

SAMOSA MALE MOUSE AND SOME MOUSLED MAIL

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Mousling Mail

A young mouse was out one Sunday afternoon. He had been sent to post some letters by his mother. His full name, this young mouse, was Samosa Male Mouse. 'Samosa' because Samosas are good things to eat and his grandpa liked to think about eating (most of the time); 'Male' because he was a boy-mouse and not a girl-mouse; 'Mouse' after his parents. The name was a bit long, but when you find out the names of all the other mice in his family - which you will do, right at the end of this story - you will understand just why he had to have such a long name.

Samosa - as we shall call him for short, for the moment, unless he gets in amongst his family again - was standing at the bright red pillar-box. You may not know this, but when a small mouse posts a letter, he has to clamber up the pillar-box to the very top, then stand on the lid of the box and shove the letter in from above. So Samosa stood at the top, clutching in his paws a very large envelope. He knew it contained a calendar which his mother was sending to Aunt Somnambulist on the Island of Samoa. The trouble was, the envelope was too big for the slot in the box, unless - as sometimes is done - he bent it a little and curved it a bit, and bent it ever so slightly here and pushed it just there and shoved with his back-paws until it

w o u l d j u s t s q u e e z e i n
to the slot and -

whoops !

Samosa lost his footing, flapped his paws wildly in the air, fell on top of the envelope and slid down it, straight into the mouth of the pillar-box!

He shot off the end of the envelope and fell

down and

down and

down

into darkness.

Luckily his fall was broken by a soft and rustling pile of letters. It was a good thing the postie had not collected the letters since Saturday morning.

Samosa lay gasping, the breath knocked out of him. Far above, he could just see daylight coming in through the slot. Even as he watched, his big envelope was pushed in and fell down on top of him, closely followed by a couple of smaller envelopes: someone else had come along and finished the

job for him. Before Samosa could gather his wits and shout for help, the someone had gone again.

The gloom made Samosa sneeze: “Aaaaa-tschoooo!”

He sat up, his eyes growing used to the dark. It was not quite as quiet as it should be. Somewhere nearby he could hear voices.

“Help.” he called, quite quietly at first, as you would when it is dark and you don’t really know what’s what. “Help!”

The voices suddenly hushed. After a few seconds, Samosa could hear footsteps, and saw the light of a torch. He stood up and called again - “Help! Over here!”

“Hello, what have we here then?” enquired a voice, somewhat sharp at the edges. “Look, Number 7423A, we’ve got ourselves a mouse!”

Samosa sneezed: “Aaaaa-tschoooo!”

“A mouse, Number 7557B! Well, ain’t that just dandy, so we have! A sneezing one at that! That’s a lark, eh, 7557B, a mouse when we’re mousling mail! Hee hee!”

Samosa shaded his eyes with his paws to try to see who was holding the torch which blinded him. He could dimly make out two thin figures, nudging each other and kicking with their legs as if in a rough football match.

“What’s mousling?” was the only thing he could think of asking.

“What’s mousling, he says! What a lark, 7557B, eh?”

“Mousling, my mouse-ling? Mousling is when you go out and steal something and pull it apart and rough it up a bit. That’s what mousling is. Look,” continued Number 7557B, grabbing a handful of envelopes from the pile and throwing them in the air, and stamping on them and kicking them into a dirty red sack, “Look, this is mousling mail! See how it’s done?”

Samosa was horrified. “But you can’t do that - that’s other people’s letters! Stop, that’s a letter for my Aunt, put it down!”

But his protests only made the two ruffians kick and crumple more than ever. In a few moments, there was a regular blizzard of envelopes in the narrow space in which they all stood. The two thin figures danced and pranced, kicked and flicked, they tossed and passed, crumpled and bumped, until all the letters were lying in torn heaps, which the pair stuffed into their red sack.

“Come on then, little mouse, you’d better come with us!” Number 7423A grabbed Samosa by his right ear and led the way. Samosa sneezed.

In the light of the torch, Samosa could just make out that a spiral staircase wound down from a narrow gap to one side. Very narrow it was: the two mouslers slipped through without any bother, but poor Samosa was pulled and pushed and hurt his tummy quite a lot before popping out on to the staircase.

The stairs led down and down and then the three emerged into bright light.

What a sight! The room was as big as a school-hall, lit from above by many lamps. The entire floor of the hall was taken up with all kinds of activity.

Strange thin figures scurried about, doing away here and doing away there. Samosa did not have much time to take in the scene before being led off, still by his ear, to a high platform in the middle of the hall.

Upon the platform, dressed in grey overalls and smoking a cigar, stood a red-faced man. As the mousling party approached, he shouted “Ah-ha!” with much enthusiasm and turned his eyes upon Samosa.

Donald Farsier's Trousers

Samosa's two guides propelled him with one last tweak of his now very sore ear towards the foot of the platform.

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed the man again, leaning over the edge and dropping ash from his cigar upon poor Samosa. "And what have we here?"

Samosa sneezed nervously: "Aaaaa-tschoooo!"

"A sneezing mousled mouse-ling, Mister Bering!" reported Number 7557B, saluting.

"Mr. Bering...?" asked the man, quietly.

"Er - Mr. Bering, *Sir!*" shouted 7557B, nervously. "A young mouse spying, Mr. Bering, *sir!*"

"Caught him ourselves, we did, Mr. Bering, *sir,*" agreed Number 7423A.

The man - or, as we should call him now we have been introduced, Mr. Bering (*sir!*) - examined Samosa thoughtfully. Samosa meanwhile studied his two captors out of the corner of his eye. They had looked thin for the very simple reason that they *were* very thin. They appeared to have been cut out of paper; when one of them turned sideways, Samosa immediately lost sight of him. Both of them had their number stamped in large letters on their back, and then, underneath, in case, as a bar-code. Curiously for pieces of paper, they both wore trousers - paper ones, of course, fastening with little tabs which hooked over their shoulders.

"Well, mouse!" Mr. Bering interrupted Samosa's observations, "What have you to say for yourself? Coming down here spying on us! What's the meaning of it all?"

Samosa was always a polite mouse. Whatever dreadful things he got up to at home - and they were many - his mother always said he was a polite mouse.

"My name is Samosa, sir. I'm sorry if I've ended up somewhere I shouldn't be - but it was an accident: I fell into the post-box. Aaaaa-tschoooo!"

"Fell in?! Fell in! Oh, that's a good one!" Mr. Bering roared with laughter, coughing and choking on his cigar. Numbers 7557B and 7423A laughed and slapped each other on the back, keeping one eye on Mr. Bering so that they would know when to stop. "Oh ho ho, fell into the post-box! Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear - you make me laugh, you do! What's your name again, sonny?"

"Samosa Male Mouse, sir," said the mouse.

"Samosa, eh? You'll do. See, 7557B, see how he calls me 'sir' without even being asked."

Number 7557B grumpily aimed a kick at Samosa.

"Well, then, young mouse, I'd better show you what you've fallen into, accidental-like, as you say. Come up here. You two, back to your work!"

Mr. Bering lifted Samosa up by his arms. Samosa's ears were grateful for being left alone.

“Now, you look at what I’ve created here. Ted Bering done all this. My pals call me Teddy - you can call me Teddy, lad. Now over there, where your two new friends have gone, that’s where we take all the letters and envelopes we’ve pinched and pile them up for dumping.”

