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The TALE of JOHNNY MOUSE

Elizabeth Gordon

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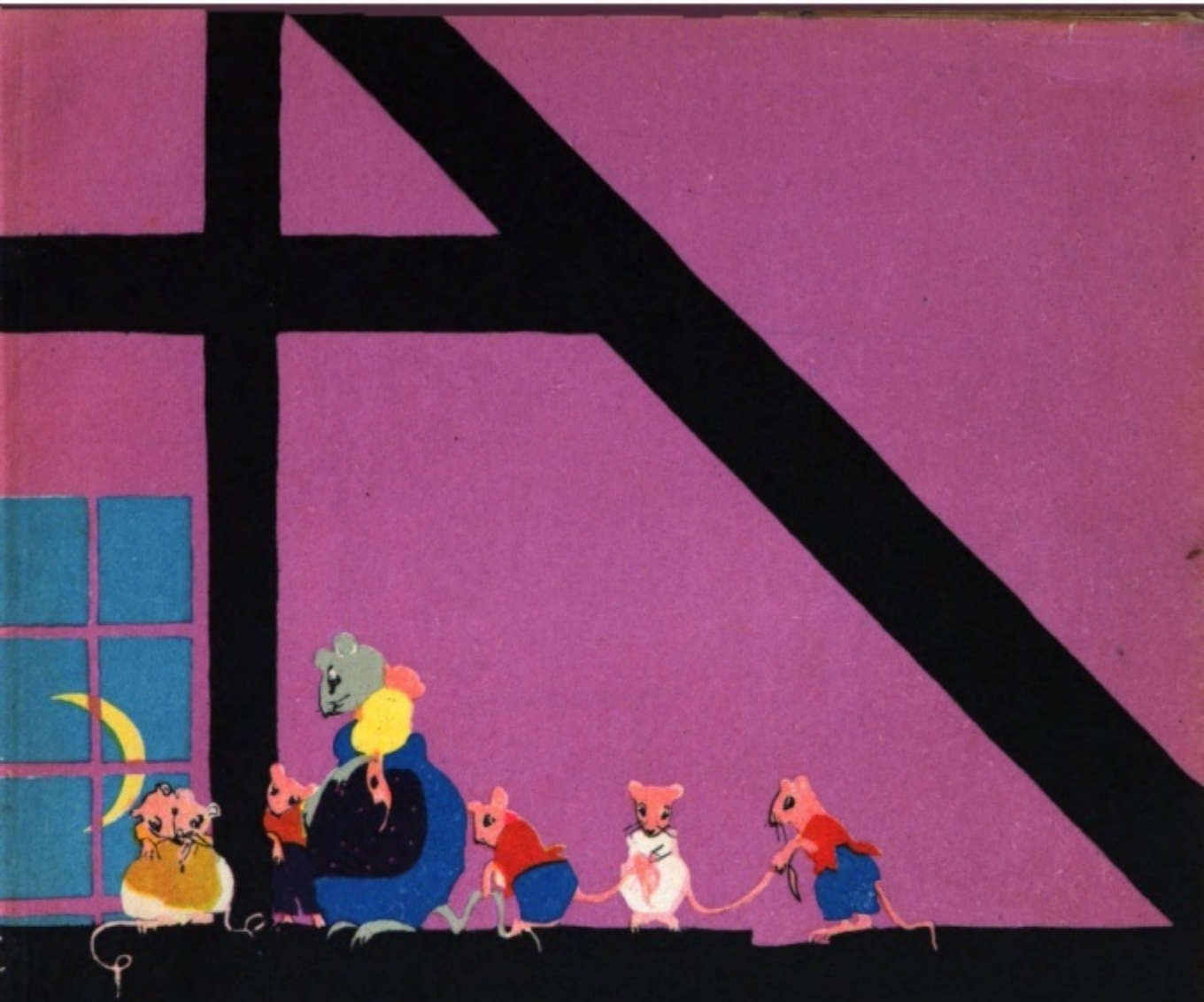

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THE TALE OF JOHNNY MOUSE

In the attic of the big house lived the Gray Mouse family. There were Grandfather and Grandmother Mouse, Daddy Mouse and Mother Mouse, with a nest of little baby mice, besides Johnny Mouse, the oldest son.

They were very comfortable and happy and never had to go hungry, because the cook in the

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The whole Mouse family loved to sit in the dormer window of the attic of the big house and watch the people go by. It was great fun. But one day what was their sorrow to see the cook with the kind heart go away, and a new cook come in her place. You could see at once, they thought, that she was not going to be easy to live with, because she had a large basket with her, and when she opened it, out stepped a fierce-looking animal with a long plumy tail and big yellow eyes.

