

Rays From The Rose Cross Magazine

Frankie and the Plaster by Dagmar Frahme

Frankie threw another bit of plaster down to the floor, and chuckled happily. He was standing on top of a suitcase on the highest shelf of the closet, and had a very good view of the mess he had already made on the floor. "Boy, wait till Mrs. Reid sees that," he thought. "Bet she's going to be mad! But she'll never know who did it."

Frankie dug some more bits of plaster out of the wall, and threw them one by one onto the floor. "This is fun," he said to himself. "Wish I'd thought of it long ago."

"Frankie, where are your" suddenly asked a voice from inside the wall.

"Oh, oh," thought Frankie. He certainly hadn't expected Mother Mouse home so soon. He had to get out of there in a hurry! Frankie dropped the last piece of plaster he was carrying carelessly on the suitcase, and scuttled quickly to the hole in the wall by the shelf. He looked cautiously inside, but saw no one in the Mouse living room. "Phew," he whispered, brushing his paw over his forehead, "that was close. Mother must still be in the kitchen. "

"Here I am, Mother," he called, "in the living room."

"Well come out here, please, and help me put these groceries away. "

Frankie, who usually took his time about helping with the groceries, hurried to the kitchen. "Sure, Mother - here, I'll take that," he said, taking a heavy bag of potatoes out of her paw and putting it into the vegetable bin. Mother Mouse looked at Frankie curiously for a minute, but then grabbed for an egg that was starting to roll off the table and forgot all about how unusually gentlemanly Frankie was being all of a sudden.

"What did you do while I was out?" she asked a few minutes later.

"Well - er - I read some, and I — I did some homework, " Frankie mumbled, his head deep inside the refrigerator where he was putting the cheese away. (Actually, he had done two arithmetic problems and read a paragraph in his history book before he thought of throwing plaster, so he did tell Mother at least *part* of the truth.)

"Good," said Mother. "Isn't it about time for another arithmetic test?"

"Yes'm," answered Frankie, wishing Mother wouldn't keep bringing that up. His last report card had not been too good anyhow, but his grade in arithmetic, as his father said, was "ridiculous." Not because he didn't really understand arithmetic, but because he couldn't be bothered with working problems when there were so many more interesting things to do.

"Thank you for helping so nicely, Frankie," said Mother finally. "Now you'd better run along and finish your homework."

"Yes'm, " said Frankie again, and scurried off to his room. He wanted so much to sneak out on the shelf and take another look at the pile of plaster on the floor, but didn't dare. Mother could come into the living room at any time.

Frankie worked on his homework, Mother made the dinner, and all was very still in the Mouse home for about an hour. Father came home, and, as he often did these days, looked at Frankie's homework. "Well, well," he said, in a pleased but rather surprised tone of voice. "You finished it, and all the answers are right. Good work, son." Frankie turned rather red and moved his head so he wouldn't have to look Father in the eye, and Father looked at him long and hard, but said nothing more and left the room.

"Omygosh!" Frankie suddenly whispered, jumping up. He had just remembered that piece of plaster lying on the suitcase. If his parents ever saw that — the plaster on the floor could have come from any place — but if a piece of it were lying on the suitcase, they would certainly know that he had done it. And then he'd be in for trouble!! Mother and Father had told him over and over about how lucky they were to live in a quiet house like Mrs. Reid's - who didn't have a cat, never set out mouse traps, and maybe didn't even know they were there. That's why Father had built their house off the shelf instead of the floor - so they could stay hidden much better. His parents were always telling him that he should do nothing to annoy Mrs. Reid, and that if he *must* get into mischief, he should at least do it outside somewhere.

The Mouse family sat down to dinner - after Mother finally managed to tear Father away from his newspaper - and was enjoying a delicious meal of cheese salad, cheese and onion soup, cheese omelette, cheese and asparagus, cheese-cake, and, for Frankie, a cheese shake.

Suddenly Mrs. Reid's front door slammed shut with a terrible bang which made Mother jump up from her chair, made Father spill his soup and caused him to say a few words rather loudly that probably shouldn't have been said at all, and even scared Frankie. Mrs. Reid must have had her arms full of packages, because she was usually a very quiet lady and certainly never slammed her door if she could help it.

The sound of paper rattling and packages being opened came from downstairs, and the Mouse family settled back to finish dinner. Frankie was just slurping up the last of his milkshake - Mother opened her mouth to say something about that noise, but decided to let it go-when they heard a shriek from below which made them all jump out of their seats.

