

Percy the Mouse

Inspired by an old tale

By

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Once upon a time, in a faraway land a long while ago, there lived a wise old king called Benjamin the First who was very kind and loved by all his people. He was particularly loved by all the children of the land for he made sure that no child was ever hungry or unhappy. The mice living in his kingdom also loved him for he made laws to stop cats catching them, and absolutely forbade the use of mouse-traps anywhere in the land. You might think this was a bit strange, but you will soon discover why.....

At the time of this tale King Benjamin the First was still quite a young boy, no more than six or seven years old, but he had already been king for more than half his life. He did not rule the kingdom himself at this age you understand, for he was much more interested in playing with his friends than in the very boring business of making laws and deciding who should pay taxes. His mother who was very good and clever looked after all those matters for him so he had plenty of time to play with all his friends.





King Benjamin the First

One day while the King was eating his bread and milk at breakfast time (there was no yoghurt, no toast and jam and definitely no chocolate flavoured cereal in those days) one of his teeth began to wobble. Now you know that this is quite normal and the best thing to do is to wobble and wobble your loose tooth with your tongue until it becomes very loose and drops out all by itself.

But because Benjamin was the King, there was a great fuss and the Court Doctors were summoned. They arrived in a great hurry and, after poking around in Benjamin's mouth for a long time, they all agreed that His Majesty was about to get some grown-up teeth.

They decided that the best thing to do was to pull the wobbly tooth out straight away! They wanted the King to go to the dentist and have gas so that it would not hurt, but Benjamin was a brave little boy and made up his mind that they should pull it out there and then!



The oldest of the Court Doctors, who must have been at least 105, tied a bit of red silk around the wobbly tooth. Then he gave a quick tug, and did it so expertly that, while the King was pulling a face, out came the tooth, as round and white as a little pearl, before he knew anything about it!

Then there was another fuss as nobody could decide what to do with the tooth. Some of the Doctors thought it should go on display in the museum, while others thought that was a very bad idea and it should be put away in a little box somewhere. Eventually Benjamin's mother, who as I have already told you, was a very wise Queen and always knew exactly what should be done said that the King should write a very polite letter and put it, with the tooth, in an envelope under his pillow that night.

Now in that land, it was not the Tooth Fairy who came to take the tooth away, it was a little mouse who would remove it and leave, not money, but a lovely present in its place.





The oldest Court Doctor

It took King Benjamin a very long time to write the letter for the little mouse. You see in those days they didn't have felt tips or crayons or biro and the King had to write the letter with an ink pen. This was very messy and the King got ink all over his fingers, the tip of his nose, his left ear and his right shoe!

The letter was finally finished, and Benjamin went to bed very early that night. He ordered that all the lights should be left on in his bedroom to keep him from going to sleep. He put the envelope with the letter in it under his pillow and sat up in bed determined to keep awake to see the little mouse even if he had to wait all night!

The mouse was a long time coming and, after a bit, King Benjamin started to open his eyes very wide, fighting against the sleepy feeling that was trying to shut them. At last he could fight no longer, his eyes closed and he slipped down into the warm bed, his head on the pillow with one arm over it, just like a little bird tucks its head under its wing when it goes to sleep.



Suddenly he felt something very soft just tickling his forehead, and, sitting up quickly, he saw in front of him standing on the pillow, a tiny little mouse in a straw hat, slippers and big gold spectacles with a red satchel slung across his back.



A tiny little mouse in a straw hat

King Benjamin stared at the little mouse in astonishment. Percy the Mouse, for that was his name, seeing that His Majesty was awake, took off his hat and made a very low bow. Then he waited for the King to speak. But Benjamin didn't say anything because he didn't know what to say. After thinking and thinking he suddenly called out,

“Hello little Mouse! What is your name?”

