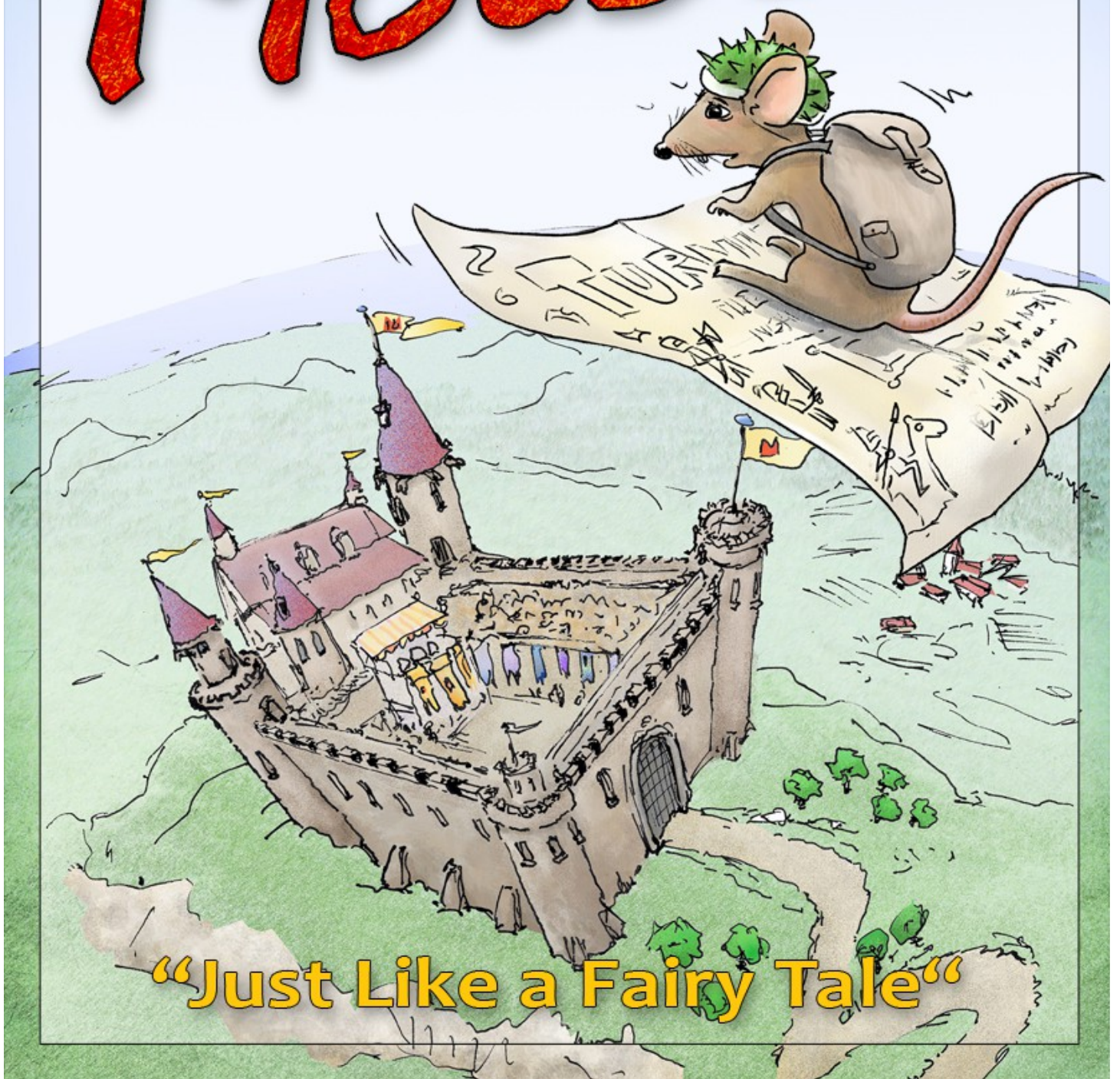


Andy Clapp & Christoph Buchfink

PERCY MOUSE



“Just Like a Fairy Tale”

Percy Mouse

and Hannibal the Terrible

Dear readers,
this is one of 14 short stories
that are planned for

“Just Like a Fairy Tale“

a book by

Andy Clapp & Christoph Buchfink

which will appear in summer 2021

We hope, you will enjoy it

Percy Mouse

Percy was an adventurer mouse. At least that's what he thought he was. Each morning he popped out of his mouse hole, looked carefully around the meadow, collected delicious goodies, took them home and gobbled them down. In the afternoon it was the same routine and in the evening as well. Then he cleaned his teeth and lay down on his cosy nest, made of bits of wool, fine grass and other soft, cuddly material which he had collected over the years. And every night he dreamt of his bravery and all the adventures he would have. That's how he spent all his days, day after day and pretty much the whole year. And his whole life could have passed like that. Could have...