"Oh, good GRIEF! Where did this mess come from?" Mrs. Reid, whose voice could hardly be heard when she talked on the telephone, and who always spoke more quietly than any of her guests, had certainly forgotten

today that she was supposed to be a very quiet lady, and was talking - evidently to herself - at the top of her lungs. "I just cleaned this closet yesterday, and look at the floor now! I wonder what caused that -Ohhhhh-" she said, in a suddenly softer and rather scared voice. "I wonder if I have mice."

All was quiet for a few minutes while Mrs. Reid went on looking at her closet floor. Mother and Father Mouse were wondering what could possibly have happened to make Mrs. Reid wonder if she had mice, and Frankie was wondering how he was going to keep his parents from discovering that he was the cause of all the trouble.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Reid a few minutes later. "I'm much too tired to clean this up tonight. It will just have to wait till morning. Guess I'd better get some mouse traps in the morning, too."

With that, Mrs. Reid went off into another room, and Mother and Father Mouse looked at each other for several long minutes.

"I'm going out there to see what she found," said Father.

"Yes," said Mother hesitantly, "I suppose you'd better. But be careful."

Father went out on the shelf and looked down, while Mother and Frankie stayed inside their hole, peering at him anxiously — Mother, because she was worried about Father, and Frankie because he was worried about himself. They watched Father looking down at the floor for some time, and as he turned and started to climb up on the suitcase, Frankie quietly crept off to his bedroom.

Father walked across the suitcase, bending over once to pick up something, and then took a few turns around the shelf, investigating several things that he seemed to notice in the wall. Then he walked slowly and thoughtfully back into the hole, looked at Mother Mouse significantly and said, "That boy! " and roared:

"Franklin McDonald Mouse, come out here at once!!"

"Yipe," said Frankie who, as far as he could remember, had never been called by his full name before.

He crept back into the living room as slowly as he could. When he saw his father's face, his heart sank all

the way to his toes. Father was furious!

"What is this?" asked Father, holding something out for Frankie to see.

"It looks -" whispered Frankie, "it looks - sort of - like plaster."

"And how do you suppose plaster got on Mrs. Reid's suitcase?"

"I don't know," whispered Frankie.

"Don't you? And I suppose you don't know how that pile of plaster got on the floor of her closet, either?"

"No," whispered Frankie for the third time.

"**Franklin,**" thundered Father as though Frankie were still in the other room, "I am not in the mood to play games. We are in a desperate situation and I want the **truth** — all of it. How did that plaster get on the floor?"

Frankie swallowed. He looked at Mother Mouse for help, but her face looked as miserable as Father's looked angry, and she said nothing. "I - I - threw it down, " said Frankie finally, when he saw that he

wasn't going to get out of this one. "I thought — well, it seemed like it would be fun."

"Fun!" raged Father. "I suppose it's going to be fun to get caught in those mousetraps, and fun to have to sneak around here the way we never did before! Well, now I'll tell you something else that's going to be fun. Tonight when Mrs. Reid is in bed you are going down there and clean all that up. There's still a chance that, if she doesn't find the mess in the morning, she may think it was all a dream."

Frankie looked at his Father. "Me -clean that up - down there? But - but - what if Mrs. Reid wakes up and sees me?"

"That, Franklin, will be your problem It is time you learned to look out for yourself."

"Oh, Bruce, do you think - " began Mother Mouse, but Father looked at her so sternly that she said no more.

"Now, Franklin," continued Father, "I want you to go down there one half hour after Mrs. Reid's light goes out. She should be sound asleep by then, and you'll need plenty of time to clean up. And there is not to be

one speck of plaster left on the floor. Now good night. Mother and I are going to bed.

Father strode off toward his bedroom followed by Mother who looked sadly at Frankie and murmured softly "Good night, dear," before she closed the door. Frankie sat down, stunned. He just couldn't believe that Father would make him go down there - all by himself. He had never been on Mrs. Reid's floor before - it was too dangerous. Even Father never went there, except one night after a party when there were several delicious crumbs of cake dropped on the floor which Mrs. Reid hadn't noticed. Father got them as a special treat for Frankie, but Mother had been so upset that Father never went down there again for fear of worrying her.

In a little while Mrs. Reid turned off her light. Frankie waited listening to the clock ticking and other night sounds which now seemed to be terribly loud. After half an hour, Frankie took a deep breath and, shaking so hard he could barely stand still, started down to the floor of the closet.

(What he didn't know was that, as soon as he was out of sight, Father and Mother who, of course, had not gone to bed at all, tiptoed out of their room and stood

at the edge of the shelf watching him, Father ready to jump down at any second if Frankie was in danger.)