Teddy pointed to a corner where huge numbers of dirty red or black bags were piling up. An even greater number of thin figures swarmed over the pile, busy busy busy. Each figure wore these curious trousers, which covered only their fronts. Even as Samosa looked, a paper-thin figure with a wheelbarrow was pushing the bags through a dark opening, where there was a glow as from a huge fire.

“We pinch the mail from all the post-boxes in the land, laddie! It’s taken me years to build up this operation! Years. Years and years! Weeks. Now, over in that corner,” Teddy swept his hand and pointed Samosa in the opposite direction, “In that corner we collect all the junk mail people want us to send out and take it back to the post-boxes. Brilliant, eh? Brilliant!”

Samosa was puzzled. He looked into the corner where huge sacks were being moved about. A veritable army of thin figures, dressed this time in shorts, rushed about, dragging sacks, tying labels on them, checking them off against lists, loading them on to conveyor belts.

“But why are you doing all this, Mr. Bering, sir?”

Teddy Bering’s cigar fell out of his mouth. He was aghast. “Why? Don’t they teach you anything at school these days, laddie? Good grief-!” For a moment, Teddy was too shocked to speak.

“Look, sonny, I’ll put it simply for you. One: Mr. Loch the businessman wants to get all his junk-mail, all his adverts and exciting competitions into as many letter-boxes as possible. Two: the Post Office can’t handle real letters **and** Mr. Loch’s junk-mail - it’s just too much. Three: Mr. Bering sends out his operatives to empty the post-boxes of real letters and to replace them with Mr. Loch’s junk-mail. That way, the Post Office has the usual number of letters to deliver and everyone’s happy! Now is that clear enough for you, boy?”

Teddy Bering stared at Samosa, annoyed at having to explain the obvious to such a simple mouse.

In reply, Samosa sneezed: “Aaaaa-tschooooo!”

Teddy Bering shook Samosa a little to rattle his brains. “Clear, boyo?”

“Oh yes, it’s quite clear sir. Quite clear,” stuttered Samosa, horrified.

“Good,” said Teddy, somewhat happier now. “And now I’ll introduce you to my right-hand man. Mr. Farsier, step up here a moment!”

Down on the vast floor of the hall, a man looked up from his task at a photo-copying machine, unbent and came over.

“Samosa, my young friend, let me introduce you to Donald Farsier. Mr. Farsier, meet Samosa.”

The man looked suspiciously at the young mouse, who politely held out his hand. Farsier did not take it.

Teddy Bering did not notice. “Now, Mr. Farsier is in charge of my workers. He prints them out, using his photo-copier, he gives them a number, clips on their trousers and sends ‘em off to do some work. Don’t you, sir?”

Donald Farsier nodded.

“Mr. Farsier even gave them a name,” continued Teddy, “TROOSERS, he calls them - **T**eddy’s **R**eliable and **O**bedient **O**peratives for **S**tealing **E**verything **R**ight **S**wankily. Smart, eh?”

Samosa was not too sure about how smart it was, but agreed politely.

“Of course, should be Donald Farsier’s TROOSERS, because he does all the work,” went on Teddy, clapping his man on the shoulder. “Come on, Donald, let’s go down and show our young friend how you do it.”

Farsier led the way back to the photo-copier. They threaded their way between scurrying and industrious figures, TROOSERS to a man. Some carried sacks, some carried huge piles of envelopes, others labels, several rushed past with heavy bales of string. Each one of them was just a figure cut out of paper, with a pair of trousers or shorts stuck loosely on with paper tabs over the shoulders. Some of the figures ran so fast that their own trousers fell off, or those of their co-workers, in the draught. If that happened, Samosa noticed, both de-bagged worker and his lost trousers were swept into a pile at the edge of the hall by a very sprightly little man wielding a broom.

“Now this is Mr. Farsier’s photocopier. Show us what you do, then, Donald.”

Standing beside the machine, Mr. Farsier came to life. He smiled and waved his hands as he explained: “It’s quite simple really. When I need a new TROOSER, all I have to do is to take this cardboard cut-out here -” he picked up a piece of cardboard cut into the shape of a man, “- stick it in here, and press the button. Out here-” pointing to the back of the machine, “Comes a photocopy, twice as big and almost ready to use. Next I photocopy a pair of trousers, or, if required, a pair of shorts, like this... Then all I need to do is to stamp on its number - so!” he stamped with a very large and inky stamp so,

8007C

then paint on a bar-code and off it goes.” As he spoke, Number 8007C, freshly minted, stamped and coded, picked itself up, adjusted its trouser-straps and ran off to the corner of the room where incoming mail was being destroyed.

“What do you think of that, then, laddie?” asked Teddy Bering, proudly turning to the mouse. “Remarkable, eh?”

“Well, sir, I suppose it’s very clever. But I still don’t think you should be stealing other people’s letters like that.”

“You cheeky little blighter!” shouted Teddy Bering. “I have spent my life, my whole working life, building all this up! Years and years. Months. Don’t you stand there and tell me you don’t think it’s right. Who asked you, anyway?”

Mr. Farsier, find this young hooligan something to do. Now you're working for Teddy Bering and that's no picnic, boy!"

With those dreadful words, Teddy Bering stormed off, scattering TROOSERS before him, leaving behind a trail of whirling breeks and de-bagged pieces of paper.

Donald Farsier made a grab for Samosa.

Samosa dodged and sneezed: "Aaaaa-tschoooo!"

Fayette Feette's Feet

The young mouse was too quick for Donald Farsier. As the man reeled back from Samosa's sneeze, the mouse ducked down and rushed for a door, leaving, like Teddy Bering, a trail of debugged workers and despair. One or two of the thin operatives leaped at him to stop him, but the mouse ran on.

He ran and ran until he saw a small door in the wall, half-hidden behind a huge pile of parcels. With one last gasp, he threw himself at the door, forced it open and fell through, colliding almost immediately with something rather hard and hairy.

"Ouch! Watch what you're doing!" shouted someone now underneath Samosa. "Get off, you nasty thing, get off at once!" A sharp paw came out from underneath Samosa and started smacking him wherever it could. Samosa got up hurriedly as he could and stepped as far back as he was able.

"Sorry, I didn't know you were there," he apologised. He sneezed again. It was dim here and dusty, but not so dark that he could not see that the other person was an elderly badger. He helped her to her feet.

"You noisy, nasty, sneezy thing, you!" complained the badger, dusting herself down and slapping away Samosa's helping hand. "What do you mean by bursting in like that and knocking down frail old ladies? Ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Sorry, ma'am," said Samosa again. "I was only trying to get away from Mr. Bering and Mr. Fa...Far...Faa..aaaa-tschoooo!"

"Oh well, why didn't you say so in the first place? Here, let me look at you - have you got a name, young man?"

"My name's Samosa, Samosa Male Mouse, ma'am"

"Stop this instant! My name ain't *ma'am*, it's Fayette Feette. Fayette Feette, got that?" She stood up straight. Unlike most old lady badgers of Samosa's acquaintance, Fayette Feette was not little and frail, but tall and quite able to look after herself in a fight. On her feet were a pair of the most enormous and heavy boots that Samosa had ever seen. Try as he might, he could not take his eyes off them. They were huge, size 12 Adult at the very least, black where they were not caked in mud, with well over 15 pairs of holes for the laces to be threaded through. And the soles! - the soles were as thick as dictionaries. Samosa's eyes grew larger and larger.

