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The Adventures of Mousy and Jasper

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By Jimmy Schantz

Foreword

Thanks to the advice of fellow senior, English Creative Writing major, Tali Valentine, I had the opportunity in my last semester at Taylor University to begin volunteering with the LIFT afterschool program. The program is designed to, among other things, help children who struggle with their reading skills. This is accomplished by personalized, one-on-one sessions as a child trades off reading with a volunteer.

On one particularly gloomy Thursday afternoon, it became obvious that the fourth-grade boy who I was reading with was having, to put it lightly, a very bad day. The full-time teacher on staff also recognized this and told me to simply read to the boy as he was in no mood to face and practice the daily struggle that reading was to him. So, there I sat reading to him as he eventually stretched himself out onto the floor. Then something magical happened. The story was not all that good and yet I could sense the boy beginning to unwind, still captured with anticipation of what would happen next. What I discovered, or maybe more appropriately, re-discovered that day is the simple yet profound power of a story.

I can resonate with the boy I met at LIFT. Growing up, reading was a very real struggle for me. I viewed it as work and it took up much of my evening to get through assigned portions of chapter books, sometimes reducing me to tears. When I was in fourth grade, I had not yet discovered or obtained the necessary skills to allow me to pick up a book in order to satisfy my natural human craving for a good story. However, although I am still a painfully slow reader, I was encouraged to press on, with the promise that books really did contain good stories.

I can attribute most of the reason I stuck with reading (and henceforth decided to study English in college) to my parents' conscious efforts to read to me as I grew up. I can fondly remember sitting out in the sun as my mom read the *Chronicles of Narnia* to my sisters and me. I cherish the spring break when, even though being in the awkward 7th grade stage when I felt embarrassed to have my dad reading to me, we sat on the beach, engrossed in *The Greatest Game Ever Played*. And even further back, I remember my dad climbing up on the bed when my sister and I were very small and making up tales of a stuffed-animal mouse and an old family dog named Jasper. As I later would recall, these stories had an uncanny resemblance to the work of Tolkien, who just so happens to be one of my dad's favorite authors.

My senior project, *The Adventures of Mousy and Jasper*, resembles the stories my dad used to tell in title alone. However, the title and names of my characters do pay homage to these childhood memories of mine. They are not just wistful childhood memories either, but moments in my life that really shaped me into who I am today.

I am the youngest of three and my oldest sister, who is ten years older than me, has two little girls. They were my intended audience as I sat down to write my story and are the reason I picked the form that I did. This story is written in audio script form with the intent to be recorded and therefore *listened to* rather than simply read.

Reading is not unlike learning to play music. The reason people quit playing musical instruments after they just begin is the same reason people stop reading. Because, at first, it is hard. It is something that requires a lot of dull practice before being able to really do it. It is quite difficult to tell a story with 150 words on a page that a young person or beginner reader can understand. However, while they might not be able to *read* many words yet, they can

understand many more just by listening. This was found to be true in a study done with some Arab elementary school children. Researchers discovered that preschoolers who were read to, especially in literary Arabic, had much better language comprehension skills by the time they arrived at elementary school. This was accomplished without ever having actually read anything themselves but simply listening while being read to (Feitelson).

Television and movies can only go so far when it comes to appreciation for a story. When something is read or listened to, it allows the receiver to exercise their imagination and add detailed images that could never be projected on a screen. There are even biological factors at play here. In a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics, it was found that when pre-school children listen to stories being read to them there is an increase in neural activation of the left-brain, the part of the brain responsible for creating mental images (Hutton). This is the part of the brain that allows someone to conjure up a mental picture of something when they are reading.

I do not believe I needed any other motivation to write this project than simply wanting to be a small part of this experience for my nieces. This was at the core of my decision to sit down and create a story script with the intent to be recorded and listened to. I wanted to be able to give them something that I have found to be very valuable in my own life. I am incredibly thankful to everyone who took the time to read to me when I was growing up.

Because my story is made to be listened to with the intended audience as children, I had to alter the language I would typically use. The language is much more conversational. It is also very simple, and yet not in a way that would patronize the listener. I simply focused on trying to make the story as clear as possible. I am also fully aware that I have some words that extend

past the vocabulary range of a small child. The beauty of this, in my mind, is that children are presented new words audibly all the time. Where a word might trip a child up on a page, they will recognize it within its context when listening to it and not even realize what they have done!

Finally, beyond any other sort of justification for writing this piece, I must admit one last thing. I knew that this would be the longest piece I had ever written to date and, because of that, I wanted to create a world that would be fun to spend a significant amount of time in. I certainly enjoyed creating Roger's Farm. Please read this with the eyes and heart of a child; it is my hope you will enjoy it as well.

Works Cited

Feitelson, Dina, et al. "Effects of Listening to Story Reading on Aspects of Literacy Acquisition in a Diglossic Situation." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1993, pp. 71–79. *JSTOR*. Abstract.

Hutton, John S, et al. "Home Reading Environment and Brain Activation in Preschool Children Listening to Stories." *Pediatrics*, Sept. 2015. Abstract.

The Adventures of Mousy and Jasper

By Jimmy Schantz

Character List

- Rachel
- Lucy
- Keekee (Narrator)
- Mrs. Martin
- Mousy
- Jasper
- Mr. Bojangles
- Horse
- Sheep one
- Sheep two
- Patriarchal Squirrel
- Main Pig
- Other Pig one
- Other Pig two
- Roger (boyhood)
- Roger (grandpa)

INTRO

Rachel: Hey Lucy, look! It's a parrot.

Lucy: Do you talk, Mr. Parrot?

Narrator: Mr. Parrot! Please. Just call me Keekee.

Lucy: Wow, Rachel, he really can talk!

Nar: *He* really can, and *he* is perched right in front of you! Did no one teach you your manners, little girl?

Lucy: Our mother did.

Nar: Your mother did. Huh--and she is nowhere to be found I can see?

Lucy: She's on vacation.

Rachel: Her and daddy told us they were going on a vacation just for them and so they took us all the way out here to Grandpa's farm.

Nar: Ahh, so you're Roger's granddaughters. That must mean that little Miss Caroline is your mother! Not very little anymore though, I suppose. A shame she didn't come to visit as well. It's been far too long.