One morning just as Percy popped out of his mouse hole and was carefully looking around his meadow, a large sheet of paper slapped against his little body and stuck to him. The wind had blown it up from the south. He recovered quickly from his shock and, pulling it off, he smoothed it flat on the ground so he could have a good look at it. There were large and small letters on it and around the edges were knights in armour on horses. In the middle was a princess. Percy couldn't see her face because she was wearing a veil. But the title was easy to read:

Tournament

it said, in big letters. Percy read on:

Grand Royal Tournament for the hand of the princess.

Poor princess thought Percy. Then she'll only have one hand left.

All Knights and brave fellows welcome

The winner will be awarded the hand of the princess.

Percy looked carefully at the picture of the princess. If only she didn't have this veil, he thought, then I could see if she's pretty. But what would I do with just a hand? Nevertheless this sounds like a proper adventure for a brave mouse like me.

**All contestants are asked to bring
their sharpest and most dangerous weapons
to this royal tournament.**

That's no problem for me at all, said Percy to himself. In my mouse hole I have all sorts of sharp, dangerous objects. He ran home and packed his little rucksack with thorns from a rose bush, rose hip seeds and a very sharp tooth pick that someone had dropped in his meadow. He also packed a piece of cheese for a packed lunch because he wasn't sure how

far away the castle was. But he was determined to take part in the tournament. After all he was an adventurer mouse, wasn't he?

After he had packed and spruced himself up he had another look, this time more carefully, at the large leaflet. All the knights were wearing heavy armour and proper helmets on their heads.

I'll need something to protect myself, he thought, as he glanced across at the horse chestnut tree where the conkers were falling. Just the thing, he said to himself and put the prickly husk from a conker onto his head and fixed it with a bit of string. It fitted perfectly. Now he was ready to have the adventure he'd always dreamed of.



"Where could the castle be?" He was talking to himself again.

"Twenty days from here," answered a butterfly, who had just landed on a dark blue cornflower, "If you're very quick." Percy was impressed.

"Do you know the castle?"

"Yes, I was there in the spring but the flowers in this meadow are far tastier," replied the butterfly while enthusiastically sucking the nectar from the blossoms.

"How do you get there?"

“You have to go through that wood, over the hill, until you come to a river. You follow it almost until it reaches the sea,” explained the butterfly, “then you go south and fly over wide pastures until you come to a stony mountain, after that a smallish desert. When you’ve flown over that, you’ll see a very green hill with the castle on top. But it’s really not worth it, the flowers here taste much better.”

“And do you know when the tournament begins?” asked Percy, a bit unsure of himself.

“No idea,” replied the butterfly who was having trouble deciding between two blossoms.

Percy grabbed the leaflet to look for the date.

**The tournament starts
on the last Sunday in August
one hour after sunrise.**

“Oh, no!” sighed Percy. “That’s tomorrow and it’ll take me a half a year to walk to the castle. If only I could fly!”

Sometimes you just have to have a bit of luck, and the wind blowing in the right direction. Just as Percy was staring sadly at the leaflet a gust of wind almost blew it away. He held on tight so he wouldn’t lose it but a powerful gust shot it into the air. He held on for dear life and the wind took him higher and higher. Like a fir cone he swung backwards and forwards from his paw tips at a dizzying height. With all his might he swung up onto the sheet of paper and sat there like a fakir on a flying carpet. Now he could see in all directions. What a view! The stormy wind blew him south over the woods.

“Wow. Now this is an adventure!” he shouted to the wind. Far beneath him, he could see the river, in the distance the sea and to the south the glittering desert and on a hill behind it he could make out a misty spec that must be the castle. He was feeling rather peckish so he unpacked his cheese. After he’d eaten it, he lay down on the leaflet, feeling a bit annoyed that he had forgotten his toothbrush. Then he fell into a deep sleep.

