house stayed silent. Maybe Tuppy wasn't home. Maybe Tuppy was in such a deep sleep, she hadn't heard the trap snap. Thimble's ears were straight up. His eyes were very wide, and he heard something that made his heart ring in his ears.

Somewhere way across the Todd house approached the tapping of Tuppy's nails along the floor. She was coming.

Thimble ran. He bolted through the middle of the kitchen. The plan was gone, there was no plan left to follow. All Thimble could hope to do was find a way out of the house before Tuppy got to him.

She'd spotted him now, he could tell, the tentative clicking of her nails were gone and now he heard, and felt, the thumps of her gallop as she bounded across the floor toward him. The terrier barked, and it sounded huge to the mouse, like a thunder clap. He was running across the living room, dodging the sofa and chairs. He could feel Tuppy's breath as she caught up to him. He didn't turn around but he could picture her long canines, coated in saliva, right over his head.

"Mouse!" The shrill voice rang down from above Thimble, "Mouse! Up here!"

Thimble flew at the curtains that lined the living room window. They were long, and white, and sheer. He dug his little nails into them and scrambled up, up, up. Finally he stopped way above the ground, nearly four feet, and for the first time he looked back. There was Tuppy staring up at him. He grasped the curtains tighter. Her nose was sniffing the air, and she was letting out a low, cantankerous grumble.

"Sorry, girl, not today," Thimble said to himself.

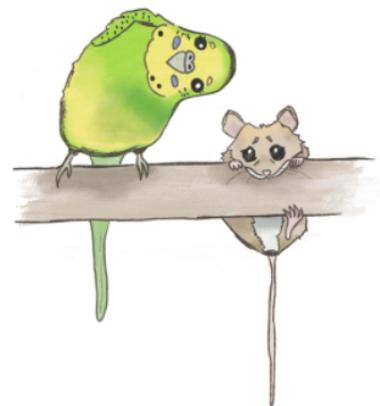
"What in the world do you think you're doing?" It was Peter, the Todd's Parakeet, who had been calling to Thimble and now sat inquisitively in his cage next to the window.

Peter was watching Thimble dangle in the curtains. Thimble had completely forgotten the bird's existence, he had been so focused on retrieving the monocle up the stairs, but now he could not be happier to see his green, somewhat perturbed acquaintance.

"Peter," Thimble sighed, "you can't know how good it is to see you, old pal."

Thimble made the easy jump from the curtains to Peter's cage, and slid the door open. He climbed the bars, calmly toward his friend, trying not to make note of Tuppy who still sat on the floor staring at them, and then he scrambled, somewhat clumsily onto Peter's perch so they could face one another.

"You should have asked for my help, in the first place," Peter said after hearing Thimble explain about the shred of newspaper that contained Chickpea's photo, and the bit of glass Garlic needed for reading, and the chapter book about the horse, and the knot in the floorboard behind the third bedpost, "Get your little paws on the door of my cage there and slide it open enough for me."



Thimble did as he was told, and slid the door open letting Peter out. Peter flew to and fro in front of the cage.

“Watch out for Tuppy!” Thimble exclaimed, swinging himself to the outside of the bars and letting the door shut.

“Oh don’t you worry about her!” Peter cried, and he dove at the dog, his wings beating, which sent the terrier running away, her tail between her legs, “She won’t hurt me, or she’d have to answer to Mrs. Todd!”

“Ha! You’re brilliant,” Thimble called out, “what do we do now?”

“Hop on my back, you silly mouse!”

Thimble did so, and away they flew through the Todd house. It was exhilarating! Thimble held onto the feathers of Peter’s neck, and felt his wings underneath lifting them up through the air. Wind blew in Thimble’s fur, and he began to laugh out loud, just a little at first, and then bigger, and then Thimble shouted a great *Waaaahoooo!* from Peter’s back.

Up they flew to the bedroom on the second floor where Thimble dismounted, and Peter straightened his feathers. Thimble found the knot without difficulty, slipped inside, and re-emerged with the bit of glass for Garlic.

When Peter deposited Thimble back at the same door he had slipped under to enter the house, Thimble turned to his friend, “Will you come with me? You knew her, too.”

“I’m so sorry,” Peter said, “I cannot. I am a house bird, and I must stay with my house, but I wish you success in your adventures, I do. Bring her back to us.”

“I will,” Thimble vowed solemnly, and he knew that he would.

“And remember, you have more friends than you know. Mine aren’t the only wings.”

With that Peter returned to his cage, and Thimble wriggled under the door and into the garden.

Mrs. Todd returned home later that afternoon, but she never did understand how it came to be that she found Peter sitting on top of his cage waiting patiently to be let in.