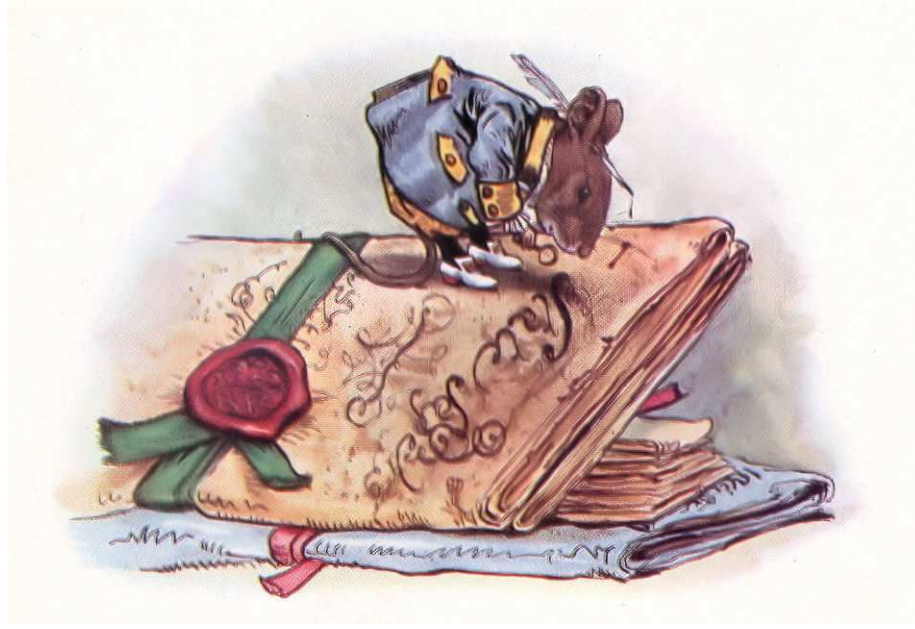
And Percy answered with another low bow,

“My name is Percy, your Majesty.”

After this, the King and the Mouse began to chat and soon became the best of friends.



Percy makes a low bow.



Toby studying

Percy was a very polite mouse who knew lots of interesting things to talk about. He had travelled through all the pipes and drains of the capital city and, in the Royal Library alone, he had eaten up three books in less than a week! He told King Benjamin all about his family. He had two grown-up daughters, Rosie and Emma, and a son, who was nearly grown-up, called Toby who was studying for a career in government in the drawer where the Secretary of State kept his most secret notes.

His Majesty listened to Percy with his mouth wide open. From time to time he put out his hand to try and grab hold of Percy's tail. But each time the mouse gave a sort of whisk and moved his tail out of the King's reach.

By this time it was getting rather late, so Percy told King Benjamin that he would soon have to go as he had to make a journey to a house to fetch the tooth of a very poor little girl called Alice. It was a very difficult, dangerous journey, because nearby there lived a very large, wicked cat called Tiger.

The King wanted to go with Percy and begged the mouse to take him along. Percy stood thinking about it, twisting his whiskers thoughtfully. The responsibility of looking after him would be enormous, and in any case he had to go back to his own house to fetch Alice's present Alice. King Benjamin said that he would love to visit Percy's home which quite made the mouse's mind up. "Come to tea!" he said!



Percy the Mouse lived underneath a food shop, near a big pile of Gruyere cheeses which supplied the whole family with breakfast, lunch and tea. King Benjamin was so excited about visiting Percy and his family that he got out of bed straight away and began to get dressed.

While he was dressing Percy suddenly jumped onto his shoulder and put the tip of his tail into His Majesty's nose! (It was a very clean tail!). Then the most amazing thing happened. The King sneezed very hard and turned into the most beautiful little mouse you ever saw. He was all soft, his fur was shiny and he had little green eyes which shone like emeralds.

Percy took King Benjamin the mouse by his tiny paw and disappeared with him down a tiny hole under the King's bed which had been hidden by the carpet.





King Benjamin sneezed!

It was very dark in the tunnel beneath the bed and the floor was rather sticky, but they scampered quickly along. Sometimes Percy stopped where the tunnel divided or when one tunnel crossed another and looked about before going on.

There were lots of strange rustlings and murmurings in the dark which rather frightened Benjamin and made him feel all shivery, right down to the tip of his tail. He didn't like it in the tunnel one little bit, but he would not let himself be frightened – which after all is being really brave! Once the King heard a loud noise which sounded like dozens of lorries or buses passing over his head. He whispered to Percy if that was where Tiger lived, but Percy said no with his tail and on they went.

Just as Benjamin's legs were getting tired and he thought he couldn't go another step they came to a gentle slope which opened out into a big cellar.



Behind a pile of Gruyere cheese they found themselves face-to-face with a large biscuit tin which was the home of the Mouse family. Here they lived very happily together, warm and safe, particularly as the shopkeeper did not have a cat!