The castle

The next morning he was woken with a jolt as the leaflet started to swerve and wobble about. He rubbed his eyes and got a shock. He was spinning in tight circles through the clouds and heading straight towards the castle walls. He grabbed the paper tightly with his paws to stop himself flying off.

“Ooow. I feel very queasy,” he complained. “I didn’t need this much adventure!” He shot violently downwards. The earth rushed up, spinning towards him. If a stiff breeze hadn’t come up the valley at that very moment he would have been dashed at great speed onto the ground.



Sometimes adventurer mice have to have luck. The sudden gust of wind broke his fall and he landed gently, spinning on the meadow in front of the castle gates. He tried to stand but could only lurch from side to side. It took quite a while before the dizziness and queasiness passed. Then he noticed the castle gates. They were tightly locked.

“I hope they haven’t started already,” sighed Percy. As soon as he could walk straight, he rushed over to the gates. There hung a large notice and written in big letters were the words:

**Tournament day
Do not disturb!**

“Bother... and three times bother!” he said to himself. He hadn’t come all this way to be shut out, late or not. Picking up a cobblestone from the ground, he banged as hard as he could against the great gates.

“Open up!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. “Let me in. I’ve got to take part in the tournament!”

After knocking and shouting for what seemed like an eternity, he heard a man’s voice from way up on the castle walls. “Quiet down there. Can’t you read? We’re shut!”

“Of course I can!” shouted Percy back. “But I’ve got to take part in the tournament. So open up!”

“Not possible. The gates are shut!” shouted the voice from above.

“But if you unlock them, they’ll be open,” called Percy.

“That’s true,” came the short reply.

“Open the gates!” begged the little mouse. “Please!”

“Only the guard can do that,” came the reply from the battlements.

“Then call the guard!”

There was a moment’s silence, then a reply: “I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Cos I am the guard!”

“Then call yourself!” urged Percy energetically.

Again a horrible silence.

“Not possible,” answered the guard, “I’ve forgotten my name.” Percy shook his head. “Well, what are you called?”

“Otto. Replacement guard Otto.”

“Good. Then simply call Otto!”

“Oh, yes.” Otto sounded enthusiastic. “But I don’t need to call me,” he added, “I’m already here.”

“Great!” Percy was getting a sore throat from all the shouting. “Then just open the gates!”

“Can’t you read? There’s a tournament on!”

Percy was getting desperate. “But I’ve got to go to the tournament.”

“Ah, yes. The tournament. It’s starting soon. I was going to watch it. What am I still doing here? Thank you for the reminder.”

Percy could hear hurrying footsteps disappearing down the steps, echoing into the distance. He had heard that people weren't always the cleverest creatures but this one seemed to be an example of exceptional simplicity, and unfortunately the only one who could let him in. Disappointed he sat down on the grass to look for something to eat when he noticed a crack in the castle wall. It was far too small for a person to get through but just wide enough for a mouse, if he sucked his stomach in. He took a deep breath, summoned all his courage and crawled through, straight into the courtyard of the castle.

The Tournament

The palace courtyard was full of knights in armour, their squires getting them ready, horses with colourful cloth coverings, flags and noise. Everywhere there were people shouting, dogs barking and vendors offering spiced sausages and other delicacies. One hundred knights from foreign lands had travelled to take part in the tournament, to be awarded the hand of the princess or even just get a kiss from her. Ninety-nine of them had a well saddled horse but one knight rode on an elephant: Hannibal the Terrible from Africa. He was a huge man with a fine suit of armour, deadly weapons and a big mouth. He shouted loudly that the rest of them should all go home and hide in their beds. He would batter them, beat them and generally mangle them. They had no chance against his elephant and his mighty mace, axe, spear and sword.

Many of the knights were nervous and one was so frightened he shut himself in the toilet hut and wouldn't come out. Then came the signal that the squires should help their knights onto their horses.

A horse, thought Percy. They didn't mention that on the leaflet. He looked around desperately. As luck would have it, he saw a riderless horse trotting up and down in front of the toilet hut. Quick as a wink he took a running jump, pulled himself up the horse's tail and ran over its back to sit in the saddle. Just as he took hold of the heavy reins, the horn sounded to signal the start of the tournament. All the knights charged into the fight wielding their weapons. Percy had no idea how to control a horse but luckily as soon as it heard the signal, it knew what to do and galloped bravely into the fray. All around arrows were whizzing, lances cracking and swords crashing on shields. But Percy's horse dodged and ducked, feinted to the right but went left and generally kept out of harm's way. Percy bravely held his toothpick up and desperately tried not to fall out of the saddle. None of the innumerable sword blows or arrows hit Percy. He was simply too small. The knights didn't see him; they just saw a riderless horse galloping around in the confusion.