Rachel: You know our mother?

Nar: Of course, I know her! She grew up right here on the farm. We were fast friends, thick as thieves.

Lucy: Mr. Parrot, how old *are* you?

Nar: It's Keekee; I hope I don't have to keep reminding you of that! And tomorrow will be my 77th birthday. Roger, your grandfather, got me when we were both just young lads and I have lived here ever since.

Rachel: Mom said Grandpa has had a lot of pets in his life.

Nar: Indeed, he has. All creatures, great and small. I have seen a lot of people and animals come and go from this farm, you know. And your mother, she used to love the stories of the old, noble creatures who have trod this little plod of earth. However, I am sure you girls are not interested in any of that ancient history.

Rachel: What noble creatures? Like a lion? Or bear? Or a stallion?

Nar: There have been creatures of that nature, from time to time, but not one of these was the *most* noble.

Lucy: Then what was?

Nar: A mouse.

Lucy and Rachel: *A mouse?*

Nar: Ah yes, a little mouse. Well, I suppose all mice are little, but this mouse was small even for a mouse. Yet he was very brave and, like I said, a very noble creature indeed. And, not because of his size but rather his good and charming nature, he earned the nickname Mousy. In fact, no one ever called him by his given name, which was Michael Cheeston, except sometimes for his wife, Gorgonzola. Ah, it was nearly 50 years ago but I can still remember that mouse--how could I forget! Small, yes. And gray, but not a dreary gray. And he had an ever so little chunk missing from his ear.

Lucy: (Interrupting) Why was part of his ear missing, Mr. Parrot, I mean, *Keekee?*

Nar: Well, I suppose there is a bit of a story to that, behind that. Would you like to hear it?

Rachel: Of course, we would!

Mrs. Martin: (Door opens) Girls, lunch is on the table; come before the soup gets cold. Is someone there? It sounded like you were talking to someone.

Rachel: Keekee was just about to tell us a story.

Mrs. Martin: I'm sure he was. That old bird only knows one thing. (Sarcastically) Hey--Keekee, tell us a story.

Nar: (In a traditional parrot-sounding voice) Keekee wanna cracker.

Mrs. Martin: See. Just a silly bird. Now wash up, it's time for lunch.

Story the First: Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

Rachel: We couldn't have been imagining it--could we have? I mean, you heard it too Lucy, didn't you?

Nar: Of course, you weren't imagining it, don't be ridiculous!

Rachel: So, you really can talk! How come you didn't talk when Mrs. Martin came in?

Nar: I really can talk, and very well I might add. As for that old housekeeper, she wouldn't believe me even if she heard me. That's just the way some people are. She probably would just accuse herself of going crazy- or *crazier*. Now, I believe I was about to tell you a story. Girls, this is how Mousy got his mark:

Now, as I was saying, Mousy was a remarkable mouse. He was small but had the heart of a lion. And, it is important to know that Mousy was a family mouse. He lived in a hole in the wall of the living room where the Cheeston family had lived for generations, even before I arrived here. He loved his wife, Gorgonzola, and their two children very much. Every day he would venture out of the living room into the kitchen to gather crumbs and other droppings. All in a day's work the dutiful little mouse would carry back his day's scavengings to his family and not eat a morsel of it until his wife and children's bellies were full.

Mice are friendly creatures, at least house mice generally are, but like I said, the Cheeston clan had an even more pristine reputation. They were friends with many creatures, large and small, and were very well liked by all other house animals. All, except one.

Now, you must understand a house mouse has two mortal enemies. One of these is a human mousetrap. The other enemy, however, is much worse. It is one as unnatural as it is treacherous. Girls, I am talking about house cats. And, the house cat that lived here in those days was the worst of them all.

Mr. Bojangles was a bad cat. He was lazy, selfish, and very, very mean. He had the habit of lying on the sofa noon and night, serving no master but himself! His eyes were always closed but he slept with one ear open just waiting for the pitter patter of little mice feet below him.

While Mr. Bojangles was lucky enough to be fed by the humans, and by the look of him he seldom missed a meal, he still preferred the taste of mouse. And, I am sorry to report that he had been a successful hunter on more than one occasion, even once having Mousy's beloved brother for lunch. Because of this, Mousy knew he must be clever in order to avoid Mr. Bojangles on his scavenging trips. So, he devised a plan. An old sock had once been pushed under the sofa and Mousy discovered that he could easily glide across the wood floor without making a sound. This worked for quite some time until Mr. Bojangles' appetite for mouse became insatiable and he vowed not to quit until he caught his prey.

It was on a chilly fall day, if I recall correctly, that Mr. Bojangles decided he could not wait for a bite of mouse any longer. He kept two eyes wide open and before too long he saw what he had been looking for, a small, gray mouse swiftly riding an old tube sock across the floor to the kitchen door.

Lucy: Mousy! No! Did he get him?

Nar: Indeed, it was Mousy. But he had disappeared under the kitchen door before that fat cat could get off the couch. To Mr. Bojangles' displeasure, he was fast asleep by the time Mousy returned home to his family that night.

This made the cat very angry. Now that he knew he had been duped for so long he decided that he was not just going to be satisfied by catching a mouse, but he was going to make sure that mouse was Mousy! So, he devised a plan of his own. Mr. Bojangles patiently waited for Mousy every day. Pretending to sleep, he memorized the mouse's movements but stayed perfectly still. He hoped he could catch Mousy off-guard if he waited long enough. Then, one day when he knew he was good and ready, he pounced!

When Mousy heard the loud thud upon the ground he turned, and to his horror, saw Mr. Bojangles bounding after him. He tried to make a run for it but one of his little paws caught in some loose threading on the gliding-sock. Mr. Bojangles lunged forward and snagged the sock, freeing Mousy's paw at the very last second. When the cat realized all he had captured was a sock he looked up just in time to see a little tail disappear underneath the kitchen door. He had let the little creature escape once again and now was steaming mad.

Mr. Bojangles: (To himself) I'll have to forget about my afternoon naps, today. Because today is the day, I WILL capture that little mouse!