"She has brought a cat," said Daddy Mouse.

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"A Cat?" said Mother Mouse, gathering her littlest babies to her heart.

"Yes, indeed, it *is* a cat, and a big one, too," said Grandmother Mouse. "A very big one. Now we shall have to move.

"Nonsense," cried Johnny Mouse, "Who's afraid of a cat? We've all seen cats before."

When the house was quiet that night, Daddy Mouse said. "Come, Johnny, we must go and bring up the food for the family. It is quite time for supper."

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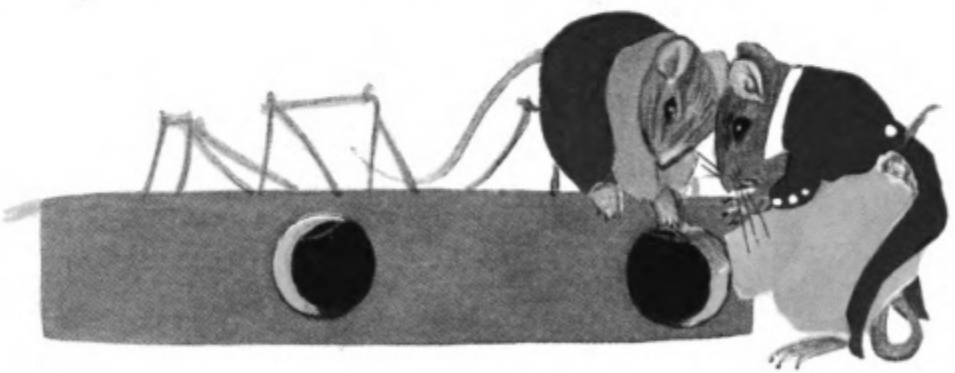
"Beware of the cat!" said Mother Mouse, as they went down the stairs, and they said they would. What was their surprise though, to find, instead of the nice food that they expected, a cruel trap which nearly caught Daddy Mouse. Indeed it did catch the end of his right foot big toe, and Oh, dear! how it *did* hurt to pull himself free.

Johnny Mouse helped Daddy Mouse up the stairs, and would you believe it, just as they got to the first landing that fierce old cat made a dash for them. They just escaped being caught. How their hearts did beat! Grandfather Mouse put



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a bandage and some salve on Daddy's poor toe, and then they all sat in the dormer window and thought how very hungry they were.

"I could go and get some wheat from the storroom," said Johnny Mouse.

"No, Johnny, you could not," said his Mother. "The reason why we are allowed to stay in this nice home, is that we never take anything which does not belong to us, and you must never, any of you, take anything that is not given you."

"There is a new moon tonight," said Grandmother Mouse. "Isn't it pretty?"

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"Grandfather," asked Johnny Mouse, "what is the moon made of?"

"I once heard a lady remark to a gentleman," said Grandfather Mouse, who was old-fashioned and like to use elegant language, "that perhaps the moon is made of green cheese."

"I wonder!" said Johnny Mouse. "If that is true, wouldn't it be a jolly place to live?"

The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea and he could just imagine himself sitting safely in the curve of a young new moon, biting off big pieces of soft new cheese to drop down to his hungry family.

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"I'll go!" said Johnny Mouse.

"The moon is very far away," said Mother Mouse, "and I do not see how you could get there. You have no wings."

"Leave that to me," said Johnny Mouse. "I shall find a way."

So he kissed his mother goodbye and scampered up to the roof of the house.

He was just in time, for he found Reddy Bat just about to take his family out to supper.

"How are you, Johnny Mouse?" asked Reddy

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Bat. "What are you doing up here this time o' the night?"

"I am on my way to the moon, to find out if it is made of green cheese," answered Johnny Mouse, "and I am hoping you will be so kind as to take me on your back as far as the top of the old elm tree in the meadow."

"I'll be very glad to," said Reddy Bat. "Jump on and hold on, because we shall go swiftly." And in one swoop, there was Johnny Mouse, sitting on top of the old elm tree in the meadow!

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"So far so good," laughed Johnny Mouse, and just who should come along but Mr. Whip-poor-will, who sat on the same branch with Johnny Mouse, to rest a bit after the concert he had been giving.

"Why, Johnny Mouse!" cried Mr. Whip-poor-will. "What are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to the moon, to find out if it is made of green cheese," said Johnny Mouse, "and I wish that you would be kind enough to take me on your back to the top of the tall pine

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tree in the far forest. I would appreciate it."

