

A Mouse With Nine Lives  
By David Silver

Let me set the scene in which we encounter this remarkable creature.

- In our lounge we have a wall unit that is 57" wide, 16" deep and 86" tall. It contains around 30 bottles of whisky, gin, vodka, brandy, rum, port, Tia Maria, Cointreau, Pernod, sherry, cans of tonic, umpteen sherry glasses, wine glasses and tumblers, and more bottles opened but not consumed containing liqueurs that tasted wonderful in their country of origin but once transported back home with the intention of providing a bibulous souvenir of a memorable trip to an exotic place taste so awful they are virtually undrinkable. In my drinking heyday they would have been knocked back just to make shelf room. These days all I can seem to manage is an occasional small sherry. Of course 'occasional' is a vague measure of time and I'll leave the reader to gauge whether that represents a month, a week or a day.  
In addition the cabinet is laden with glass ornaments and family photos. The whole caboodle must weigh, oh I don't know, 30 stone?
- A musician friend is due round at 10am in the morning. We have pieces to practice for a forthcoming event. There is pressure. I thought I'd left pressure behind when I retired from work but it seems that pressure is an addictive substance and I have been regularly self-overdosing by way of compensation for not having to hack my way round the M25 before spending the day shovelling corporate manure.
- We are going away for 10 days in two days' time.
- We have a cat, Charlie.
- Wife is phobic about mice.

You may already be anticipating where this story is going and you'd be right. The tale (hah!) starts at 4:30am on a Thursday morning.

Wife: "D, wake up D".

Me: "What's the matter?"

Wife: "Charlie's caught a mouse".

Let me explain that Charlie is a skilled hunter and frequently catches mice and an assortment of other species. His favourite prey is wood pigeon which he devours with gusto although I'm not sure that an hour plucking feathers and crunching bones, leaving just feet, beak and the partly digested remains of the pigeon's last meal would be my idea of gusto. Most of his victims are despatched on the rear patio. His access arrangements to our house are a cat door set to open outward only. This is so that he can leave the house at will but cannot bring dead, half dead or fully living creatures in with him. He has to be let in through a window or door and always lets us know vociferously if he wants to come in. Of course in the daytime in the summer with patio doors and windows open everywhere this system rather breaks down but fortunately most prey is nocturnal. We have however found the odd mummified frog underneath a settee or chair.

Now, back to the bedroom scene.

Me: "So what?"

Wife: "He's brought it into the house and it's in the lounge."

Me: "How did he manage to unlock and open the door?"

Wife: "He didn't. I let him in"

Me: "Why the f\*\*\* did you do that?"

Now regular readers of mine will know that 'Why the f\*\*\*' is a phrase frequently used in our household to express mild surprise or puzzlement.

Wife: "Well, I heard foxes and then I heard Charlie miaow and thought he might have been injured. I knew he wouldn't be able to miaow if he had something in his mouth so I let him in before I managed to get a good look".

Me: "He certainly can miaow with prey in his mouth, he makes a particularly high pitched excited miaow in that situation. I'll have to go down won't I?"

I reluctantly and grumpily got up and went downstairs. Yes, there he was excitedly love-tapping the mouse which was scuttling back and forth against the skirting board, looking intact and uninjured. I grabbed Charlie and put him out of the lounge and closed the door. Having had cats for over 40 years I'm experienced at this sort of thing and know that trying to catch a mouse in competition with a cat is not a good idea. I turned back to deal with the mouse just in time to see it run behind the wall unit. Yes, I really know what I'm doing.

"Flip" I said. ("Oh no you didn't" says my imaginary audience).

I knew I had to catch the mouse somehow because mice are always pregnant and I didn't want to come home after our trip away to find the curtains gnawed, the drinks cabinet raided and seven generations of mice ruling the roost. I loaded the two mousetraps I had acquired from previous situations – one humane and one deadly - with ASDA's juiciest peanut butter and left one at each end of the cabinet. I went back to bed having begrudgingly calmed a panicky wife.