Nar: Meanwhile, Mousy, who had been in such a scramble to avoid being eaten, had not looked to see where he was going and ran straight into something large and wet. When he turned forward to see what the obstruction was, he realized it was a nose. Suddenly, the nose rose up, leaving Mousy with a view of two enormous rows of sharp-looking, glinty-white teeth! A warm draft of dog breath washed over Mousy as the mouse now prepared to die. Even as brave a critter as Mousy was, he closed his eyes thinking that he had now met his end. Then, there was a tremendous SNAP! And, to Mousy's surprise, he found himself unscratched. He realized he had run straight into the crate of an old basset hound and just awoken the poor dog from his nap.

Jasper: AHHH, hmph! Who goes there (finishing a yawn).

Mousy: It's Michael Cheeston, sir.

Jasper: Cheeston? Who?

Mousy: Well, most folks just call me Mousy.

Jasper: A mouse! You know the kitchen is an awfully dangerous place for a mouse. Lot of traps around here. I've gotten a paw stuck more than once. You better move along. You have some nerve for a little guy such as yourself coming in here and waking me up!

Nar: And with that, the dog rolled over and pretended to go back to sleep.

Mousy: Well, you see, I had no intentions of doing that! Truly. I really just wanted to gather some food crumbs for my family and be on my way. I am sorry to bother you, but it appears I am trapped in here.

Nar: Just then, the dog and the mouse heard a terrible scratching sound coming from the other side of the kitchen door. Jasper rolled on his side and peered underneath the door. He saw a single, enormous yellow eye staring back at him and he shuddered.

Jasper: Trapped you say? It seems you might be telling the truth. I suppose you can stay here until the coast is clear, as long as you let me finish my nap. I can get grumpy without my nap, you know.

Mousy: Say dog, what's your name, anyways?

Jasper: Jasper.

Nar: And with that, the dog once again rolled over trying to ignore the little mouse that had interrupted him from his nap.

Story the Second: How Mousy Got His Mark

Nar: Mousy had nowhere to go with Mr. Bojangles waiting outside guarding the door. And Jasper, who was only pretending to sleep, couldn't ignore Mousy's attempts at pleasant conversation any longer.

Mousy: You certainly spend a lot of time in the kitchen, don't you?

Jasper: Yes.

Mousy: It's getting chilly outside, wouldn't you say?

Jasper: Unseasonably so.

Mousy: How about a joke?

Jasper: I'm fine, thanks.

Mousy: So, there are these three blind mice...

Jasper: I said no thank you.

Mousy: Well they all walk into a bar and before they know it, they're all lying on the ground rubbing their heads!

Jasper: I don't get it.

Mousy: They walked into an actual bar! Like a pole, not a place. They hit their heads since they're blind mice and can't see it. I guess it's not that funny when I have to explain it. (Pause) Gee, it sure is getting late. I hope my family isn't getting too hungry.

Nar: Mousy's attempts to wear Jasper down were not working and Jasper seemed only interested in returning to his nap. But just then, Mousy thought of a plan.

Mousy: Listen dog, I've got an idea to get me back home and out of your hair. Let me hop in your mouth and you can carry me back to safety.

Jasper: Hop in my mouth! Are you crazy?

Mousy: Do you know what the humans would say if they saw me riding on your back!? I'm afraid it's the only way, pal. And trust me, I dislike it as much as you do.

Nar: And so, Jasper reluctantly opened his mouth and Mousy crawled in. Jasper pushed open the kitchen door with his nose only to find Mr. Bojangles still waiting for Mousy on the other side.

Mr. Bojangles: (Hissing) You mangy old mutt. What possessed you to leave your grimy little prison cell today? I thought I told you to stay out of here, this room belongs to me!

Nar: Jasper did his best to simply ignore the cat's comments.

Mr. Bojangles: You didn't happen to see a little mouse in there did you?

Nar: Not being able to keep his composure any longer, Jasper turned to Mr. Bojangles and gave him a grin, revealing the concealed mouse. Then, from the dog's mouth emerged a little voice.

Mousy: Not today, you fat cat! You will never catch me. I am too clever!

Nar: But, instead of responding to Mousy's insult, Mr. Bojangles turned and stood on the rug in the center of the room. He then proceeded to urinate a large puddle onto the rug, all while maintaining a fierce scowl directed right at the mouse and the dog. This behavior was so bizarre to Mousy and Jasper that for a moment they were frozen in place. And then, suddenly a pair of footsteps could be heard coming from down the hall. Mr. Bojangles slithered out of the room leaving Jasper, with Mousy still in his mouth, standing helplessly alone in the living room. A woman, your great-grandmother I might add, walked in. It was too late for Jasper. He stood there helplessly. He knew he had been framed and there was nothing he could do about it. The woman looked at the puddle on the rug and then at the dog and a frightfully loud voice yelled, "bad dog!" and suddenly seized Jasper by the collar, giving it a tug. This sudden attack caused Jasper to bite down slightly as the woman dragged him through the kitchen and threw him out into the yard. The woman, of course, could not hear the high-pitched squeal that ensued. But, with his large ears and excellent dog's hearing, Jasper heard it all too well and grimaced.

Once outside, Jasper gently spit Mousy onto the grass feeling sick to his stomach. He feared the worst. He was relieved when he saw that what he had bitten down on was just the mouse's left ear. But then, Jasper suddenly became fearful of the Mouse and worried that Mousy would be terribly mad at him. The two sat there for a moment looking at one another. Then Jasper spoke up.

Jasper: Mousy, your ear. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me! I didn't mean to. Honestly. I'm just so glad you're ok. Oh, please forgive me.

Mousy: Forgive you? Why would I forgive you?

Nar: At these words Jasper buried his head in sorrow into the cold ground.

Mousy: Forgive you. I should thank you for saving my life! That mean old cat would have killed me and if he didn't that old woman certainly would have! I owe you one, Jasper. Thank you very much.

Nar: And with that, Jasper took his paws away from his face and looked up at the little Mouse who, despite having a little less ear, still stood proudly in the lawn, and the dog began to wag his tail.

Lucy: So that is how Mousy got his mark.

Nar: Exactly.

Rachel: But weren't they stuck outside?

Lucy: And how about Mousy's family? Weren't they worried about Mousy?

Rachel: And also getting hungry?