"What are you staring at, young man? Don't you know it's very rude to stare at people you've barely been introduced to? Oh, it's my boots - smart, aren't they?" Fayette danced about a bit on the spot, to show off her boots. It was as if someone had dumped a barrow-load of gravel on a tin-roof: the noise was so tremendous that Samosa had to clap his hands over his ears and shut his eyes.

"Do you like that?" laughed Fayette Feette, laughing, "Listen!" And she did it again. As her boots hit the ground again and again, there came the sound

of collapsing buildings, crashing trains, torrents of river-water down a waterfall. When she stopped dancing, the sound slowly died away.

Samosa caught his breath. "Well, they're certainly the noisiest boots I've ever heard, Mrs. Feette..."

"Miss Feette, I'll have you know. There never was a Mr. Feette - although I did once try. But he was afraid of sudden noises, so he ran away." Fayette sounded sad, and was silent for a moment, thinking of her lost chances with Bert Bodger, the eligible bachelor badger of her youth. Then she cheered up. "But you're right, you won't find a noisier pair of boots this side of Paraguay. Listen!"

And she danced another typhoon, an avalanche of cutlery in metal cupboard, a hailstorm in a tin-bath.

"Mm, very nice," shouted Samosa, wishing she would stop. "Very nice, indeed."

Fayette Feette sighed and suddenly sat down, her chin in her hands. "Oh, but it doesn't do me any good. Every time I try to get out of here, those TROUSERS hear me coming and chase me back in here again. I creep up on them as quietly as I can, but they can hear me coming from miles off! It's impossible! But enough of my troubles - what brings you here and why are you trying to escape?"

Samosa told Fayette his story - about falling into the pillar-box and sneezing and meeting Teddy Bering and then Donald Farsier.

"Oh yes, they're a wicked bunch of people out there, aren't they? We must stop them. We need a plan - a plan is always a good thing: I find that young people sometimes have plans. Do you have one, Samosa?"

Samosa had to admit that he had, as yet, no plan. Fayette Feette tutted a bit and then fell silent. Somewhere in the silence, there was a faint ticking. Tick, tick, tick.

"Oh come out, do! Stop hiding away like that, you silly old clock!" Fayette's scolding took Samosa by surprise, and he began to apologise. But the old badger ignored him and began tugging away at something behind her.

"Out you come, you old devil! What do you mean by hiding behind me like that? Introduce yourself - Samosa, this is the Run-Alongside Clock; Clock, meet Samosa Mouse. Shake hands, go on!"

From out of the gloom came a shy old clock, hands shaking nervously between about twenty minutes to one and ten minutes to three. It sidled forward and bowed stiffly to Samosa.

"Bong!" it said, chiming once in a most melodious way.

Samosa bowed back, surprised.

"Run-Alongside Clock's been with me for fifty-three years now, haven't you? A ridiculous old creature. But very useful. Runs alongside and tells me the time. I expect you've got one of those silly little wrist-watches, have you?" Fayette peered suspiciously at Samosa's wrist. Luckily, Samosa had forgotten to put his watch on that morning.

Pleased with this observation, Fayette patted the clock firmly on the head and told it to sit down and be quiet.

Samosa had a bright idea.

“Miss Feette, if you want to get past the TROOSERS without them hearing you, why don't you just tiptoe?”

“Tiptoe? Tiptoe!? Oh, you little innocent! Listen - listen to me tiptoe.”

Fayette placed herself elegantly on the tips of the toes of her back feet and slowly and majestically began to tiptoe towards Samosa. It was like listening to an army march in step up a gravel drive-way.

Samosa understood.

“If I could only creep past those nasty little thin things, I know a way out. If only, if only!” Fayette mumbled to herself.

Samosa sneezed and had another bright idea. “If you took off your boots, Fayette, and carried them, maybe that would work?”

Fayette Feette was shocked. “Take off my boots - but I haven't done that for years, child! Take off my boots? Oh no, I don't think so.”

“But why not?” asked Samosa, “I'm sure it would work.”

The old lady looked doubtfully at the Run-Alongside Clock, which ticked nervously, shaking its hands. She thought for several minutes. Then she sat down and started untying the laces.

“Haven't done this since I worked in the town gardens. That was twenty years ago. You must excuse my socks, young mouse.”

Samosa politely ignored Fayette's socks when, after much groaning and pulling, the boots finally popped off. They were certainly the holiest and dirtiest socks he had ever seen in his young life.

“Come on, then, what are you waiting for, Let's try it!” said Fayette enthusiastically. She opened the door which led out into the Hall of the TROOSERS; Samosa and the Clock followed.

All went well. Fayette Feette crept past one group of busy operatives, then another. The Clock ran alongside, ticking tocking, the mouse followed, as quiet as a mouse. No one noticed them, as they kept close to the wall, hiding behind the sacks and the discarded envelopes and the moving mounds of junk-mail.

Fayette Feette grew confident. More than once, she crept right up behind some unsuspecting worker and, gently flipping the paper-tabs over his shoulders, caused his trousers to fall down. Within moments, the little man with the broom had swept up the surprised TROOSER and his surprised trousers and dumped them on to the waste-heap. Fayette giggled.

In this way, creeping and tip-toeing, they managed to reach another entrance without being caught. They slipped in to a dark opening. Fayette whooped with delight and smacked Samosa on the back.

“You did it, boy, you did it! Come on, let's get out of here!” and headed off down the gloomy passage, lighting the way with a torch she had pinched from one of the mouslers.

Samosa sneezed: “Aaaa-tschoooo!”
“Bong” chimed Clock.

T.Waddle and Rabbit

Samosa, Fayette and the Run-Alongside Clock were now in a passage which twisted and turned and went down and went up. The ceiling was one moment very low and the next moment far above their heads. The ticking from Clock sometimes echoed nearby and sometimes far off. At one point, Samosa nearly fell into an underground river which crossed their path, dark and cold. It was impossible to see how deep it was; luckily, there was a wooden bridge nearby. Not long after that, Fayette's torch showed a huge cavern in which great pillars grew from the floor and reached down from the roof.

Samosa knew what those were: "Stalactites and stalagmites," he announced proudly. "We've done them in school."

Fayette sighed: "I did them at school too, when I was a lot younger. But I can never remember the difference..."

"Easy," said Samosa, "Stalagmites come from the ground, and there's a 'g' in both words; stalactites come from the ceiling, and both of them have a 'c' in the word."

The Run-Alongside Clock stopped running alongside at this point. "I - think - that's - a - daft - thing - to - say," he said, tocking. "You'll - tell - us - next - that - a - cell - ar - is - a - bove - a - cei - ling - cos - they - both - have - a - 'c' - in - the - word - and - that - a - loft - is - be - low - the - floor - cos - both - have - an - 'f' - in - the - word. And - then - you'll - have - us - be - lieve - that - a - light - should - be - in - the - ground - and - a - car - pet - on - the - cei - ling - cos -"

"Oh, do be quiet, Clock!" scolded Fayette Feette, fed up. "Come on, we've got to keep moving. I think I can hear someone following us."

The Run-Alongside Clock ticked twice in an annoyed manner then began running alongside again. Samosa breathed a sigh of relief and jogged forwards into the gloom. It was true - when they stopped, he could just make out the sound of wildly rustling paper somewhere behind them - possibly the sound of TROUSERS giving chase.

After a few minutes, Samosa realised that some marks he had noticed on the floor of the passage were in fact carefully painted lines. White ones and double yellow ones, mostly, down each side of the passage, painted very neatly and as straight as could be imagined. He wondered who could have painted them there.

