

Peter

There once was a rodent named Peter. Why did a rodent have a name, you might be asking? Well, because this was a very special rodent. He was a pet rodent that had been saved from a sewer pipe when he was just a furless fragile thing by a boy named Willie. Willie wasn't much different than most boys and girls you might know. He liked to run and jump and climb trees and eat his boogers when he thought no one was looking. And Willie's mom wasn't much different than most moms you probably know, which means she didn't like rodents, and especially not in her house. As you can already see, this was a problem. Willie couldn't just abandon Peter to be cat food or a snack for a hawk. On the other hand, well, Willie also had a dad who kept a wooden spoon that wasn't for stirring soup if you know what I mean.

Well, after thinking it through for some time he hit on a compromise. He'd keep him in the garage. His dad had an old toolbox, the kind that's as tall as a person and rolls around on wheels. This one was red when it was new, but now it was mostly black because it was covered with oil and dirt. It had been Willie's grandpas when he was still alive. Anyway, he knew that the bottom drawer was empty. So he borrowed an old towel from the bottom of the towel cabinet and covered the bottom of the drawer so it was nice and clean and soft for poor Peter. Then he found an empty soda bottle that would work for a water dish. He carefully cut the bottom off with a kitchen knife, filled it with water, and put it in one corner of the drawer. He also knew that rodents need food too, not just water, so he borrowed a piece of cheese from the refrigerator and cut it into lots of little pieces that would be the perfect size for tiny little rodent bites. He didn't have a dish for the cheese, but that was okay. He made a tidy little pile of cheese nibbles next to the water dish.

Finally he went and got Peter from the porch. He'd left him in an old shoe box while he'd gotten his home ready. Poor little Peter was shivering and shaking. It may have been because he didn't have any fur, but it also wasn't that cold outside so maybe he was just scared. Willie carefully scooped him up into his right hand and then put his left hand on top so all you could see was little Peter's head poking out between Willies grubby little fingers. Willie could feel the little heart beating against his fingers. He put his face very close to Peter's and examined him closely. Willie decided he was a good rodent and good rodents didn't have rabies. He was glad about that. Peter didn't move when Willie put him in the drawer, but his whiskers twitched a lot

and he seemed to be looking around. Willie carefully closed the drawer to give him time to get used to his new house in private.

The arrangement was to Peter's liking, and even though he was a clever rodent and could have escaped (in fact he knew how to get out and often went for long walks at night, wondering who his parents were, and whether he had any brothers and sisters, and what his purpose in life was) he didn't. He liked the way Willie cut his cheese into the perfect size bites and even gave him little apple cubes too sometimes. Soon Peter had doubled and tripled in size and his fur had grown in soft and grey. He was very proud of his fur and dedicated seventeen minutes each morning to grooming it with his little pink tongue. However, even though Willie never failed to spend time with him every day, Peter began to feel lonely. He loved Willie, but he longed for someone a bit smaller and greyer that he could snuggle up next to in his little drawer and share his cheese nibbles with.

One night, as he was strolling through the backyard in the moonlight lost in thought (as a matter of fact he'd just worked out the Pythagorean theorem from scratch, only he didn't call it that because he didn't even know Greece existed, let alone the Greek Pythagoras...) he was startled out of his thoughts by a rustling in the bushes. Quickly he ducked for cover under the nearby English Ivy. Willie had always protected him and he didn't know how to fight. Trembling he watched the hedge where the noise had come from. He saw whiskers emerge, vibrating in the moonlight. Then he saw the nose appear that they were attached too. Then the little grey body. With growing excitement he realized that it was another rodent, just like him. The rodent was sniffing, rapidly and eagerly, as if searching for something. It then darted into the pathway he'd just left. It seemed as though he'd dropped a cheese nibble on one of his nightly walks and the new rodent now had it in hand and was examining it gleefully.

Peter stepped out of the shadows and felt immediately bashful. He wondered if his fur was still in place from the morning grooming. The other rodent noticed Peter and folded its arms around the cheese nibble, watching Peter suspiciously. Peter cleared his throat, but couldn't think of what to say. Finally he said, "so...you like cheese?" He felt pretty silly asking but he was so nervous.

"I found it and it's mine," the rodent said. Her voice was high and squeaky. Knowing it was a girl made Peter much more nervous. "I'm Peter," he said. She stared at him for awhile then took a bite of the cheese. A look of satisfaction appeared as she tasted it. "Vanessa", she said after swallowing.

"Gruyere", Peter said. She looked at him blankly and popped the rest of the

somewhat smelly cheese in her mouth.

"It's Gruyere" Peter continued. "Willie said it was leftover from a fondue party his parents had."

She sneered at him and disappeared into the bushes.