Nar: Ah, yes. Well there certainly is more to their adventure and I would be happy to share if you have the ears to listen.

Rachel and Lucy: Please tell us!

Nar: Well, evening was coming quickly and the mouse and his canine companion found that they were locked out of the house! Mousy began to shiver as the two sat on the lawn wondering what to do next. In an upstairs window they could see Mr. Bojangles wedged up against the glass, a menacing yellow grin across his pudgy face. . .

Mrs. Martin: Girls, I hope you're not bothering with that bird again! Ugh, they live too long if you ask me. Your grandfather needs some help with the horses out in the barn. Run along and go help him.

Story the third: Away in a Manger

Nar: Turn that light off! Do you have any idea what time it is? Let an old bird sleep. Ah, it's you two young ladies. Shouldn't you both be tucked away in bed?

Lucy: We snuck out of bed after we were sure everyone was asleep, Keekee.

Rachel: We both realized that we couldn't sleep. Poor Mousy and Jasper, did they make it back inside and out of the cold?

Nar: Ah, I'm afraid things got worse before they got better for that old dog and mouse that day. Certainly nothing you would want to hear before sleeping.

Rachel: No, Keekee. Tell us, please!

Nar: I'm afraid you will have nightmares if I tell you! Plus, I am an old bird. I do not know how much I can tell at this hour. Come back again in the morning.

Lucy: We can handle it, Keekee. **In unison** Pleasseeeee.

Nar: Alright, alright. Now, where were we?

Lucy: It was getting dark and Mousy and Jasper were stuck and Mr. Bojangles was smiling menacinisngly at them with his gross, yellow teeth!

Nar: I believe you mean, *menacingly*. And yes, of course. Well it was getting cold outside and so the two set off in order to try and find some place warm to spend the night. They could see the barn up in the distance and decided that would be their best chance at some shelter. As they began to walk Mousy asked Jasper a question.

Mousy: Hey Jasper, how come you don't come out of the kitchen more often? Anyone's ever only seen you in there sleeping in your crate? I mean, you have free rein to go anywhere in the house, but you never leave?

Jasper: I might ask you what you were doing in there when you woke me up? Don't you have any idea how dangerous the kitchen is for a mouse. If anyone but me saw you they wouldn't rest until you were dead! And plus, just to get there you have to get by that mean old cat.

Mousy: Jasper, when you want to eat all you have to do is walk over to a bowl with your name written on the side and you can eat. But there is no bowl for a mouse. In fact, any time a human tries to feed us is a piece of cheese attached to a deathtrap! But there are always scraps of food

on the kitchen floor. I go there to gather what is left over and bring back what I can to feed my family.

Jasper: You have a family, Mousy?

Mousy: Of course, I do; everybody's got a family. My wife, Gorgonzola, is the cutest mouse you ever saw. And we have two children, Rhoda and Vernon. I sure hope they aren't too worried about their old man. I think we had some left over breadcrumbs from last night so they shouldn't be too hungry if I'm not back before tonight. Although my boy was probably hungry before I even left today! (Some silence) Jasper, tell me about your family.

Jasper: There is not much to tell. I only remember my mother a little. But even a memory of her is foggy. You see, I was the runt of my litter and so when it was time to feed, I was left out. Well you know what they do to the runts and, when that day rolled around, I thought it was it for me.

Mousy: But you're here now. What happened?

Jasper: I guess you could say I'm one of the lucky ones, whatever lucky means. I remember it was cold. I was only weeks old, but I had been struggling to feed because I kept getting bumped and pushed out of the way by my brothers and sisters. I finally gave up and the next thing I remember was an enormous pair of rough hands scooping me up. Before I knew it I had been dunked into a bucket of water. Ohhh, it was so cold. I am shivering just thinking about it. Anyhow, I sloshed around and flailed my arms and kicked my legs but I didn't have enough space to move my arms around and keep my head above the water. Finally, I couldn't stay up any longer and I went under. I thought that was it. But then, I woke up and I was covered with a blanket and was placed before a fire. A little boy held me in his arms. He sat there stroking my ears ever so gently and as feeling was restored to me a warmth gushed throughout my whole body.

Mousy: So, you never did know your family then?

Jasper: No, mouse, I guess I've never known any family except that little boy.

Mousy: But still, why on earth do you never leave that dingy old crate of yours?

Jasper: When I was still just a young pup I used to get scared every time I heard someone flush the toilet, turn on a sink, or fill up the bath. When that would happen, well I don't really know what would happen, except that one moment I'd be standing there and the next moment there would be a mess all over the rug. After that occurred a couple of times I was told to stay in the kitchen or else I'd be a "bad dog." Well I sure never want to be a bad dog so there I sat and there I've stayed ever since.

Nar: Just then the two arrived at the barn. By now it was nighttime. They found a gap in the side-boards large enough for Jasper to squeeze through and when they emerged, they found themselves at the hind-hooves of an enormous horse. Mousy craned his neck to look at the horse and then looked at Jasper. At that moment they heard the horse begin to speak.

Horse: Heyyyy now. Who is trespassing in my stable? Didn't you read the sign?

Mousy: What sign is that?

Nar: The horse did not even turn his head before he addressed Mousy and Jasper.

Horse: Can't you read? The sign that is right behind you!

Nar: And sure enough, Mousy and Jasper turned to read a sign that read NO TRESPASSING and beneath that: Violators Will Be Prosecuted.

Mousy: Shouldn't the sign be on the other side of the- ah never mind. We're quite sorry. You see we are just looking for a warm place to sleep tonight.

Horse: Well keep looking. This is not a hotel. I'll have you know my great-grandfather was a Kentucky Derby winner! I have royalty in my loins. I'm afraid you cannot sleep here tonight. They already treat me so poorly with this tiny stall it is certainly not big enough for two of us, let alone three!

Nar: And it really may not have been. If I recall correctly, that horse had an enormous belly. (Chuckles) Maybe his grandfather was a racehorse but I wouldn't place a bet on that old steed. Anyhow, sensing the horse's irritation, Mousy and Jasper moved on through stable doors and continued their search to find a bed.

In the next stall they found two sheep. They entered and saw the two animals wide awake staring intently at one another. Mousy and Jasper entered but the sheep did not seem to take notice.

