

The Tears of Power

By
Kit Cain



Illustrated by Scott Peck

The Tears Of Power

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PREFACE

From the time I was 7 years old, it was my privilege and joy to begin active participation in my Grandfather and Father's summer camp for boys in what was then—and still is today—the rural countryside, forests, lakes, and rivers of Yarmouth County, Nova Scotia.

Each evening before bedtime, we would sit around an open campfire on logs or wooden benches and listen to stories of youthful adventure read to us by each cabin's counselor—quite often by the dim light of a flashlight since there was no electrical power. It was a magical experience, and not for many years did I realize that storytelling around an open fire has been an integral part of man's history since the discovery of fire and the beginning of speech. It was Sir Laurens van der Post who, in one of his many wonderful stories, personified to me that experience in the words of Xabbo, the African Bushman:

"The story is like the wind.
It comes from a far-off place
...and we feel it."

The Tears Of Power is my effort to contribute to that great storytelling tradition and to add the dimension of uplifting truth to the challenge and adventure of life itself.

Kit Cain

Victor, The Traveler



Chapter 1.

Life On The Edge Of Everything

Quite often in the busyness of life ... in the search for importance, or love, or fame, or money... one fails to look down into the grasses of the fields, the trees and moss-covered floor of the forest, or the water's edge. Were one to do so with a true observer's eye, he would find there another world ... another realm remarkably like our own, yet made up of creatures who, though appearing to be different from us, have things to deal with not at all unlike our own. There are those who, in those other worlds, pursue their daily lives much as we do in ours, without a great deal of thought or a questioning mind, and who therefore fall victim to the multitudinous traps defined mostly as fate, bad luck, misfortune, travesty, and the many words coined to describe this reactive/unaware state. Though there have been many stories written about the adventures of misfortune, poor judgment, and indiscriminate action, none are quite like the story of one who, for some strange reason, leads a completely frivolous, whimsical, and yet totally charmed life quite different from those about him.

Such a one is a mouse named Victor, and though he seems to revel in and seek out adventurous situations, his continuous and narrow escapes from fate, bad luck, misfortune, and travesty, lead one to wonder to what degree any mouse—or any person for that matter—is really in charge of these factors, and how much emanates from some vast unknown and unseen dimension as though to prove that such a dimension really does exist despite its invisible nature.

Victor is a member of a rather large mouse family whose home, as though it were a sign or symbol of Victor's nature, lies on the very edge of everything: the edge of the forest; the edge of the mountains; the edge of a grassy meadow; the edge of a flowing river; the edge of the air; and, the edge of the great unknown which seems to be of no interest to anyone but Victor. Victor has an insatiable curiosity for everything in his world, and this makes him a wanderer and traveler of immense proportion from his very earliest days. More times than anyone wishes to recall, he has been found by his worried Father in areas very hazardous to mouse survival. Being unlike any of his numerous brothers and sisters, Victor's habit of turning up missing for a meal causes his Father more than mere concern. His Father must

often go rushing up to his lookout high on the rocks above their home searching anxiously for some sign such as a feeding hawk, movements in the grass, screams of distress, or the site of Victor's red bandanna tied to the end of his walking stick, hobo style, as it weaves its way along, barely visible above the grasses of the field. Not a few of the gray hairs on his Father's and Mother's head have been caused by Victor alone—the balance of the family of 10 being at least trainable by constant repetition, and responsive enough to fear to be kept under control.

Victor? ... well it seems as though he has no fear, has a mainspring in his clock that never winds down, and a curiosity that should by all rights have rendered him dead a hundred times over for all his wanderings. After all, the fields are full of snakes and martens, the woods full of coyotes, and the skies full of hawks—all of ruthless cunning and an insatiable hunger—and mice are their favorite food! None of this, however, seems to be of any concern to Victor ... he being possessed of an ever-alert nature, a very good sniffer, sharp eyes, and ears that hear every little noise about him.

One of the things Victor has noticed for some time is the very large, white-headed bald eagle who constantly sits watching from the top of a tall dead snag at the edge of everything. The eagle never seems to be too close, but neither is he ever too far away either. Victor's parents, and his many mouse companions, constantly warn him about the eagle, and there are countless stories of the eagle's attacks on the mouse population, but strangely enough, no one can recall anything but a "close call"—a missed attack—so the eagle is regarded with caution, but not with the paralyzing fear accorded the hawk, the snake, or the coyote. Since the eagle seems to be ever-present, Victor has become accustomed to him, but nevertheless accords him a wide berth whenever he heads out on one of his journeys.