Miss Stilton, the Governess



Mrs Mouse was sitting by the fire

Mrs Mouse was embroidering a beautiful hat for her husband, sitting by a warm, bright fire made of grape stalks and apple pips. They were a lovely family and King Benjamin instantly felt at home.



Rosie made tea

Rosie and Emma made tea and poured it out into lovely tiny cups made out of acorn cups and there were broken biscuits from the shop to dunk into the tea, and nobody minded one little bit!

Then there was music. Rosie sang “Three Blind Mice” very beautifully and Emma recited a poem about a little mouse who was ill with the flu and a naughty kitten who wanted to pounce on it.



Emma recited a poem

After this Toby came in from the club where he wasted all his time playing cards with mice from other parts of the city and hardly did any studying for his exams.



Toby playing cards

King Benjamin would very much have liked to have stayed longer, but Percy who had disappeared for a few moments, came back with his satchel on his back and said it was time to start. So the King said goodbye to everyone and out through the biscuit lid they went and into the dark tunnels again.



Ferocious mice, armed to the teeth

This time in front of them went a whole regiment of very frightening mice, soldier mice whose bayonets made of fine needles gleamed silver in the darkness. Behind them came another regiment of soldier mice, also armed to the teeth with rifles, bayonets and cutlasses. Percy explained that these soldiers would protect Benjamin on this dangerous expedition.



The soldiers lined up

Suddenly King Benjamin saw that the guard in front had disappeared down a little hole through which he could see a faint light. This was the most dangerous moment! Percy Mouse, slowly wagging his long tail from side to side, poked his head very cautiously through the hole and looked around; he then went back two steps, and finally, suddenly seizing Benjamin's left paw, dashed through the hole like an arrow, hurtled across a big kitchen and disappeared through another hole on the opposite side..

As they dashed across the kitchen, out of the corner of his eye, Benjamin saw that by the hearth, in the glow of the fire, lay an enormous cat, the dreadful Tiger, his great whiskers moving up and down as he breathed.

Once they had crossed the kitchen the danger was over and they only had to go upstairs as this was where little Alice lived. Her room was very cold and bare with icicles hanging from the ceiling.





The Dreadful Tiger

The sloping attic ceiling joined the floor, so that on one side of the room you couldn't stand upright and through the holes in the window panes, a cold wind blew. The only furniture was a broken old chair, and empty bread basket hanging up and in a corner, a bed of straw and rags on which little Alice and her mother were lying fast asleep.

Percy went up to the bed, taking King Benjamin by the paw, and they could see how little Alice was shivering even though she was cuddled up against her mother for warmth. The sight made Benjamin so unhappy that he began to cry. Why was Alice so poor? Why didn't she have enough to eat? He felt as though he would never want his own warm bed again until he could be sure that every child in his kingdom had enough blankets to keep them snug and cosy.

Percy brushed away the King's tears and tried to make him feel better by showing Benjamin the bright gold coin he was going to put under Alice's pillow in exchange for her first baby tooth.



Just then Alice woke up. She felt under her pillow and gave a cry of delight when her hand felt the gold coin that Percy had placed there. When her mother saw the coin she was overjoyed. With this money she could pay for her and Alice to make the journey back to their old home in the country where they would be safe with their friends and family again.



Alice and her mother

On the return journey Percy and Benjamin were silent as they both had a lot to think about. They slipped past Tiger once more and were safely back in Benjamin's bedroom in about half-an-hour. Percy once again put the tip of his (still very clean!) tail into Benjamin's nose and made him sneeze. All at once the young King found himself safely back in his own bed again with his mother, the Queen bending over him to wake him as she did every morning.

At first he thought that the whole adventure had just been a dream; but when he looked for the letter he had put under his pillow he found that it had gone, and in its place was a case with a beautiful gold chain in it, a magnificent present from Percy in exchange for the King's first baby tooth.

The little King, however, wasn't very interested in the present as he was too busy thinking about the events of the previous night.





A beautiful gold chain

Suddenly Benjamin asked the Queen if there were very many poor children living in his kingdom?

The Queen said that there were not very many as far as she knew.

“In that case then,” said Benjamin, “we can help them all.”

And with his mother he drew up laws that would make sure that every child in his kingdom would have enough to eat and a nice warm bed to sleep in. And while he was doing this, he also made the law that I told you about right at the beginning of the story ... that is that mousetraps were prohibited and no cat was ever allowed to catch a mice.

So that is why King Benjamin the First was loved by all the children and mice living in his kingdom.

The End