"I will do that gladly," said Mr. Whip-poor-will. "Jump on and hold on, because we shall go swiftly." And before Johnny Mouse knew it, there they were on the very top of the tallest pine tree in the far forest.

"So far, so good," said Johnny Mouse. "I'm getting nearer all the time." And while he was sitting there wondering what to do next, along came Mrs. Eagle, on her way home to supper, and spied Johnny Mouse.

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"Why, Johnny Mouse," said she in her sweetest manner, "what in the world are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to the moon," said Johnny Mouse, "to see if it is made of green cheese, and I wish that you would take me on your back to the top of the highest mountain-peak."

"That is where my nest is," said Mrs. Eagle, "and it will be no trouble at all for me to take you there, so jump on and hold on, for we shall go swiftly."

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And before Johnny Mouse knew it, they were at Mrs. Eagle's home on the mountain-peak. "See, children dear," called Mrs. Eagle, "what I am bringing for your supper."

Johnny Mouse looked at all the young Eaglets with their bills wide open and remembered that Grandfather Mouse had told him once to be careful about Eagles.

"They mean to eat me," said Johnny Mouse, "and I don't think I'll stay to supper."

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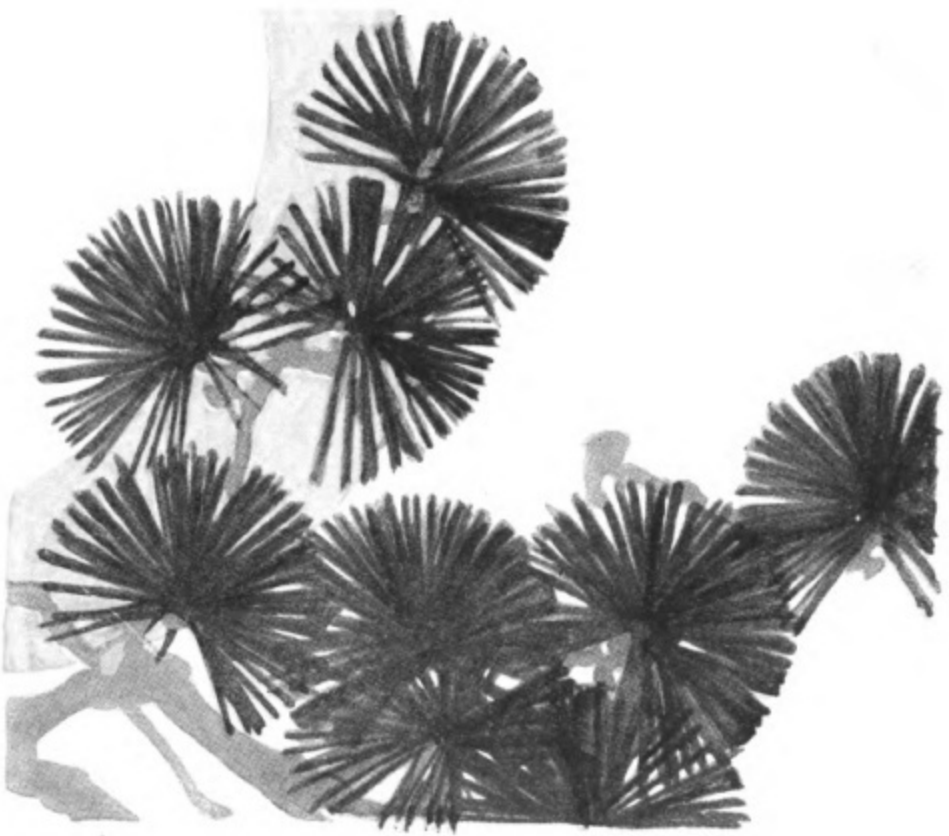

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"but I am not going so far. I will take you to the foot of the Moon-Ray ladder, which is the best I can do, so hold on, because we shall go swiftly."

So very soon they came to the ladder of Moon-Rays and from there it was no work at all for Johnny Mouse to scamper up to the Moon.

"Well, here I am," said Johnny Mouse, as he looked around to see what he could see.