After the fight had raged for an hour, lances had broken against shields, knights had fallen from their horses and swords were bent out of shape, there were ninety-eight knights lying panting in the mud and only two still in their saddles: Percy Mouse and Hannibal the Terrible.

“Hurray!” shouted Percy excitedly. Now it was time for the final duel.

Bother... and triple bother, thought Percy. Now he realised the danger he was in. He thought of his cuddly warm nest at home. He had wanted an adventure and now he was in the middle of a real one. Percy climbed carefully up onto the head of the horse to get a better look at Hannibal.



When Hannibal saw Percy in his conker husk helmet holding his toothpick he couldn't stop laughing. His scornful voice boomed out, "Look, a tiny mite! A worm. I'll squash him between my finger and thumb." And then directly to Percy, "Give up now and go home. They don't call me Hannibal the Terrible for nothing!" The crowd roared with laughter and Percy started trembling. But Hannibal's elephant noticed the mouse for the first time. What Percy didn't know was that elephants are frightened of mice. They fear that the mice will run up their trunks and tickle and bite them: very unpleasant for the elephant. When this elephant saw Percy he panicked. He reared up on his hind legs, trumpeted loudly and fell onto his bottom sending a shockwave through the courtyard. Hannibal sailed through the air and landed on his back in the dust, denting and smashing his armour. He lay there, like a beetle on its back, flailing with his arms and legs, unable to get up.



“Help me up,” he called, “I’m the winner. I’ll squash him flat.” As it was against the rules to help, no one moved.

Now I’ve got him, thought Percy and he jumped from his horse and crawled into his opponent’s armour. Inside he grasped his toothpick and started to poke Hannibal’s legs, behind his knees, under his arms and in all the sensitive places on his body. Hannibal started to wail and complain. Then Percy took the thorns that he had brought with him and put them in Hannibal’s underpants. He climbed up and ripped out a few of Hannibal’s chest hairs and finally put the rose hips down his back inside his armour where they itched terribly.

Hannibal thrashed about in the dust and complained bitterly, “Aaaah. Take it out. It tickles horribly.” But in his bent armour he could hardly move, let alone get his fat fingers in their iron gloves underneath his back plate to reach the rose hips.

Percy jumped up onto Hannibal’s helmet, opened the visor, looked him threateningly in the eyes and asked, “Do you give up?”

“Never!” replied the huge knight, “I’m Hannibal the Terrible... ohhh!” Percy poked him hard in the nose.

“Alright. Alright, I surrender.”

“Winner!” Percy Mouse, through his determination and skill, had actually won the tournament. What an adventure! And what about the princess’ hand? He was not sure he wanted a hand. All the guests cheered and hooted and applauded him. Some came and put him on a soft cushion to carry him triumphantly to the castle. Others ran on ahead to make sure they were first at the buffet.

“But I haven’t seen the princess waving,” he said.

“She’ll be waiting for you in her bed chamber,” explained an excited servant on their way up the castle steps.

The Royal Bed Chamber

In the middle of the spacious royal bed chamber was a four poster bed with a canopy of silk curtains in splendid colours with cosy pillows. It was of course far too big for a mouse, even an adventurer mouse.

I hope I get to see the princess’ hand soon, thought Percy, so I can nip off to the banquet. I’m dying of hunger and my stomach is starting to make funny noises. The princess was nowhere to be seen. So Percy clambered up onto the bed, took off his rucksack with the toothpick in it and sat on a nice soft pillow. I could do with one like this in my nest at home, he thought. Then his stomach rumbled again. Hopefully there’ll be some cheese soon.

“There you are my brave knight.” He jumped as he heard her voice next to him. The princess was sitting on the edge of the bed and he hadn’t heard her coming.

Although startled he composed himself quickly again. She was wearing her veil which completely covered her face. Maybe she’s frightened that she isn’t pretty enough, he thought. “You can take your veil off, Princess,” he said encouragingly. “You don’t need to be shy with me.”

“That’s very courageous of you,” she breathed and lifted a paw, which Percy noticed was very furry, to remove her veil. He saw two pointed ears, yellow slits for eyes, sharp teeth and a greedy mouth. The princess was a cat. A particularly big cat. A very greedy looking cat!