"Hello, goodbye, good night, good boy!" came a voice, startling them immediately from the left, "How do the blue shrimps scream with joy, while the sheep in the fields baa and play, how fine it is to stop and say, 'Hello, goodbye, good night, good boy!'"

The three runners stopped and stared. From out of a narrow opening off the passage, a mole had appeared. In the light of the torch, he presented a

strange figure: on his head he wore a pair of red underpants; around his neck was the longest stripey scarf you could ever imagine, coloured

| red | purple | green | blue | yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink | emerald | ruby | purple | green | blue
| yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink | emerald | ruby | red | green | blue | yellow | teal | aquamarine |
pink | emerald | ruby | red | purple | blue | yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink | emerald | ruby | red |
purple | green | yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink | emerald | ruby | red | purple | green | blue |
aquamarine | pink | emerald | ruby | red | purple | green | blue | yellow | teal | pink | emerald | ruby
| red | purple | green | blue | yellow | teal | aquamarine | emerald | ruby | red | purple | green | blue
| yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink | red | purple | green | blue | yellow | teal | aquamarine | pink |
emerald | ruby |

...and so on, for at least sixteen metres. He also wore a rather attractive flowery dress, which he must have inherited from his mother or a great-aunt, and on his feet were two socks which were not a pair, one being decorated with flying saucers, the other with the crest of the Flat Earth Society.

“Hail fellows, have you been down yonder in Dingly Dell, there where the penguins have learned to spell, have you been in the caves of Samarkand, or up in the - ?” The mole suddenly stopped and stared at them, aghast. “Oh no, I’m at it again. I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I just open my mouth and all kinds of rubbish comes out, it’s not something I can stop, Pop! where you are, sailors of the night, the rowing-machines are screwed down tight! Sorry! On the Atlas Mountains the sun gleams red, and all at once I feel -”

Fayette stepped up to the mole and gently but firmly placed a paw over this mouth. The mole stopped; he thanked Fayette with his eyes.

“What a lot of nonsense you do speak, young man,” scolded Fayette. “Why don’t you have a rest?”

The young mole nodded, and clapped his own large pink forepaws to his mouth to show them that he intended to speak no more.

Just then, another figure popped out from the same hole in the wall. It was a very large rabbit. Very large indeed - much taller than Samosa or Fayette.

“A moment of your time, young master,” said the rabbit, addressing the mole. “I see you’ve come across some travellers.” She turned to Fayette Feette. “Has he been annoying you, madam?”

“Oh no, not at all. I just had to ask him to stop speaking for a while,” replied Fayette.

“You must forgive him, he had a silly childhood, and it all seems to have affected him. Let me introduce you - T.Waddle Fontaine, this is -?” She looked questioningly at Fayette and Samosa.

“Fayette Feette and Samosa Mouse, and the Run-Alongside Clock”, Fayette presented them in turn.

“Fayette - T.Waddle Fontaine; Samosa - T.Waddle; Mr. Clock - Mr. Fontaine - I say, what time is it?”

The Clock consulted his face. “Se - ven - teen - mi - nutes - to - six - eg - sact - ly.”

“And what makes you think that, sir Clock? Can you be so sure?”

Clock ticked grumpily and checked again.

“Six - teen - mi - nutes - and - four - teen - sec - onds - to - six - eg - sact - ly,” he tocked.

The rabbit nodded gravely. “I thought so - please do not try to fib to me. Let me introduce myself - I am Augusta Rabbit.” The rabbit bowed low.

“Augusta Rabbit, who bites her nails by the light of the moon and the enlightened snail, who ties the dragonflies to an alder-tree, in the hope of a lunch that none can see! Sorry! Augusta Rabbit, with a standard-lamp, none can withstand her Penny Black stamp, standing there with her Book of Japes, we bow down before her and her cycling capes!”

So saying, T.Waddle Fontaine threw himself to his short knees in front of the Rabbit.

“Get up, get up, you ridiculous animal,” scolded the Rabbit.

“Oh, dreadfully sorry, I just open my mouth and out it comes. Sorry, sorry!” said the mole, ashamed.

“Friends,” said the rabbit, turning to the mouse and his companions, “What brings you to this part of the world? Why did you not pass some other way?”

“We’re running away from the TROOSERS,” replied Samosa, sneezing.

“Oh, I know just what you mean!” exclaimed Augusta, bending her ears backwards in disgust. “In my very humble opinion, the time has come to put an end to Teddy Bering’s nonsense, to -”

She got no further. There was a crashing noise from behind them and a gang of thin paper figures burst into view. The TROOSERS!

“Stop there, or it will be the worse for you!” shouted the leading photocopy, brandishing a bottle of ink in their direction. “Stop, or I’ll squirt!”

“Quickly now, friends, conceal yourselves behind me! These ruffians shall have a taste of Rabbit! Fontaine, I call upon you!” Augusta stood up to her very full height, ears and all, to block the passage. No one could get past for the moment. Needing no further encouragement, Fayette, Samosa and Clock ran off down the passage. As they set off, they could hear T.Waddle’s voice

“Step forth, step forward, step up, step back, fourth drawer from the bottom and third from the top, you little pages from a boring book, step up, step down and then take a look! You will find a precious porker, a-snorting all the way, a Downhill Slalom snorkeller out there in the bay. I clapped my eyes on you today, I clapped my eyes until they hurt, I stamped my feet when the moon-men came, I stamped my feet with ink...”

“Out of our way, you fools!” snarled the hunters, pressing up against the Rabbit and her friend, pushing and shoving. But the Rabbit would not move.

“Back, scum, back! You stand now against the Might of Rabbitry, and you shall not pass!”

T.Waddle agreed whole-heartedly.

“Begone, briefs in breeches, be-breeked Behemoths, pantalooned loons, impatient impertinents! No, indeed, my fine-trousered gentlemen! You are but minnows among the Tritons, newts among the Brontosaurus! I, the great Knickerbocker Glory above you all, command you to retire!”

More of the same rubbish followed Samosa and his friends as they ran on.

The Young Walnut-Keeper's Guide to Successful Cracking

When they came to a fork in the passage, and they had to stop to decide which way to take, Samosa pointed to the lines which went off down the right-hand passage.

“Let's follow the lines here!”

Fayette Feette looked at them doubtfully. “But we don't know who painted them, you silly mouse. What if that dreadful Donald Farsier painted them?” Fayette sat down heavily and began to pull on her boots again. Her feet hurt from running so far in her stocking-holes.

“Well, do you have a better suggestion?” asked Samosa, also sitting down. He was tired. It had been a long time since he first fell into the pillar-box - it seemed almost like days, and so much had happened since then.

“No,” admitted Fayette, “Not really. Just let me have a little rest, boy.”

The Run-Alongside Clock groaned. “Me - too - I'm - fee - ling - all - run - down. Do - you - think - you - could - wind - me - up - a - bit - just - here - in - the - mi - ddle - of - my - back?” The Clock turned round and showed the mouse a huge brass key. Samosa turned it and wound, wound, wound up the clockwork.

The Clock grunted happily. “Much - be - tter - much - be - tter - thank - you - thank - you. Bong.”

For a few minutes, the three runaways rested quietly. From behind they could vaguely hear the drone of T.Waddle Fontaine as he lectured the troops of Donald Farsier. Snatches of his speech occasionally drifted down the passageways - “...Yetis turning gently in the breeze, custard and mustard on toasted cheese...a wild-goose chase cooked in brandy, daisies pied and violets dandy... Oh sorry, sorry, I just open...” It seemed that the TROOSERS were not going to make much progress.