Jasper: (Clearing his throat) Excuse me, sheep, we are just two weary travelers looking for a warm place to stay. Would it be too much of a burden to stay here in your stall tonight.

Sheep One: (In a raspy smoker's voice) Ah, sweetheart, that would be lovely. But--we can't.

Mousy: (Irritated) Why not? It looks like you have plenty of room and extra straw.

Sheep Two: (In a hipster tone) Room and straw we have, man, room and straw we have.

Mousy: So, then what's the problem.

Sheep One: The problem is, we are insomniacs.

Jasper: Insomni-whats?

Sheep Two: It means we can't sleep, bro.

Sheep One: We'd love to have you stay. We certainly know the importance of a good night's sleep. But we have so much trouble sleeping on our own that we would be completely hopeless with anyone else in here.

Nar: And so Mousy and Jasper exchanged exasperated looks and politely thanked the sheep for their time, wished them luck at a good night's sleep, and found themselves, once again, cold and alone in the middle of the barn. They decided to try the next stall.

They found it belonged to a white cow with big black spots. And, unlike the sheep next door, she was sound asleep.

Jasper: She's probably been asleep for a long time already.

Mousy: How do you know something like that?

Jasper: Cows have to go to work very early every morning to be milked.

Mousy: Well, do you think she'd mind if we spent the night in here? Maybe whoever comes to milk her will see us and take us back inside! She won't even really know we were here.

Nar: But right then the two stopped dead in their tracks. After taking only half a sniff both Mousy and Jasper bolted straight for the stall door. Mousy's question had been answered immediately. The dairy cow was notorious for her flatulence and the smell was simply unbearable. The poor dog and mouse began to feel hopeless.

Jasper lay down in the middle of the barn and put his tail between his legs. It was quiet and then the two could hear the pitter-patter of racing feet in the rafters above them. Jasper shuddered and Mousy grew rigid and stoic.

Jasper: That's just great. Here come the rats. And if they don't get us then we're going to freeze out here tonight, I just know it. (Begins to whimper and whine)

Mousy: There is one more stall to try, Jasper. Don't give up yet. I've got a good feeling about this one. You can just stay here if you'd like and I'll go check it out.

Nar: So Mousy got up and left Jasper to go check his hunch and see if the last stall might really be a place they could finally get some rest. Mousy scrambled under the stall door and for a moment he thought it was completely empty. He discovered there was plenty of straw to keep him and Jasper warm for the night. Then all of a sudden, he heard a squeaky sound that nearly sounded like a mouse, but something was just off. And then, out of the staw, a large gray squirrel emerged.

Patriarchal Squirrel: (Texas twang) Well, howdy stranger. What brings a house mouse such as yourself all the way out to the barn?

Mousy: My friend and I were, well, thrown out of the house might be a good way to put it. We're just looking for a place to spend the night before heading back.

Squirrel: Well, son, you came to the right place. A fellow rodent is a friend to me! Unless rats of course, but they are hardly even rodent. You and your friend are more than welcome to spend the night here tonight. It isn't often we get company!

Nar: By then, an entire family of squirrels, thirteen in all, had emerged from out of the straw.

Squirrel: What'd you say your name was, son?

Mousy: Michael Cheeston, sir. But you can just call me Mousy.

Squirrel: Well, go get your friend, Mousy, and the Misses will gather up something to eat for you two and I'll prepare a place in the straw for y'all to sleep.

Nar: Mousy was overjoyed! Finally, he thought, and scampered back into the barn to call Jasper.

Mousy: We're saved, Jasper! We have a place to stay and even a meal waiting for us. Come here, old boy.

Nar: Hearing the good news, Jasper shot up and practically bounded toward Mousy. With his tongue hanging floppily out of his mouth and a wide grin on his face Jasper followed mousy into the squirrel's stall.

Mousy: This is my friend, Jasper. I can't even begin to tell you how thankful we are for you guys taking us in tonight.

Nar: But this praise was only met by a look of horror from the squirrels. The mother squirrel quickly began to gather her children and lead them back into the straw and out of site.

Squirrel: You didn't tell me your friend was a--a dawwwg.

Mousy: So, what? (Under his breath) What could it possibly be now?

Squirrel: We don't take too kindly to dogs. The Misses, she had a brother once. A good squirrel too, a great scavenger. Well, one day, while he was out gathering nuts he met a dog out in the woods. Well, I've been told he put up a valiant fight, but that good squirrel never returned that

day. So, you can understand why we don't want no dog sleeping in the same stall as our very own children. Now, dog, I'm gonna ask you again to kindly leave.

Mousy: I'm very sorry to hear that about your wife's brother, but a dog in the woods? That seems unlikely. Are you sure it wasn't a coyote?

Squirrel: Even if it was, that's all a dog really is deep down anyways. Now git out of here, boy. Git.

Nar: And with that the squirrel spat on the ground. Jasper no longer had a grin on his face and had put his tongue securely back in his mouth. He slowly turned around and left the stall without a word. Mousy went after him but stopped at the door.

Mousy: Jasper, wait!

Jasper: I'm obviously not wanted.

Nar: And without stopping, the old dog continued walking through the darkness and eventually out of the barn.

Squirrel: You're still welcome to stay. Like I said, any fellow *rodent* is a friend of mine.

Nar: And so Mousy went back to the squirrel's stall. The squirrel's wife had prepared a bed for him and Mousy, overtaken with exhaustion, lay down in the straw.

***Snoring.** (From Rachel and Lucy)

Nar: Ah- it appears that my audience has now found the ability to sleep. Good too, because this old bird could use some shuteye himself.

Story the fourth: The Good Samaritan

Mrs. Martin: What on earth are you doing down here! (exasperated). It's nearly 11 o'clock. Look at that sun way up there in the sky. Why did you not sleep in your beds last night?

Rachel: (Yawning) We had to know what happened next in Keekee's story!

Mrs. Martin: Ha, Keekee's story. Some story I'm sure. Lucy, wake up! You girls need to stop trying to get this old bird to talk. Look at him. He's sound asleep. You're starting to worry me with all this nonsense! Now go brush your teeth. Keekee's story. Hmphh.