“Um... I’m rather hungry.” Out of the corner of his eye, Percy was desperately looking for an escape route.

“Oh. It’s supertime,” she purred.

“How nice... um... What’s for supper?”

“Mouse!” snarled the cat quietly and extended her claws.

“Bad choice,” replied Percy as he shoved his toothpick into her right nostril and ran for his life.

Up and down

That was the start of a wild chase through the farthest reaches of the castle. Percy rushed into the hall, up the spiral staircase and into the highest tower. The cat was directly behind him. He slid down the drainpipe until he came to an open window. He jumped into the tower room but the cat knew the castle like the back of her paw and was waiting in the doorway for him. He dived into the open door of a wardrobe, with the cat all claws and teeth just inches behind him. Making wild hissing noises she ripped the clothes out of the way. But Percy slipped through a hole in the back of the wardrobe and ran out of the door into the hallway.

Wherever Percy ran the cat was hot on his tail. In the cellar he ran through sacks of flour, peas and dried beans. He shot across the kitchen, which smelt temptingly of cheese. He would have loved to have stopped for a nibble but the cat was right on his heels. He saw a saucepan of water which he managed to push over, drenching the cat. He knew cats hated getting wet and in the moment's delay he grabbed a piece of cheese in passing.



He rushed up the stairs but before he could get to the front door, the cat had overtaken him, so he dodged down a corridor to the left. What a mistake. There was no door at the end. He was trapped and watched as the cat shook herself dry and grinned at him with a terrifying smile. He pressed himself against the cold hard wall and felt exhausted. He was panting for breath and his heart was beating so fast he thought it would never slow down again. He had never run so fast or so far in his life. The cat sensed how he felt, and came slowly towards him with her wicked smile.

“So my little brave knight. It’s supertime!” Percy threw his cheese at her but she was already in the air with her claws out heading straight at him. He dived to the floor and noticed a tiny hole in the skirting board just big enough for him to fit through. What luck! He scrabbled inside just in time to hear the cat thump against the wall. Here she couldn’t get at him. He was safe for the time being.

The real princess

Outside he heard the cat give up the chase and mumble something about fish pie as she grudgingly left the room. But inside his heart was still thumping.

“That was a close thing,” he said, trying to catch his breath.

“And a very brave thing!” He heard a sweet voice coming from the darkness. In the gloom he could make out a beautiful mouse with shining eyes and a tender smile.

“How lovely,” he gasped. “Am I in heaven?” The other mouse giggled in amusement. “No. My name is Priscilla. I live here in the castle.”

“Oh... my name is Percy Mouse. I wanted to take part in the tournament and...”

“I know,” she replied, “I saw everything: your tactics at the tournament, your win against that big mouth Hannibal and your heroic fight with that false princess.” She sounded almost desperate.

“Why false princess?” asked Percy.

“That cat is a usurper,” she explained. “The real princess is a mouse... and is called Priscilla.”

Percy looked somewhat confused at her for a long moment then it dawned on him.

“Princess!” He blushed a deep red. Even though she wasn’t wearing a crown or royal robes, she looked somehow regal, just like he’d imagined a princess would be, only far more beautiful.

“This palace has been my family seat for generations,” she explained sadly. “My parents were the best mouse king and queen you could imagine. Then a couple of months ago that lousy cat crept in and chased us all away. She even ate some of us.” Tears welled up in her eyes. “I’m the only one who has stayed to fight this evil cat.” Percy wanted to comfort her so he reached out to hold her hand. She let him.

“She wanted to have the palace for herself,” she continued, “and marry a prince so she would be queen.”

“The stupid cow!” Percy was furious.

“Cat...” sighed Priscilla.

“We’ve got to get rid of her.” Percy could feel the anger pulsing through his veins.

“But how?” asked Priscilla desperately.

“I have an idea!” Suddenly Percy knew what was to be done. “How do I get to the tournament field from here?”

“No problem. In these old walls there are always holes and passageways for us mice. I’ll show you the way.” And with that, she was off.

Goodbye Hannibal

All the guests and knights were partying, drinking beer, roaring with laughter and stuffing themselves with food. Hannibal was the only one left on the tournament field, still on his back like a beetle, moaning to himself. His squire had forgotten him and was enjoying the delicious food and laughing about events of the afternoon.