At last, Fayette leapt to her Feette with a rattle like gunfire. “Come on then, you pair of lazybones, we can't lie about here all day - let's be off!” And with that, her gravel-boots led the way down the passage with the painted lines.

After not very many steps, the passage broadened out into a cavern and they came to a halt in front of a very odd house. It was made entirely of dried noodles, woven into each other like knitting. Green spinach noodles for the roof, brown wholewheat spaghetti for the walls, Chinese egg-noodles around the windows and door. A large sign tacked above the door stated

Noodle Nook

Lionel L. Paynter (Prop.)

Proprietor Paynter himself stood at the door, a smile upon his cheeks. He was a very large hamster indeed, nicely well fed.

“Friends!” he called, “Come on in! I was just sitting down to my third tea, and there’s plenty for everyone - even,” he added, looking doubtfully at Clock, “Even a hungry clock. Come on in!”

The three companions were indeed very hungry, most especially so Samosa Mouse who was used to a snack every hour or so at home, and who had now not eaten for several hours. They politely wiped their feet upon the doormat, which turned out to be an oversized waffle, and entered.

The first thing they saw when they were inside was a huge table, about the size of a bowling-green, covered with plates of food: loaves of bread, jugs of juice, mounds of muffins, jars of nuts, trays of biscuits and cakes, jellies, ice-cream, aubergines, olives, cheeses piled so high to the ceiling that the Clock was convinced they were stalagmites (or was it stalactites?), potato pancakes. Around this table were set six armchairs, squashed up against the wall, because there was very little room left. In two of the armchairs, busy munching and slurping, without much more than a glance in the direction of the visitors, sat a pair of shrews.

“Sit yourself down, my guests, sit down and eat your fill!”

Samosa need no second telling: he sneezed, “Aaaaa-tschooooo!”, made himself comfortable in a spare armchair and tucked in to the feast. Fayette Feette joined him, after a ladylike pause, and soon caught up with Samosa. Lionel Paynter - “El” as he liked to be called - had evidently been in the middle of his tea when the travellers had arrived, and he simply threw himself back into the fray.

For a few minutes there was little noise other than munching and crunching and sipping and the occasional burp from the shrews. When it was time to take a pause, Samosa looked around.

The first thing he realised was that the armchairs themselves were made of freshly-baked bread. The scent of the fresh bread was tremendous. It was clear that one of the shrews had been unable to restrain itself, and had already begun to chew off the right arm of its chair. Samosa secretly pulled a chunk of his chair from down near the floor and tasted it: good - sunflower-seed bread.

In this room, apart from the table and its tasty armchairs, there was space only for a bookcase, which held some fascinating books:

- ‘On Marrows’
- ‘The Pistachio Papers’
- ‘Arabian Bites: A Thousand and One Ways to Cook Parsnips’
- ‘Boiling Eggs Made Simple’
- ‘Arty Choke - a Novel’
- ‘The Boiled Beetroot’
- ‘The Young Walnut-Keeper’s Guide to Successful Cracking’
- ‘Eating by Numbers’

- 'Mineral Waters of the Sahara'
- 'Chocolate Chip Cookies and their Place in Society: a Study'
- 'Rare Raspberries'
- 'A Borlotti Bean for Your Thoughts'
- 'An Introduction to Twentieth Century Camembert'
- 'My Climbs in The Swiss Rolls'

and many more.

Always the conversational guest, Samosa turned to El.

"You are interested in food and drink, then, sir?" he enquired.

El threw himself back in his chair and burst out laughing, inadvertently spraying the ceiling with oats and tomato-seeds.

"Oh my goodness, oh my goodness, young mouse! Yes, you could say I am interested in food! And I hope you are too?"

Samosa nodded shyly and reached for a pumpkin-seed roll.

There was a crash just above their heads. Samosa jumped, startled, and sneezed. El stood up and wiped his mouth with his napkin, shouting

"Beaufort! Beaufort! Come down here at once!"

Beaufort, whoever it was, made no signs of coming down, so El marched up the stairs. Out of curiosity, Samosa followed him. At the top of the stairs was a large bedroom. It was in fact a vegetable-bed, planted out neatly with lettuces, brussels-sprouts and runner-beans. Sitting on top of the bed, looking very annoyed with itself, was a tiny volcanic vole.

And what a mess met Samosa's eyes in the rest of the room!

"Beaufort!" scolded El, "I've told you before about eating the wardrobe. In fact, I told you just last week that if you ate any more of it, it would fall apart. Now look what you've gone and done!"

Beaufort sat up, whiskers twitching angrily. "But you said I should make myself at home," he accused, eyes blazing. "If you don't mean what you say, don't say it! When I say something, I want people to believe me! And if you want me to leave, I'll leave now!"

"Oh you silly vole!" El turned to Samosa. "Beaufort likes nuts. That's the trouble really - I inherited this wardrobe from old Uncle Duster: carved from a single huge cashew nut it was, wonderful piece of work. Beaufort here is very fond of cashews and just could not keep away from it. And now he's chewed it all to pieces!"

Sure enough, the remains of the wardrobe now lay scattered over the floor, a sad pile of crumbs. Worse than that, the contents of the wardrobe had fallen out and were lying higgledy-piggledy on the carpet - cabbage-suits and herb-waistcoats, pasta-shoes and mushroom-hats. El also owned a most impressive collection of elderberry-ties which were now lying crushed and juicy underneath a heap of carrot-sticks.

"What a mess, Beaufort! You're a disgrace!"

The vole bounced up and down on the spot, furious.

“A disgrace!? A disgrace!? Let me tell you that there are not many voles about who could chew a cupboard to pieces in less than half an hour! I’m a champion chewer, I am, the best vole of all!”

El sighed. “Yes, of course you are, Beaufort. Now, you just get a dustpan and brush to clear it all up, and then come downstairs and join our visitors!”

The vole, spitting and grumbling, rushed past them. El and Samosa also went back down the stairs, but not before the mouse had caught a glimpse in the bathroom of a most wonderful bath in the shape of a soup-tureen.

In the meantime, the party had been joined by a rather flustered-looking Augusta Rabbit and by T.Waddle Fontaine, his hands clamped firmly over his mouth again, wild-eyed with the effort of keeping quiet.

“Thank you so much for holding back the TROOSERS, Augusta Rabbit,” said Fayette, pouring cups of tea for everyone.

“Oh, it was nothing,” said the Rabbit modestly, “It was mostly T.Waddle’s work - he just kept talking and talking, until the little fiends curled up on the floor. We left a whole heap of them back there, all yellowed and withered.” Augusta Rabbit picked up her tea-cup and took a sip.

It was a comfortable tea-party in Noodle Nook: the shrews who had occupied two of the armchairs had by now fallen asleep and lay curled up under the crumbly remains of their chairs, leaving space for El, Fayette, Samosa, Augusta, Clock and T.Waddle to sit at their ease, sip tea and nibble muffins. The Clock ticked in a homely manner. T.Waddle munched happily, with only the occasional chit-chat - wise remarks about ‘man-eating bananas’ or an opinion on learning the names of asparagus ferns - escaping his lips. Finally, El wiped the crumbs from his lips (and his beard, his waistcoat, his lap, his ears and his ankles) and called for attention.

“Now that we have had tea, we should think how we are going to help young Samosa Mouse escape back to his family.”