Frankie started work - and it was a hard job. The plaster kept breaking into smaller and smaller pieces every time he picked some up, and he began to think that he would never get every speck off the floor, the way Father had insisted. Twice he heard sounds that made him stop in his tracks, tail, whiskers, and ears standing straight up with fright. Each time it turned out to be Mrs. Reid moving in her sleep, but to Frankie it sounded like a whole army of goblins and cats, ready to snatch him.

Finally, after about two hours, he was finished. He looked at the floor one more time, and didn't see a single speck of plaster. By this time he was so tired and scared that he could hardly get back up to his hole. Mother, still watching, wanted to help, but Father wouldn't let her. "He's learning quite a lesson tonight," he whispered, "but I want him to learn all of it." And so Father and Mother tiptoed back to their room and, as soon as they heard Frankie safely upstairs again, Father shut the door.

Frankie dragged himself to his room and flopped down on his bed, clothes and all. When he woke up it was morning - long past the time when he usually got

up. For a moment, he couldn't remember why he was lying on top of his bed with his clothes on, and when he did remember, he wished he hadn't. He did not want to go out and face his parents - in fact, he wanted to stay in bed forever. But he *was* hungry, and could smell the pancakes that mother was fixing, and so he finally got up, washed his face, combed his hair, put on a clean shirt, and went down to the kitchen.

"Good morning, Franklin, " said Father, as if nothing had happened.

"Good morning, dear," said Mother, giving him a hug with one paw as she turned a pancake with the other.

Frankie looked at them somewhat surprised. "Good morning," he said finally, and sat down at the table.

Mother served the pancakes, and Father started telling her about something he had heard on the morning news. Soon they were talking about all kinds of things - everything, it seemed, except what had happened the night before - and Frankie finished his pancakes hungrily, saying nothing.

Mother had just started to clear the table when Father suddenly caught her paw. "Shhh-listen," he whispered.

They could hear Mrs. Reid moving around downstairs, her footsteps coming closer and closer to the closet. Mother, Father, and Frankie quickly made their way to the shelf and tried to peer over the side while still keeping hidden.

Mrs. Reid brought her dustpan and broom into the closet. She set down the dustpan, lifted the broom to sweep, and suddenly set it down, her mouth open. She looked at the floor, rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

"My land," she said. "There - there is no plaster. But I could swear I saw a pile of it here last night. I *know* I did."

She leaned against the wall of the closet, while Father, Mother, and Frankie held their breath. Then she sighed. "Well, I sure must have been dreaming," she said finally. "Whatever it was I thought I saw last night is definitely not here now. What a dream! Goodness, I hope I don't have any more like that!"

Taking one last look at the floor, she picked up the broom and dustpan and left the room.

Father, Mother, and Frankie went silently back into their hole, Father sat down on the couch, Mother on a

chair, and Frankie, feeling limp, sat down right in the middle of the floor.

"Well, I guess that means we're safe," said Father, smiling.

"Yes," Mother smiled too.

"You did a good job down there last night, Frankie," went on Father, still smiling. "It took a lot of courage, especially when you heard those noises."

"How did you - I mean-weren't you asleep?" asked Frankie, amazed.

"No, dear, we weren't asleep," said Mother softly. "We were on the shelf watching you all the time. Father would have been right down if you had ever been in trouble."

"Gosh," said Frankie, looking first at Mother and then at Father, who continued to smile at him. "Gosh," he repeated, "and I thought—"

Frankie looked down at the floor.

Then he said, "It sure was stupid of me to throw that plaster.

I'm glad you made me clean it up - and I'm glad I *could* clean it up. For a while there I didn't think I'd be able to get all those specks of plaster. I promise I won't do anything dumb like that again, even if it does seem like fun."

"No," laughed Father kindly, "I don't think you will either, Frankie. But you know what would be fun? How about going down to the beach for a picnic this afternoon? I really think we could use a little relaxation."

"Oh, boy," said Frankie, "that's great. Can I ask a friend to go along?"

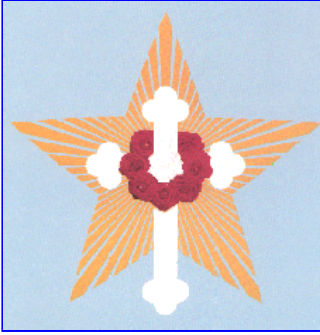
And as the Mouse family got ready for their picnic, Mrs. Reid was doing her breakfast dishes, shaking her head every so often as she thought about her dream. "Maybe I've just been working too hard," she told herself. "Think I'll call up Agatha and see if she doesn't want to go to the beach for a picnic this afternoon. I really think I could use a little relaxation."

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