“Help! Ohhh... How that itches and scratches. Oh. Help!!” No one else wanted to help him: they had had enough of his big mouth and heavy mace. Percy and Priscilla jumped up onto the helmet, pushed up the visor and looked Hannibal deep in the eyes.

“There you are at last!” whined Hannibal. “Take these awful prickly things out, but hurry.”

Percy took a deep breath. “Alright. Hanni, I’ve a proposal for you. You take the fake princess and disappear with her from here for ever.”

“But... but that’s what I wanted to do anyway,” explained Hannibal. “I wanted to win the tournament, marry the princess and take all the gold with me back to Africa.”

“Right,” Percy looked at Priscilla who nodded. “You can have the gold. It tastes awful anyway. But the cheese stays here!”

“Agreed. But please take these terrible things out of my armour. And help me up.”

The promises were kept. Percy pulled the thorns out of the knight’s underpants. Secretly he left a few rose hips under the back plate as a gentle reminder. Hannibal married the fake princess and they went on their way south with the gold and the elephant.

Nearly goodbye

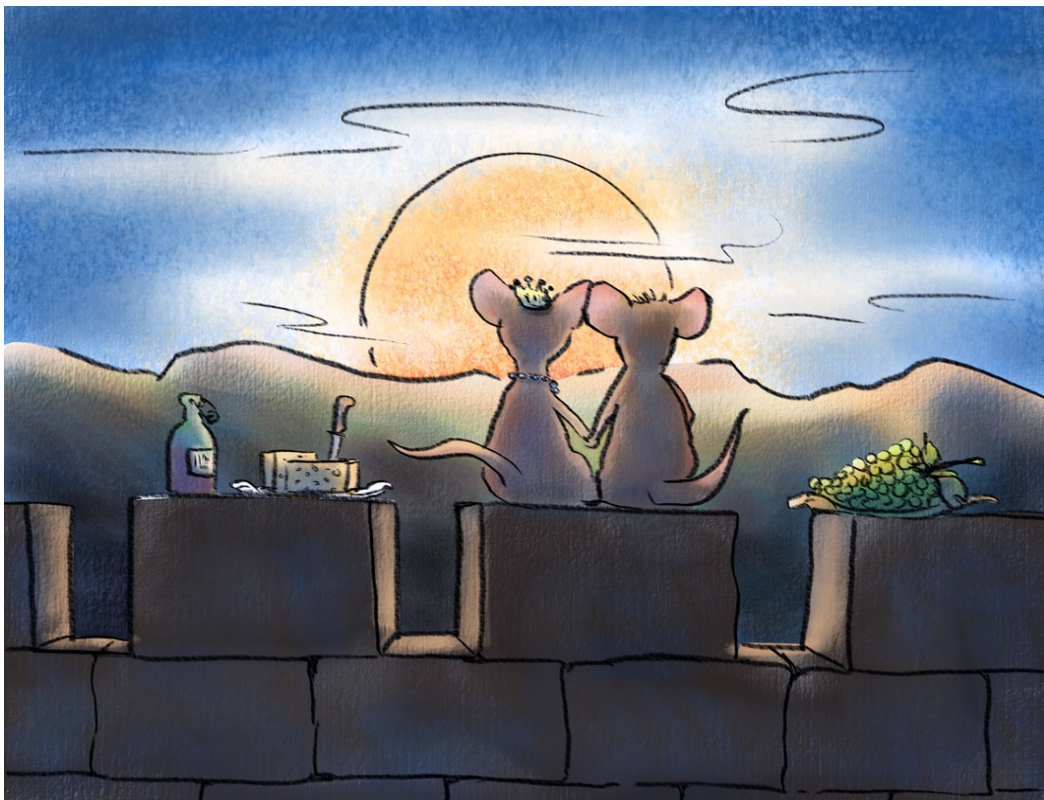
That evening Percy and Priscilla sat up on the parapet nibbling a large portion of cheese and grapes, and watched the sky turn slowly red.

“I have, way over there, behind the mountains, desert, hills and woods, a very comfy nest,” mentioned Percy. “I’m sure you would like it.”

Priscilla looked at him with a cheeky smile. “And I have a sweet, little palace with lots of cheese. I think you might like that too.”

Percy glanced back at the palace and smiled. Priscilla was happy. Suddenly he looked serious. “There’s something you have to know about me,” he said. “I’m an adventurer mouse! “

“No problem,” she replied. “I am too!”



The End

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