“Hear hear,” mumbled Fayette Feette, “The poor little lamb has been away quite long enough - what must his mother be thinking now?”

“She’ll be thinking beans and breakfast, she’ll be cooking toasted turnips, she’ll be roasting a rodent repast, she’ll -” T.Waddle’s thoughts were interrupted by a well-placed paw over his mouth. Augusta said

“Please continue, Mr. Paynter”

“Now the only way back to the outside world,” went on El, after a slurp of tea, “Is back through the hall used by Teddy Bering and his terrible gang. There is no other way. So we must think of how we can sneak through without them noticing.”

There was a deep silence.

A whole number of desperate thoughts raced through Samosa’s head, each one more unlikely than the one before. None of them seemed to have the slightest chance of succeeding. The draught from the racing thoughts made him sneeze: “Aaaaa-tschoooo!” But he knew he wanted to get back home soon.

The Run-Alongside Clock ticked deeply and regularly. Apart from the snores of the shrews, all was quiet.

They were startled from their thoughts by a crash from the kitchen.

“Beaufort!” yelled El, without even getting out of his seat “What are you up to now?”

Samosa ran through to the kitchen. Beaufort was standing amongst a pile of plates and jars and bottles which had fallen out of the cheese-larder, seething with grumpiness. The cheese-larder was made of cheese, and Beaufort had been nibbling it and of course it had fallen to pieces and everything in it had fallen out. Now the vole was stamping his feet and shaking his fists. Samosa retreated.

“Just a little accident,” reported Samosa as he returned to the table, leaving Beaufort to clear up the mess.

“Right,” said Augusta Rabbit, “I think we should just go back to Teddy Bering’s hall and see what we can find.”

Everyone thought that was a good idea, and they set off immediately, El stopping only to stuff his pockets with macaroni-cheese, tomatoes, carrot-cake, egg and cress sandwiches, blueberry muffins, celery-sticks with garlic cheese, shelled roasted pistachios, Christmas pudding and some other minor snacks for the journey.

Gordy Loch and the Three Scares

Although it felt much safer returning back down the passages in the company of his friends, Samosa was still very nervous. El had supplied everyone - except Clock, whose hands were not suited to holding things - with a torch, so there was plenty of light to see by. Augusta had ordered T.Waddle to keep quiet, in case the TROOSERS came up on them; the young mole obeyed, keeping his mouth covered up rather well with his long scarf.

Clock ran alongside.

Beaufort scampered and muttered behind.

They re-traced their steps, following El's painted lines which now came in very useful, because there were forks and turns in the passage which Samosa and Fayette had not noticed before. The lines led them safely back to the point where Augusta Rabbit and T.Waddle had met them.

Just as they reached this point, they heard a strange sound coming up the passage behind them. Hurriedly, they pressed themselves against the wall.

From behind came a roaring, parping sound, like a demented tractor. It grew louder and louder until finally a small car swung round the corner. A figure sat inside.

The car was not particularly fast and, as it trundled past, Clock stepped out and began to run alongside the car.

"Bong - bong - bong!" chimed Clock as he ran alongside the car. "Bonnnng!!!"

It was seven o'clock.

The man in the car got such a scare that the car swerved to one side, hit the wall and lurched to a halt. Clock stopped running, ticking gently to himself.

The man in the car threw open the door and climbed out. He was dressed in a golden suit and hat, and seemed to have golden hair. His spectacles were gold-rimmed and his nails were painted with gold varnish. His car, on the other hand, was a complete write-off.

"Look what you've done, you idiot! Two days old that car was! Two days old and not a scratch on it!" He shook Clock angrily until Clock's hands were going round his face like a windmill. "What do you mean, jumping out at me like that? I got a terrible scare!"

"B-b-b-onnnngg!" stuttered Clock. "I'm - sor - ry - I - did - not - mean - to - scare - you..."

"Well, it's all very well being sorry, you stupid clock, but what are you going to do about my nice new car? Eh?!" For good measure, the man rattled Clock a few more times.

He was interrupted in this exercise by a dreadful crashing, thumping noise in the distance, getting closer and closer. The man dropped Clock and stepped back behind his car, looking nervously back down the passage. The din grew louder and louder, now like an army on the march, now like a legion

of tanks, now like a hundred trains bearing down on them. The man cowered beside the wreck of his car, whimpering, teeth chattering. The racket began to deafen both Clock and the man, like an avalanche of a million rocks.

Fayette Feette came into sight, her boots clattering on the rock. She had seen Clock disappear off behind the car, and had given chase straight away: Clock was not one to be left on his own - he always got into trouble.

Hiding behind the car, the man did not immediately see Fayette arrive. All he heard was the huge crescendo of noise, which died away into echoes as Fayette halted beside the still-trembling Clock.

“You poor little thing!” she exclaimed, patting Clock on the head and holding his hands. “Whatever has happened to you - who did this?” She raised her voice and drew herself up to full height. “Come out here, you big bully, whoever you are! Come out here this instant!”

The man put first an eye, then an eye and an ear, then two eyes above the door of his car, peeping to see who had arrived.

“Goodness me, madam!” he exclaimed, “You gave me a dreadful scare! What on earth were you doing?”

“I could ask the same question of you, young man,” replied Fayette. “Just who do you think you are, shaking this poor defenceless Clock to bits like that?”

“I, madam,” said the man snootily, adjusting the blonde wig which was perched at the very top of his otherwise bald head, “I am Gordon Loch, famous businessman and owner of the rights to all junk-mail in this land. And who,” he enquired, dusting down the shoulders of his very bright golden suit, “Might you be?”

“Fayette Feette, sir,” replied the badger. “And this poor little creature is Run-Alongside Clock. I think you should say sorry to him.”

“I am Gordy Loch, madam, and I NEVER EVER say sorry. Least of all to passing clocks. And since both you and this clock have given me a scare, I think you owe me an apology!”

Fayette was about to make her opinion known when a strange and eery sound came to them.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaa -”

It sounded like a ghost come to haunt them, a banshee warming up.

“Aaaaaaaa -

aaaaaaaaaaaaa -

aaaaaaaaaaaaa -”

It was the moaning of a soul in torment, the painful cry of a beast without a home, and the hair on Fayette's back stood up on end. Clock threw himself under the car to hide. Gordy Loch quivered like a jelly and hung on to Fayette for dear life.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaa -

aaaaaaaaaaaaa -

tchoooooooo!!!!”

It was, of course, only Samosa sneezing, because the car in passing had stirred up a lot of dust, which had gone up his nose like a feather-duster.

“Atchoo!

Aatchooo!

Aa-ti-shooooo!”

he added, in case no one had heard.

This third and final scare was just too much for Gordy Loch. He was down on his knees, hands clutching each other, begging them not to scare him any more. His golden wig hung over his right ear like a rather expensive rat. Tears streamed down his face. He blubbed pathetically.

Just as the rest of the party arrived, Fayette Feette picked Gordy Loch by his collar. “Now, blow your nose and stand up and tell me what your business is here today, Mister Loch.” She rattled the golden man by the shoulders until he stood up, blowing his nose on his wig in his confusion. Beaufort darted out of the shadows and nipped Gordy’s ankles for good measure.

Between sobs, Gordy Loch managed to explain that he was going to meet Teddy Bering.

“I’ve never met Teddy,” he sobbed, wringing his hands and generally being wet, “Never met him. But we’ve been doing business for some time now. He’s looking after my junk-mail business. At this very moment, Teddy is expecting me for our first meeting.”