Lucy: (sound of Mrs. Martin leaving room) I don't think she believes us about Keekee.

Rachel: She definitely doesn't. Keekee, are you awake?

Nar: After all that racket, of course I am. Sometimes it is better just to pretend to be asleep when she is around though.

Rachel: What happened to Jasper?

Nar: Jasper was alright. It was Mousy that you need to be worried about. But I can hear Mrs. Martin calling you to get going. Come back this afternoon and I will tell you!

(Pause)

Rachel: Happy birthday, Keekee!

Nar: Ahh well thank you. I wondered when I might see you two again. Now, where were we?

Lucy: Jasper left, and you said something was about to happen to Mousy!

Nar: Yes, that is right. Well, as Mousy lay quietly in the bed the squirrels had made him, Jasper made his way out of the barn and continued to wander until he heard what sounded like quarreling. He turned his attention toward a small, dark structure in the distance. Because of the dark he could only see the silhouetted outline of the building but as he walked closer, he realized that there was lots of movement within it. And then, what had first sounded like arguing had turned into a symphony of laughter. Jasper realized that he had arrived at the farm's pig sty. When he came close enough, he saw they were all rolling around in the mud having a grand old time. One of the pigs, who was muddier than all the rest (if that was even possible), saw Jasper standing there outside and stopped rolling around.

Main Pig: Hellooooo, my furry friend! Come for a roll in the mud, have you?

Jasper: Just ahh, passing through.

Nar: Jasper had always been told to stay away from pigs. It was said they were dirty, rude animals who spent time with weasels and skunks and ate their meals with very bad table manners.

Jasper: I think I'll just be on my way.

Main Pig: Surely not! You just arrived. We're friend to all creatures who need a hoof under this roof--even if all creatures ain't a friend to us. Now, dog, what's your name? You look like you could use a warm place to stay. And say, the old farmer dropped off our slop this morning and left a couple of bones in it. You wouldn't know anyone who might want to gnaw on one of them, would ya?

Nar: At the sound of a nice bone, Jasper's tail began to wag. He decided he didn't care what others said about pigs, they couldn't be that bad. And so, the pig invited him into the sty and showed him a heap of bones so large Jasper thought he couldn't finish them if he had whole year. Remembering just how hungry he was, Jasper dug in and found they were delicious.

Pig: You're just in time, really. We were just getting ready for bed ourselves.

Jasper: Really? (between bites, slightly confused). It looked like you were playing in the muck.

Pig: Don't be deceived, my friend, we were. But that is how pigs get ready for bed. You see, pigs don't get straw from the farmer like the other animals and so, when nighttime comes and it gets a little cold, like it is tonight, we cover ourselves in mud to stay warm. Come here, and I'll show you.

Nar: So, Jasper got up, his belly now feeling full, and hesitantly followed the pig back outside to the mud pit.

Other Pig 1: (Squeals with delight) The first time is always the hardest!

Other Pig 2: Come on in, the mud is niceee and warm.

Nar: And then the host pig, giving himself a running start, bounded into the muck and began to once again cover himself from head to hoof in the mud. Jasper, either feeling good from gnawing on the bone or simply because of the hospitality he had been shown, gave it a running start, closed his eyes, and jumped in after. Before he knew it, he was rolling around in the mud with all the pigs. How fun, the dog thought, and he began to howl with joy.

When it was time to go to sleep Jasper followed the pigs from the muddy pit into the sty. Soon they were all sound asleep. If you looked closely, you could even see a small smile beginning to curl on the old dog's mouth as he drifted off into a peaceful, dreamy slumber.

Meanwhile, back in the barn, Mousy found he could not sleep. He tossed and turned but couldn't rest a wink. Worried that Jasper was cold and alone and not feeling right about receiving this hospitality from the squirrels that had not been extended to both of them, Mousy finally gave up on his efforts to sleep and went out looking for the dog. Quietly, the mouse crept past the family of squirrels, who were now sound asleep, and left the stall. Once out in the middle of the barn he began to head in the direction he had last seen Jasper walk. When he had nearly reached the barn door, he heard the same, hauntingly familiar pitter-patter that he and Jasper had heard when they had first arrived. Just then, Mousy saw something scurry up on one of the wooden beams up into the rafters.

Mousy: (Whispered) Rats!

Nar: Knowing rats to be the foulest of all the barnyard animals and knowing he wouldn't stand a chance if he ran into one on their turf, Mousy left the barn as quickly as possible. He didn't want any more trouble.

Back out in the cold, Mousy heard Jasper's howl and hurried to see if his friend was in trouble. When Mousy reached the pig sty he was surprised to see Jasper rolling around in the mud squealing and laughing right along with the pigs. Feeling ashamed that he had abandoned his friend, he hung his head and turned back, feeling very alone. Knowing he could not return to the barn without Jasper to protect him from the rats, he left the sty and went out into the yard. There he found a wood pile stacked up against a fence and crawled in between two decaying logs. Now, completely exhausted, he shut his eyes and fell into a dull, sorrowful sleep. If the poor little mouse had known what awaited him, his sleeping arrangements would have been the least of his worries.

Story the Fifth: From the Clear Blue Yonder

Rachel: Mousy's gonna be ok, right?

Nar: If you let me continue, you'll find out.

Rachel: You wouldn't tell us this story if something bad happened to Mousy, would you?

Nar: I'm simply telling you what happened.

The next morning Mousy suddenly jolted awake. The sun was already high in the sky and Mousy remembered his family and thought they must now be getting hungry. He needed to get to them and bring something to eat. And I can attest to that mouse's worry. I remember it like it was yesterday. Here I sat in this very spot, watching helplessly as Mr. Bojangles paced up and down the living room floor making sure that no mouse of any kind escaped him. Mousy knew that he needed Jasper to get back inside the house and back to his family. He just hoped that the dog could forgive him for abandoning him last night.

So, Mousy got up, dusted himself off, and began to make his way back toward the pig sty hoping to find Jasper still there. When he arrived at the sty, he found the dog and his new pig friends still sound asleep. Knowing it was his own fault that he was now all alone he decided to head back to the house. He feared his family couldn't not wait for him any longer, so he made his way through the barnyard and back to the farmhouse.