In the morning I went downstairs fully expecting to see one of the traps sprung. No. Nothing. Bugger, this is clearly a wise mouse. Was it even still there? Had it gone and hidden behind a piece of furniture somewhere else in the room? Inside the piano perhaps? I needed to perform an exploratory procedure. I found a long piece of wooden batten and managed to poke it along at floor level between the wall and unit. A few jabs in and out later the mouse shot out of the other end of the unit – and just as quickly shot back in again. Now what? Do I really go for it and aim to squash the mouse with the batten? I don't like the thought of injuring it and having it die slowly, then decomposing, with all that that entails. I'd have to think about this.

I called Ros my musical friend and explained the situation to ensure she too wasn't phobic about mice. No, she was fine, and anyway in her book music transcends all earthly concerns.

So at 10am Ros arrived and listened to the details of the tale with amusement. She then offered to help us unload the cabinet so that I could move it and try to extract the mouse. Wife plucked up courage and came back into the lounge and the three of us unloaded all the Stuff. If I lived alone there wouldn't be any Stuff. An empty room is a tidy room. But I don't live alone so there is Stuff.

I then attempted to pull the unit out but it wouldn't budge. Vague memories from when I'd installed it years ago came back and I had to go to the garage and fetch a step-ladder and tools in order to detach the two halves from each other, and from the wall.

Now for the moment of truth. Ros stood guard at one end whilst I pulled the unit away a few inches at the other end. Yes – there she was – Minnie Mouse, quietly sitting behind the unit. How would I capture her? I rely heavily on my subconscious to solve problems

and it didn't let me down. An image of a vacuum cleaner popped into my mind. I obediently fetched the machine in and pushed the hose along the floor behind the unit.

"Has Minnie come out at your end Ros" I asked, to ensure she hadn't scuttled off in the opposite direction. No, Ros hadn't seen her. I looked again and now I couldn't see her either. "Oh, F#" I said musically. Then it occurred to me that Minnie may have run into the dark tube for refuge. This would make my job easier. I switched on the machine.

The motor whirred for a few moments and in my imagination I saw a cartoon mouse clinging on for dear life, its rear legs stretched out skedaddling fruitlessly in a gale. Suddenly there was a soft pop and I knew I had her. Up the tube, through the machine, into the transparent dust collector. I switched off the machine expecting to see blood and guts.

But no, there she was, trapped between the filter and the side of the cylinder - and intact!

I quickly took the entire gubbins, vacuum cleaner, hose, mouse and all outside and emptied the cylinder into the dustbin.

There at the bottom was a poor little creature covered in dust lying motionless. I couldn't leave it like that so I gently emptied the bin onto the concrete standing and picked her up. Her eyes were tightly closed against the grey powder – but she seemed to be alive. I showed her through the window to Wife – to assure her it had been caught – and to Ros who was interested from a more scientific point of view. I took Minnie to the end of the garden and placed her on the compost heap. If she was injured or dying I would have to despatch her. She remained still for a few moments. Suddenly her eyes opened and she started to move. Within moments she was bimbaling around as mice do, slowly but unharmed.

We all had a cup of coffee to celebrate before Ros and I got back to some music amidst the devastated lounge and bottles, glasses, step-ladder and tools strewn everywhere. We counted up the lives Minnie had lost, what with being caught by a cat, escaping two traps, being poked with a stick, vacuumed up and emptied into a dustbin. We estimated that she had used up around eight.

When Ros's husband Simon arrived to collect her he was understandably startled by the scene and it took some persuading before he would believe we hadn't been wildly partying. Being a businessman he suggested we should open a new pub and name it 'Mouse and Clarinet'. Who knows, perhaps 'Elephant and Castle' commemorates a medieval occurrence of a similar nature? Oh, suit yourselves, perhaps not.

Looking back I like to think the mouse rather enjoyed the whole experience. I can't say I did.

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