Gordy Loch sobbed. “Please let me go, kind people, let me go and I won’t disturb you again. I’ll go on quietly, won’t even mention it to Mr. Bering...”

Samosa was suddenly struck by a brilliant idea. It struck him so hard, he had to sit down and sneeze seven times. Gordy Loch fell down in a moaning heap again. Beaufort nipped him again, for encouragement.

“If Teddy has never seen Gordy Loch before, why don’t WE go to the meeting instead of him?” asked the mouse excitedly, “Then we can trick them into showing us the way out?”

Augusta Rabbit was not sure about this: “But Teddy and Donald have seen you already,” she reasoned, “So it can’t be you - what about T.Waddle here? He’s about the right height.”

They all agreed.

T.Waddle unwound all sixteen metres of his scarf and, having removed Gordy Loch’s jacket and trousers, they tied him up with it. They stuffed his wig in his mouth to keep him quiet and bundled him into his dead car. Then T.Waddle tried on the suit and hat. They fitted perfectly. Beaufort began to munch the car’s tyres: this car was never going anywhere again.

Just at that moment, there came an ominous rustling sound from further up the passage, and a gang of TROUSERS burst into view. Samosa retreated quickly into the shadows.

“Ah, Mr. Loch, I presume. Number 6339A at your service.” The leading photocopy advanced upon T.Waddle, saluting, convinced by that golden clothing that this brave mole was Gordon Loch him very self. “And these are your people, I suppose?”

“Yes, all mine they are, all mine, my friend,” answered T.Waddle, “And a mine of gems to its very end, full of rubies and diamonds and emeralds and gold, glinting away like stars in the cold, as cold as the rains in Spain on the plain - ouch!”

Augusta Rabbit stamped firmly upon T.Waddle’s foot to shut him up. The TROOSERS looked a little suspicious.

“Take me to your leader, Number 6339A,” said T.Waddle hastily. “Follow me, all my people, even into the Halls of Bering!”

The whole party set off, Donald Farsier’s TROOSERS leading the way, the Gordy Loch party in the rear. T.Waddle lent Samosa his red-underpants-hat, which more than covered his head and most of his face, so that he would not be recognised. Beaufort stayed behind to eat the car all up and to nip the juicy bits of the real Mr. Loch.

After five minutes, the whole procession emerged into the busy hall where Teddy Bering’s mail-mousling operation was still in full swing.

Lettuces and Gerbil-Feet !

The whole party came out into the hall, and marched without stopping towards Teddy Bering's platform in the middle of the room. Around them, the operatives were still feverishly engaged in crumpling up letters and wheeling great trolleys full of junk-mail to and fro.

The platform had been lavishly decorated with balloons of every colour, tied with string to prevent them from floating away. Teddy and Donald Farsier were waiting at the foot of the steps to the platform; Teddy had a huge smile plastered on his face.

"Welcome, Mr. Loch! We meet at last!" he exclaimed, seizing T.Waddle's pink paw and pumping it up and down. "Farsier," he said over his shoulder, "See that Mr. Loch's people are seated comfortably. Mr. Loch," turning again to the golden-suited young mole, "May I say, from my heart, how pleased I am to welcome you here. I thought you could begin our meeting by saying a few words to all our fellow-workers?" He ushered T.Waddle towards the steps and up to the platform.

Samosa, following with the rest of the party, groaned. Not a speech! As soon as T.Waddle opened his mouth, Teddy would realise that this was not Gordon Loch! The game was up!

Donald Farsier clapped his hands loudly several times, calling for silence. Gradually the hubbub died down, as the TROOSERS stopped what they were doing and turned to listen. Even the little man with the broom interrupted his sweeping and leaned on the handle.

"Fellow workers!" declaimed Teddy Bering, "It is my very great pleasure and privilege to welcome here today a valued business-partner, the Junker of Junk-Mail himself, Gordon Loch!" Great rounds of papery applause burst from the assembly. "Mr. Loch has come here today to see how his junk-mail is sent out to all the houses in the land. I'm sure he will be impressed by the way we do things here. No waste, Mr. Loch, no excuses, just hard work and dedication - isn't that right, my fellow-workers?"

Another burst of applause sounded out, less enthusiastic than before.

"And now Mr. Loch would like to say a few words, and then it's back to work for all of you! Mr. Loch?"

T.Waddle stepped forward, waving regally. Samosa gritted his teeth and shut his eyes - they were about to be unmasked.

"Lettuces and gerbil-feet," began T.Waddle as he addressed the ladies and gentlemen who worked for Teddy Bering, "Let it never be said, that my hot-air balloon would fall out of bed, Let my toe-nails snuggle up in the sun, if I forget this good place and all you have done. I speak to you in words so clear: my fungibles are sweet and very dear, yet I entrust them all to you for to mash and to keep and then I know that uncluttered by sleep, one lemon curd I would squeak to you all and that is why I walk with my ears in the squall: thank you, cruisers, thank you bruisers, thank you all!"

T.Waddle's words were received in silence. One or two of the operatives turned to look at each other. Teddy Bering gazed into the distance, still smiling fixedly but slightly puzzled. Samosa waited for Donald Farsier to pull off his red hat and expose him for the escaped mouse that he was. He was desperately trying not to sneeze.

And then Teddy Bering began to applaud. He clapped furiously and, of course, Donald clapped too and then all the TROOSERS, stamping and shouting and cheering, throwing envelopes in the air. Samosa sneezed and sneezed eagerly. What a reception!

T.Waddle, more surprised than anyone at this, smiled happily, turning his thumbs up to his friends. Teddy Bering shook him by both hands. Samosa stopped sneezing and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Mr. Loch, for those inspiring words! I'm sure we shall all remember them for many days to come." He turned to the mass of workers below him. "Now get back to work, you lazy good-for-nothings, or I'll have you all swept into the shredder! We've got junk-mail to move!"

Teddy switched on his nicest smile for the supposed Gordon Loch and his party. "And now perhaps we can have some light refreshments before giving you a guided tour..."

A table was already set on the platform. Compared with the food at Noodle Nook, this was a pitiful meal - crisps, some sausages on sticks, thin orange-juice, stale curly toast. El looked at it in despair. He whispered to Augusta Rabbit.

Augusta nodded and turned bossily to the beaming host. "Mr. Bering," she said, "On this happy occasion, Mr. Loch's people would like to share with you some specialities which they have brought from Mr. Loch's very own mansion. You will permit this, of course?"

"But of course, my dear - er - rabbit. You are my guests, and I'm sure we would all be delighted to share in food which has come from the larder of Mr. Junk Mail himself. Please, go ahead!"

Without further ado, El Paynter began to unload his pockets - sandwiches, whole nut-roasts, cauliflowers, baked potatoes, cream puddings, stuffed marrows - it seemed his pockets were limitless; out came

Chilled Avocado Soup

or

Creamy Bean Dip with Sesame Toast

or

Stilton Pate with Peaches

Aubergines Stuffed with Almonds

or

Lentil Bake

with a choice of

Brussels Sprouts with Lemon Sauce

or

Sweet Cabbage Salad with Lovage

or

Carrots Cooked in Butter

accompanied by

Jacket Potato Boats

or

Nutty Brown Rice

Side salads

finishing with

Chocolate Ice Cream

Bramble Tart

Banana Fritters

Everyone looked on, impressed, and then tucked in. Even the Run-Alongside Clock had something to eat. Only Samosa noticed that El, with a wink, slipped a couple of extra vegetables on to the plates of Teddy Bering and Donald Farsier.