As it would happen, a hawk was out hunting that very morning. He was soaring through the clear blue morning sky when he spotted, with his keen eye, a little gray mouse down in the field. As was his custom, he circled his target from above, calculating how he might swoop down and snatch the little mouse up. When he was confident he had his prey captured, he dove from the air straight down at the unsuspecting mouse. Mousy looked over his shoulder when the great bird's shadow covered him and saw a pair of glinty talons outstretched and reaching right at him. This is it, Mousy thought and squeezed his eyes shut as he braced himself for the capture. He then heard a loud cry come from the hawk and opened his eyes to realize he was not only unscathed, but that Jasper, still completely covered in mud, had come in and knocked

the bird right out of the air. Close behind him were a dozen pigs, squealing and snorting their battle cries as they all chased the hawk back into flight and far away from the field.

Jasper: Are you alright there, Mousy. That was a close one.

Mousy: I- I think so. Oh Jasper. You saved my life. I thought I was finished. But how could you possibly have known the hawk was coming for me. I thought you were asleep.

Jasper: I was asleep, but Ernesto (that was the pig who was so friendly to me); he wasn't asleep and when he saw a hawk circling in the sky, he woke me up. He said, "hey, didn't you say you were traveling with a mouse because it looks like it's some mouse's unlucky day." And so that's when I come runnin', Mousy. I'm just glad I wasn't too late.

Mousy: Me too, Jasper. And Jasper, I sure am sorry for staying with the squirrels last night. You've saved my life twice now and all I've done is abandon you. I've been a real bad friend. Could you ever forgive me?

Jasper: Did you say we were friends?

Mousy: Well sure we are. I think you're a real good dog, Jasper.

Jasper: You really mean that, Mousy?

Mousy: Of course, I do.

Jasper: I forgive you, Mousy. Here climb on up and let's go back to the house. You've got a wife and kids to feed.

Nar: And with that, Mousy climbed up onto Jasper's collar. They turned around and thanked the pigs who, Mousy thought to himself, aren't nearly as bad as everybody made them out to be, and after a very long night, the two made their way back home.

Story the Last: A Game of Cat and Mouse

Nar: When Mousy and Jasper arrived back at the house they sat at the back porch and peered through the window.

Mousy: How do you suppose we get past that cat?

Jasper: I'll just carry you in my mouth again. If Mr. Bojangles tries to get you, I'll just do to him what I did to that hawk.

Mousy: That will never work, Jasper.

Jasper: Why not?

Mousy: Well for starters, you won't make it two seconds in that house without getting thrown right back out. Look how dirty you are! Secondly, even if you did get me past Bojangles, we would still starve! He won't quit until he gets me, that I am sure of.

Jasper: Then what do you suppose we do, Mousy? It seems we're in another real pickle, doesn't it?

Mousy: A pickle indeed, and I need to get back to Gorgonzola and the kids with some food and soon!

Nar: So, there the two sat for a long while, in silence, thinking about how they could get into the house and past Mr. Bojangles not just this once but once and for all. After a good long while an idea dawned on Mousy.

Mousy: Jasper, I think I've got it. I am afraid it will be terribly dangerous, but I believe it is the only way.

Jasper: What is it Mousy? I don't want anyone getting hurt. That cat is mean and nasty, and won't stop at anything.

Mousy: I--I can't tell you, Jasper. You're just going to have to trust me. Do you trust me, Jasper?

Jasper: What do you have in mind, Mousy?

Mousy: I need you to promise me that you will do exactly as I say. Now, I am going to go in there, alone, and whatever you hear or see you have to promise me that you won't come in and try and save me. I cannot stress enough how important this is. You have saved my life two times in as many days, but you will need to trust me and do exactly as I say, no more and no less.

Jasper: And what exactly is it that I need to do?

Mousy: When you hear the porch door close, you need to bust in through the kitchen screen door and go into the living room and start making a racket like your tail is on fire. Keep doing that until the farmer comes. Whatever you do, stay in the living room until the farmer comes and don't stop barking. Is that clear?

Jasper: Yes. And Mousy, just be careful. You're the best friend I've ever had.

Nar: With those parting words Mousy crawled through a crack under the door into the kitchen leaving Jasper behind with his peculiar instruction. Once inside, the brave little Mouse

scampered into the living room where Mr. Bojangles was prowling around. Mousy scurried to the very center of the room where a small coffee table sat and climbed up. He stood on it as if it were a stage.

Mousy: Hey Cat! Looking for someone.

Nar: Mr. Bojangles stopped in his tracks and turned his head to see the little mouse standing tall on the table. He lunged at Mousy and gave a menacing “Meooowww.” But Mousy stood firm. Mr. Bojangles grabbed at Mousy and scraped him with his claw causing him to bleed as he pinned him down. The cat stood with his forepaws mounted on table stood, grasping the small Mouse who still stood defiantly even after his easy capture.

Mr. Bojangles: I’ve got you now, mouse. I knew you couldn’t stay away. That’s the problem with you family mice, you care too much about your children. You could’ve at least put up a little resistance. You wouldn’t want your son growing up thinking you were a coward.

Nar: And sure enough, Mousy could see under the sofa that his family had gathered once they heard the commotion. His lovely Gorgonzola, tears in her eyes, held her children close. All they could do was look on.

Mr. Bojangles: Come on and fight me, you coward!

Nar: Mr. Bojangles was so close to the little mouse that his stale breath singed Mousy’s nostrils. But Mousy stood firm his ground.

Mousy: You knew I would never win.

Mr. Bojangles: You made a fool of me long enough. Now it is your time to pay. Are you ready to be eaten, little mouse? Because I am ready to feast! (Menacing cat laughter)

Mousy: I suppose so. But could you at least do me one courtesy? Now that you have defeated me, and on account that I will be such a tasty lunch, I think I deserve just one simple request.

Mr. Bojangles: And what might that be?

Mousy: I ask that you eat me outside and out of view of my family. Surely that is not too much to ask.

Mr. Bojangles: I am in a surprisingly good mood right now; perhaps it is that feeling you get when you can smell a delicious meal. I will grant you your request, mouse.