For the next few weeks Peter did nothing but think about Vanessa. What was her favorite color? Did she like to go for walks under the moonlight? Did she enjoy beach volleyball? But as time dragged by his excitement turned to melancholy. Night after night he would return to the spot of their fateful encounter, carefully place a cheese nibble in the exact location, and wait patiently for her to appear. He felt as if his heart, so full, was turning grey, just like his fur. He began to miss his evening walks and even when Willie came to tell him about his day Peter hardly stirred.

Willie looked concerned. He couldn't have known exactly what was wrong with Peter since Peter didn't speak English (when he spoke to Vanessa earlier I translated the rodent speak into English. Otherwise the rest of the story wouldn't make sense) and Willie didn't speak rodent, atleast not enough to properly diagnose Peter's condition. What he did know though, as all little boys do, is that there's nothing to cheer up a rodent like a nice stinky goat cheese.

When Willie reached in and removed the white cheddar nibbles from the previous day Peter barely stirred. His head rested immobile on his paws and his eyes were like twin puddles on a cloudy day. But when the stinky goat cheese appeared in a nice white pile by his water dish his whiskers perked up and began twitching like they were electric. Unaware of his own body he crept up to the pile, wondering if he'd died. With trembling paws he took a nugget and brought it to his mouth. A great light was kindled deep within his soul and his eyes began to change, glimmering and shining. He began to shamelessly devour the pile, his animal instinct stronger than he'd ever felt it before. Soon the last nugget was swallowed and, stuffed full, he burped and fell over sideways into an unwakeable sleep. Well, not quite unwakeable because he did wake up and when he did, heaven of heavens the pile was there again. He reined in the fire in his belly and tried to think rationally. Get control of yourself Peter, he said. Get control of yourself Peter, he said again. This cheese, it was like a rodent magnet. A rodent magnet. A rodent magnet. He listened to his thoughts. A rodent magnet. His excitement began to stir once again. The clouds parted and the sun shone down on his thoughts. Hurriedly he ran to the other side of his drawer and began to chew a neat and perfect square from his towel carpet. Carefully he carried the fabric square to the pile and threw it on top of the biggest nugget. Working quickly he wrapped the corners together, trapping the nugget inside,

and quickly tied a knot. Then, without giving himself time to think, threw the bundle over his shoulder and hopped out of his drawer.

It was still dusk. Carefully he approached the walking path and untied the parcel. The wafts of stinky goat cheese which hit him almost made him forget his plan, but he turned and ran. Taking cover under the ivy he waited. Half an hour later the last light of the day was slipping away and Peter began to wonder if he was destined to once again be disappointed in his efforts. Suddenly though, a rustle. Was it though? He strained his eyes against the darkness and once again a rustle. This time there could be no doubt. The waxy leaves of the hedge moved and a rodent stepped out from the cover of the hedge. Peter was jubilant and was halfway through standing up to run to his friend when he realized that something was wrong. This rodent wasn't small and dainty like Vanessa. He was a goliath. A giant rat, black even against the darkness. His eyes gleamed yellow and as he opened his mouth his teeth did as well. He approached the nugget and sat back, rubbing his dirty paws together and chuckling evilly. Just before his paws reached the delicate nugget though, he shot into the air like a serpent had bit his rear. In fact, it wasn't a serpent it was Vanessa and she'd bit his tail rather. Almost clean off. The rat landed facing Vanessa. His eyes darkened from yellow to a burning orange. His pupils transformed into wafer thin shadows against the inferno. A growl began in the depths of his bowels and came out as the voice of a demon. Vanessa shook but didn't run. "That's my nugget you dirty sewer rat" she said, her teeth clenched.

It was too much for Peter. His vision began clouding and he felt himself slipping into the greyness. What was the use? It was his destiny to be alone forever. He laid his head on his paws and his eyes filled with tears. "Help!" he heard Vanessa cry. Something snapped in Peter. The greyness gave way to waves and waves of splendor clothed in white. He stood up to his full height (which was quite small, but no one mentioned it for fear of hurting his feelings) and charged through the darkness. Without pausing to think he took the thick hairy tail into his jaws in just the same spot Vanessa had maimed. He felt the creature's blood pour into his mouth like slimy black oil but he didn't stop. Down, down went his teeth. Down and down until there was no more down and the coarse, bloody tail dropped off into the dirt. The rat wailed with rage, defeat, and shame, running off into the darkness.

Peter looked at Vanessa and blushed. She blushed too. "Thanks" she said quietly. Peter smiled.

"Um" she said, waving her paw in the air in front of her face. "You've got a...uh...you've got something in your teeth."

Peter turned his face and frantically felt his teeth. Between his incisors was lodged a coarse black hair from the rats tail. He quickly pulled it out and wiped his face.

"Sorry" he said sheepishly.

The next day Peter took Vanessa to meet Willie. Willie happily agreed that it was a good match and soon Peter and Vanessa had two more little rodents to share their drawer with. The first one they named Elise and the second one they named Audrey. They were good little rodents most of the time and even though Vanessa had a sturdy wooden spoon they never used it for anything other than cheese soup.

The End