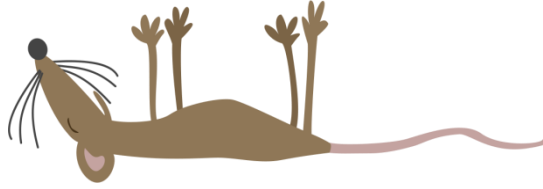


# The Great Mouse Plot

by Roald Dahl



1 My four friends and I had come across a loose floorboard at the back of the classroom, and when we prised it up with the blade of a pocket knife, we discovered a big hollow space underneath. This, we decided, would be our secret hiding place for sweets and other small treasures such as conkers and monkey nuts and birds' eggs. Every afternoon, when the last lesson was over, the five of us would wait until the classroom had emptied, then we would lift up the floorboard and examine our secret hoard, perhaps adding to it or taking something away.

One day, when we lifted it up, we found a dead mouse lying among our treasures. It was an exciting discovery. Thwaites took it out by its tail and waved it in front of our faces. 'What shall we do with it?' he cried.

10 'It stinks!' someone shouted. 'Throw it out of the window quick!'

'Hold on a tick,' I said. 'Don't throw it away.'

Thwaites hesitated. They all looked at me.

When writing about oneself, one must strive to be truthful. Truth is more important than modesty. I must tell you, therefore, that it was I and I alone who had the idea for the great and daring Mouse Plot. We all have our moments of brilliance and glory, and this was mine.

15 'Why don't we', I said, 'slip it into one of Mrs Pratchett's jars of sweets? Then when she puts her dirty hand in to grab a handful, she'll grab a stinky dead mouse instead.'

The other four stared at me in wonder. Then, as the sheer genius of the plot began to sink in, they all started grinning. They slapped me on the back. They cheered me and danced around the classroom. 'We'll do it today!' they cried. 'We'll do it on the way home! You had the idea,' they said to me, 'so you can be the one to put the mouse in the jar.'

Thwaites handed me the mouse. I put it into my trouser pocket. Then the five of us left the school, crossed the village green and headed for the sweet-shop. We were tremendously jazzed up. We felt like a gang of desperados setting out to rob a train or blow up the sheriff's office.

25 'Make sure you put it into a jar which is used often,' somebody said.

'I'm putting it in Gobstoppers,' I said. 'The Gobstopper jar is never behind the counter.'

'I've got a penny,' Thwaites said, 'so I'll ask for one Sherbet Sucker and one Bootlace. And while she turns away to get them, you slip the mouse in quickly with the Gobstoppers.'

Thus everything was arranged. We were strutting a little as we entered the shop. We were the victors now and Mrs Pratchett was the victim. She stood behind the counter, and her small malignant pig-eyes watched us suspiciously as we came forward.

'One Sherbet Sucker, please,' Thwaites said to her, holding out his penny.

I kept to the rear of the group, and when I saw Mrs Pratchett turn her head away for a couple of seconds to fish a Sherbet Sucker out of the box, I lifted the heavy glass lid of the Gobstopper jar and

35 dropped the mouse in. Then I replaced the lid as silently as possible. My heart was thumping like mad and my hands had gone all sweaty.

‘And one Bootlace, please,’ I heard Thwaites saying. When I turned round, I saw Mrs Pratchett holding out the Bootlace in her filthy fingers.

40 ‘I don't want all the lot of you troopin' in 'ere if only one of you is buyin',’ she screamed at us. ‘Now beat it! Go on, get out!’

As soon as we were outside, we broke into a run. ‘Did you do it?’ they shouted at me. ‘Of course I did!’ I said.

‘Well done you!’ they cried. ‘What a super show!’

45 I felt like a hero. I was a hero. It was marvellous to be so popular.

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The flush of triumph over the dead mouse was carried forward to the next morning as we all met again to walk to school.

‘Let's go in and see if it's still in the jar,’ somebody said as we approached the sweet-shop.

‘Don't,’ Thwaites said firmly. ‘It's too dangerous. Walk past as though nothing has happened.’

60 As we came level with the shop we saw a cardboard notice hanging on the door.

We stopped and stared. We had never known the sweetshop to be closed at this time in the morning, even on Sundays.

‘What's happened?’ we asked each other. ‘What's going on?’

65 We pressed our faces against the window and looked inside. Mrs Pratchett was nowhere to be seen.

‘Look!’ I cried. ‘The Gobstopper jar's gone! It's not on the shelf! There's a gap where it used to be!’

‘It's on the floor!’ someone said. ‘It's smashed to bits and there's Gobstoppers everywhere!’ ‘There's the mouse!’ someone else shouted.

70 We could see it all, the huge glass jar smashed to smithereens with the dead mouse lying in the wreckage and hundreds of many-coloured Gobstoppers littering the floor.

‘She got such a shock when she grabbed hold of the mouse that she dropped everything,’ somebody was saying.

‘But why didn't she sweep it all up and open the shop?’ I asked. Nobody answered me.

75 We turned away and walked towards the school. All of a sudden we had begun to feel slightly uncomfortable. There was something not quite right about the shop being closed. Even Thwaites was unable to offer a reasonable explanation. We became silent. There was a faint scent of danger in the air now. Each one of us had caught a whiff of it. Alarm bells were beginning to ring faintly in our ears.