Nar: But it was out of no goodness that Mr. Bojangles actually agreed to comply to Mousy’s last wishes. He knew, if he was really going to enjoy the mouse, he would have to do it away from any humans. So, Mr. Bojangles carried Mousy out of the room, making sure to strut right past

Mousy's family, holding his prisoner in his jaws. Gorgonzola and Mousy locked eyes for a moment but said nothing as Mousy was led away to the porch where he was going to be devoured. Once out on the porch, Mr. Bojangles looked at Mousy and licked his lips.

Mr. Bojangles: You thought you were soooo clever, didn't you, mouse. Scooting around on that sock feeding you and your family of worthless rodents right under my nose. But help me understand this. If you're so clever, why would you simply turn yourself in? Where is your dog friend to save you now? I think I hear him inside. Hahaha it appears he has gone mad. (Jasper barking in the background)

Mousy: I turned myself in so that you might promise to never hurt my family. Let them eat scraps from the kitchen and grow old without living in terror. No gimmicks, this time. You win, Bojangles. I am at your mercy.

Nar: After hearing the porch door close, Jasper burst through the kitchen screen door. Although he desperately wanted to go help his friend out on the porch, he did as he was told and went straight to the living room where he barked and made a racket like he never had done before. He went so crazy that in no time at all a young boy came running into the room to see what could possibly be the matter. There he found Jasper, covered in mud, acting like someone had just broken into the house.

Younger Roger: You crazy old dog, what is the matter with you? Look at you, you're filthy! How could you have possibly gotten you so dirty. If Mother sees you in here getting the furniture all messy, she'll have both our heads! Come here, boy.

Nar: And so, young Roger gently grasped Jasper's collar and led him straight outside and onto the front porch. Mr. Bojangles, who had been crouched over a small object, bolted upright at the noise, revealing Mousy's bloodied body, lying completely still on the floorboards.

Younger Roger: Ah, Mr. Bojangles. Look at you! You caught yourself a mouse. What a good hunter you are. I think I have just the job for you.

Lucy: (Interrupting the story, with a catch in her throat) No! He can't be dead! What about his family, Keekee? What about poor Gorgonzola and the kids? (Sniffles)

Nar: Would you like me to stop?

Rachel: No, please go on. We at least need to know what happened to poor old Jasper.

Nar: Well, then. The boy reached down and grabbed Mr. Bojangles and held him in his arms.

Younger Roger: I have been looking for a cat that could help with catching rats in the barn. There is a dreadful number of them, I am afraid, certainly enough to keep you busy! I'm going to take you out there right away!

Nar: The farmer mounted Mr. Bojangles onto his shoulders and carried him away to his new barn home. Jasper stared with an angry look at the cat as he was carried away and gave a final, mournful howl. Then, Jasper lay down and buried his face in his paws and began to mourn for his fallen friend. (Dramatic pause and dog whimpering in background)

Mousy: What's the matter, old dog.

Jasper: (Astonished) Mousy?! How can this be. I thought you were dead. I thought Mr. Bojangles had killed you? Oh, you're alive!! But you're all bloody. We need to get you some help.

Mousy: It's just a little scratch, Mousy said. It looks worse than it is.

Jasper: What do you mean by that?

Mousy: Well, Jasper. That was all part of my plan. I needed to look as dead as possible, or it never would have worked. Oh, you did a splendid job, Jasper, it never would have worked without you.

Jasper: I did? I mean, I did!

Mousy: You see, I knew that if I could make it look like Bojangles had captured me and one of the humans saw that, then they would surely realize his skills would be needed out in the barn to deal with that horrid rat infestation. That is why I needed you to wait until you heard the door close before making your scene.

Jasper: Well, how'd you know he'd take you outside, and that you would have enough time! It seems like you could be actually dead right now.

Mousy: I suppose I couldn't have known anything for certain, but I knew that arrogant cat would want to gloat just a little bit. I always figured he would take me outside to eat. I imagined it was his worst fear to ever be caught with a mouse in the house because he knew he would be sent to the barn for sure. He didn't suspect anyone would see him if we were outside.

Jasper: One last thing, Mousy. How come you didn't let me in on the plan.

Mousy: I really wanted to; you have to believe me on that one. But I knew you'd try and save me if you knew what I was doing--you couldn't have helped yourself. You would have barged into the room, guns-a-blazen, and, as you can now see, thrown off the whole operation. That's why I needed to have you trust me.

Jasper: That was very brave of you, Mousy. I think you're right. I wouldn't have been able to let you go in there if I knew what you were about to do. But you scared me half to death, Mousy.

Mousy: I am sorry about that. But Jasper, you are a real good dog.

Rachel: Thank goodness Mousy lived! Is that the end of the story, Keekee?

Nar: Almost. The end of *this* story, at least. That brave little mouse and his trusty canine companion shared more than a few adventures together after that, but as far as their run-in with Mr. Bojangles, well, I'll end the story here:

Jasper and Mousy both got cleaned up, Jasper with the hose and Mousy with the aid of Gorgonzola, who patched his wounds and nursed him back to health. It became common for the Cheeston family to invite Jasper over for dinner. And so, the first adventure of Mousy and Jasper ends here, with an old basset hound sharing a meal with a noble mouse and his family. Of course, Jasper could only fit his nose and eyes under the sofa but that was more than enough as he enjoyed his first ever family meal.

Ah--I think I see your grandfather coming.

Grandpa Roger: Rachel, Lucy; I see you have met my dear friend, Keekee. I hope he hasn't been talking your ear off.

Mrs. Martin: He's the only thing they want to play with. They're convinced he's telling them stories. The imaginations of some kids. I'll never understand it.

Roger: Sometimes if we listen and look closely enough, we might even surprise ourselves, Mrs. Martin.

Lucy: Ahh, Rachel did you see that? A mouse!

Mrs. Martin: I'll need to set some more traps it looks like.

Roger: I really don't think that will be necessary. You know, I had a dog when I was a boy who once in a while could be seen with a little gray mouse. Sometimes even riding around in his mouth, but ever so gently. Since then, I've developed a certain fondness for the little creatures.

Mrs. Martin: Everyone around here has lost their head.

Roger: You wouldn't have anything to do with that, now would you, Keekee?

*And the two little girls giggle.