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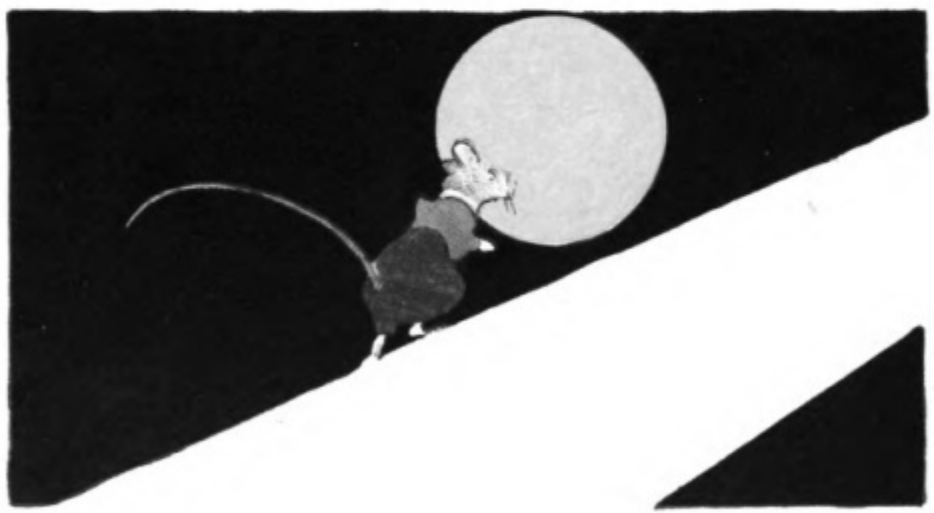
He was rather surprised to find that he was in a lovely garden, where beautiful moon-maidens were gathering moon-flowers and twining them in their lovely moon-shine colored hair.

"Good evening, Moon-maidens," said Johnny Mouse, bowing very low, in the way that his old-fashioned Grandfather had taught him.

"Oh, Oh, Oh!" screamed all the Moon-maidens, scrambling up on the garden benches and holding their skirts tightly around them. "It's a Mouse!



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"What in the Moon is all this noise about?" asked The-Man-in-the-Moon fussily, coming around the corner. "How do you suppose I am ever going to get a nap with you girls making all this racket?"

Then he saw Johnny Mouse and smiled. "Oh, that's always the way with girls, afraid of a little harmless Mouse! But how did you come up here, Johnny Mouse?" he asked. "Just last night I saw you and all your folks as we sailed past the dormer window."

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"I came," said Johnny Mouse, politely, "because we have no food at home, and my Grandfather once heard a lady remark to a gentleman that *perhaps* the Moon is made of green cheese, and if it is we would like to come here to live."

"Perhaps you did not notice the sign," said The-Man-in-the-Moon, "which says that no mice or rats may live on the moon. I'm very sorry, but you see we could not let you move here. But I'm sure you must be hungry after your long journey, so come to supper."

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Johnny Mouse gladly followed The Man-in-the Moon to another garden where some small pale yellow flowers were nodding on their stems.

"Help yourself," said The-Man-in-the-Moon, "this is our cheese-flower patch, and over on this side you will find the bread-and-butter plants, and if you are thirsty the milk-weed is right over here. Help yourself and welcome."

The supper was delicious, and after Johnny Mouse had eaten all that he possibly could, he said he must be thinking about how to get home.

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"Don't worry about that," said The-Man-in-the-Moon, "what comes up must go down, you know. We will see you safely home again," he added. "I am having the Moon-Rays make a toboggan slide right now, and as soon as we are directly over the house where you live, you may slide safely home."

"It will be a splendid coast," said Johnny Mouse, though he didn't smile.

"But why do you look so thoughtful and sad, Johnny Mouse?" asked The-Man-in-the-Moon.

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"I am thinking about my hungry family," said Johnny Mouse, "and wishing they could have had some of my nice supper."

"I'll have some Cheese flower sandwiches made for you to take home to them," said The-Man-in-the-Moon.

"That will help some, and is very kind of you," said Johnny Mouse, "but I must find some way to feed the family all the time, now that my father has a lame foot, and the cook with the hard heart and the cruel cat lives in the kitchen."

"That is true," said The-Man-in-the-Moon. "Let me think! There must *be* a way, there

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always *is* a way when a thing *just must be done*."

"I wonder," said Johnny Mouse, "if I could not plant some cheese-flower plants on the roof of the big house?"

"It couldn't be done," said The-Man-in-the-Moon, "on account of the sunshine. They would melt and run away. But why can't you plant something that likes the sunlight? Wheat, or corn, or something like that and then you would not have to depend upon someone else for your food?"

"That's a good idea," said Johnny Mouse, "and I'll start a garden just as soon as I get home and find some seed."

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"Perhaps," said Johnny Mouse, "but the Man-in-the-Moon said that no one has yet been able to prove it."

The best of this story is that the very next day the cook with the hard heart and the cruel cat went away and the cook with the kind heart came back. But Johnny Mouse planted his garden just the same, because he had learned that it does not do to depend upon anyone else to do things that one should do for himself. And so everyone in the big house with the attic lived happily forever 'n ever after.

And this is the tale of Johnny Mouse.

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