Conversation flowed fast and furious. T.Waddle, disguised still as Gordy Loch, talked absolute drivel to the unfortunate Donald Farsier on his right and an incredulous Teddy Bering on his left. Fayette and Augusta exchanged views on the state of the trousers of the workers below. The balloons bobbed about in the air.

After about ten minutes, El nudged Samosa. "Look at that pair," he whispered, nodding the direction of Mr. Bering and Mr. Farsier. Samosa looked over - the two men were visibly falling asleep. Donald's eyelids kept dropping, and he had lost his fork and knife under the table. Teddy's head kept lolling over the back of his chair; the fixed grin had never left his face. Even as Samosa watched, both of them finally gave up, Teddy slumping backwards, Donald forwards with his face into his plate, and both began to snore peacefully. T.Waddle, to his credit, did not notice a thing, and kept on prattling nonsense.

"I gave them those vegetables from my soft vegetable-bed - great things for sending people to sleep!" said El proudly.

"Right," said Fayette Feette. "You can stop talking now, T.W. I said, you can stop talking now - now!"

T.Waddle eventually had to be stopped with a baked potato.

"Time to see if we can get out of here!"

Electric Trouser Trap

This was not going to be as easy as they thought. Although Farsier and Bering were far away in the land of dreams, the platform was still surrounded by the hordes of TROOSERS going about their business. It was unlikely that anyone could get past them without arousing suspicion.

The party sat up at the table, pretending nothing had happened, trying to think of a way out. El passed the time by eating, Clock amused himself by waggling his hands back and forward. T.Waddle, unable to keep still now that he had been told to keep quiet, wandered around the platform, peering over the edges at the activities below and patting the balloons. Samosa joined him.

“Do you know the trick you can play with a balloon?” he asked T.W. “If you rub it very hard against your jersey and hold it above someone’s head, then their hair stands on end. Let’s try it with Teddy Bering...”

Samosa untied a balloon, rubbed it vigorously up and down the very nice jersey which his grandma Mousseline Mouse had knitted him; and then held it above Bering. Bering’s hair immediately stood on end, and the mouse and the chattering mole giggled. So they tried it on Farsier. T.Waddle then untied another balloon and did the same thing with Fayette, until she shooed him away. Disconsolate, T.W. dropped his balloon over the side of the platform.

The effect was startling. The balloon floated down until it bumped into a passing operative. The static electricity in the balloon suddenly and unexpectedly lifted the operative’s trousers off; the trousers stuck to the balloon; the worker fell over in surprise.

Immediately, the sprightly little man with the broom bustled up and swept the trouserless operative away. As he did so, another TROOSER walked too close to the balloon, and the same thing happened - trousers stuck to the balloon, and operative was brushed away into the heap in the corner. With the movement all around, the balloon began to bounce slowly hither and thither, collecting trousers as it did so. The sprightly little man with the broom rushed around faster and faster, sweeping furiously.

Augusta Rabbit had been watching: “Brilliant, young mouse! Come on, everyone, let’s get to work!”

Abandoning their hosts to their sleep, everyone on the platform grabbed a balloon, untied it, rubbed it against Samosa’s jersey. Samosa’s whiskers began to stand on end from all the static electricity. Charged up, the balloons were thrown over the side, and in no time at all there were huge gaps in the throng below. At the centre of each gap a balloon bounced gently, now weighted down with dozens of pairs of photocopied trousers.

When the crowds below had been thinned out, everyone grabbed two balloons each and they set off down the steps on to the floor. Augusta put Bering over one shoulder and Farsier over the other. They made towards the entrance through which Samosa had first been dragged by Numbers 7557B and 7423A.

To the right of them and to the left of them, photocopied figures lunged at them, grabbed with papery hands, rustled threateningly.

But if any of them came too close - whoosh! out with the balloon, off with the trousers! The worker was done for!

Halfway to the door they were surrounded by a threatening, grinning crowd of TROOSERS. They pressed in on all sides. Samosa was convinced they were done for. But just then, El pulled down a balloon he had tied to his tail in reserve, swooped it around in a big circle and with a sigh, all the trousers were off and the danger collapsed.

As they passed a pile of bags neatly tied and full of junk-mail, Augusta stopped, placed Teddy Bering in one bag, Donald Farsier in another, and secured the ends. On each bag she tied a large label marked:

H.M. Prison

The party moved on and soon reached the little doorway which led up towards the inside of the pillar-box. Behind them the rustling, threatening band of TROOSERS massed, trying to catch up, but fearful of the un-trousering balloons.

As a precaution, Augusta piled up the balloons at the doorway to make sure that none of the TROOSERS could squeeze past safely and give chase.

“Made it!” exclaimed Samosa happily as he led the way up towards daylight.

SMM, MM, MM, MM, MM, SMM, MM, MM, SM, SFM - and other M's

It appeared, once Samosa Male Mouse was safely back home, that his family had not missed him. He had been gone only five minutes, they thought. His mother was puzzled but pleased to meet his new friends.

Samosa Male Mouse introduced them all:

"El Paynter meet
Moses Mouse, my father the upholsterer;
Moses Mouse - El Paynter.
El - Mosaic Mouse my elder brother,
Mosaic Mouse - El;
El - Mocassin Mouse my youngest sister,
Mocassin Mouse - El;
Mosasauros Mouse my uncle;
Samoan Mum Mouse, my mother;
Mousse Mouse my oldest sister;
Moussaka Mouse my cousin;
Samson Mouse my next oldest brother;
Samosa Female Mouse my twin sister;
Mousseline Mouse, my grandmother;
and Moose Mouse my grandpa."
and Moose Mouse my grandpa."
Mousseline Mouse, my grandmother;
Samosa Female Mouse my twin sister;
Samson Mouse my next oldest brother;
Moussaka Mouse my cousin;
Mousse Mouse my oldest sister;
Samoan Mum Mouse, my mother;
Mosasauros Mouse my uncle;
Mocassin Mouse - Fayette;
Fayette - Mocassin Mouse my youngest sister;
Mosaic Mouse - Fayette;
Fayette - Mosaic Mouse my elder brother,
Moses Mouse - Fayette Fayette.
Moses Mouse, my father the upholsterer;
"Fayette Fayette meet

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Now you know why Samosa Male Mouse was called such a long name. And now you know why it took two hours to make all the introductions, at the end of which time T.Waddle Fontaine had taken Mosasauros Mouse to one side and had told him all there was to know about nothing in particular, El Paynter was nervously looking for something to nibble, and the Run-Alongside Clock had run down completely.

When the introductions were over and done with, T.Waddle was invited to give a

Very short speech.

in the course of which he managed to confuse everyone within earshot by talking about cream-cheese and podded peas.

Mousse Mouse took pity on Clock and wound him up, and enjoyed listening to him go tick-tock in her ear.

Samoan Mum Mouse was delighted with the company of Fayette Feette, who was telling her, and anyone else within earshot, how proud she should be of her son who had destroyed the evil plans of Gordy Loch and Teddy Bering, all by himself.

El Paynter took Moose Mouse to one side.

“Splendid grandson you have, Mr. Mouse, marvellous.” Moose Mouse supposed he was. “And a very comfortable home you have here, Mr. Moose, very nice indeed.” Moose Mouse supposed it was. “However, I have quite some experience in furnishing and decorating homes. I think I may have some ideas which will be of interest to you...”