Victor's journeys often take him into the deep forests. On one of his journeys he notices two squirrels busily carrying debris and moss up an old tree to a hole high up in the leaves and branches ... a hole that is obviously going to be their home. Victor thinks to himself that this looks like a very exciting idea. He can do that! A tree house for a mouse! What a wonderful idea! The fact that mice are not supposed to climb trees never occurs to him, and so he immediately begins looking for a suitable tree ... a high one with branches placed just so. Then he can build his own little house way up where other mice don't go.

After a considerable time peering upwards into the tops of trees—and several journeys up what appear to be suitable trees—Victor finally finds what he's looking

for. At this point his energy shifts into high gear. He scurries here, and he scurries there, finding sticks and reeds to interlace into a floor. Then he scurries home for his hammer and saw and nails and nail pouch and ... and ... what else has he forgotten? Victor builds, and builds, and builds until he only lacks a door and some furniture to make his tree house cozy. It is so late in the day he has not even noticing darkness falling. In fact, it is so late he can barely see at all. He realizes that he will miss dinner completely if he doesn't scurry home, so home he goes at top speed as usual, until ... whoops!... DANGER!

His nose and ears tell him there's something behind him in the dark. It moves when he moves; stops when he stops. Victor's mind starts working rapidly, his attention completely on his situation.

"A Marten ", he thinks. "Nope ... too big for a Marten! I can feel the footsteps when they hit the ground. It's something VERY BIG!"

Rising to his tallest height, Victor looks quickly about himself for ideas. Over there ... at the foot of the mountain ... a giant rock! At his very top speed, Victor changes direction from home to the giant rock. The sounds behind him do the same, but they aren't gaining on him.

Reaching the rocks, Victor runs around its base until, by peering around a corner, he can just see down his previous pathway through the woods. There, sneaking along, nose to the ground, is Coyote, licking his chops for the mouse meal he knows is his. When Coyote reaches the rock he begins to circle the base, sniffing his way along Victor's footsteps, ears alert and listening for any sound. As Coyote circles, Victor follows, keeping Coyote just out of sight until he arrives back on his own track. Traveling a few feet further, he looks up, gathers all his strength, and leaps as far up onto the rock as he can leap, his little feet and light weight allowing him to scurry all the way to the top of the rock without missing a step.

In the meantime, coyote picks up his speed, thinking that now it's a chase to catch Victor as he circles the rock. Victor watches cautiously from the top of the rock and when Coyote is approaching the far side of the rock away from him, leaps into the branches of a nearby tree and travels from tree to tree just as he's seen the squirrels do. Coyote soon realizes what kind of a trick Victor has played on him and starts busily trying to scratch and claw his way up onto the huge boulder. The walls of the rock, however, are too steep for his claws and weight, and as he keeps tumbling back to the ground, he grows madder and madder and more determined to reach the top of the rock. Thus freed from Coyote's attention, Victor makes his way back home without mishap.

It might be said here that Victor knows his territory well—being a traveler as he is—and having wandered over every square inch of it at various times that are more safe than at night. It might also be said that Victor has unusual survival capabilities, but those capabilities have a negative side to them as well in that Victor's vigilance is often severely compromised by his curiosity and imagination ... as we shall see!

As Victor approaches his home, he realizes he is too late for his dinner, and to avoid being scolded, he will have to sneak into his room through the back door. As his mother gradually clears the long table after dinner and brings the dirty dishes into the kitchen, Victor peeks through a side door and notices his plate with food on it still at his own place among the twelve place settings of the dinner table. Silently he scurries under the dinner table, reaches up from beneath while his mother is in the kitchen, grabs his plate, and eats his dinner out of sight. As his mother's feet make their way around the table, he hears her remark:

"My goodness ... did I take Victor's plate to the kitchen already? Well ... I guess I must have."

As she disappears back into the kitchen, Victor places his empty plate at one of his sisters' places and scurries off to his room, pretending to be sound asleep when his mother later looks in.

Just as the pre-dawn light starts to cast faint shadows onto the walls of his room, Victor bounds out of bed, pulls on his coveralls, grabs his ball cap and sneaks quietly out of the mouse-cave-house so that his mother, singing and working quietly in the kitchen, doesn't hear him. His most urgent mission of the day revolves around construction of his new tree house; it desperately needs a door ... and Victor knows just where to go to get one.

Straightaway, Victor makes a Bee-line for the town dump ... one of his very favorite places in Edgeville. Situated a short distance from town... at the "edge" of a small river, the "edge" of the main road (to parts as yet unknown to Victor), the "edge" of the forest, and the "edge" of several fields of tall grasses, the Edgeville Town Dump announces itself by a wide, hand-painted sign over the open entrance. The remainder of the dump's perimeter is surrounded by a very high, very thick wall of interlaced Hawthorne thorn bushes and Hawthorne trees closely planted together. Not only does the Hawthorne Fence hide the dump debris from view, but because of its abundance of long, sharp thorns, it provides an almost impenetrable protection from "Dump pickers" who are frowned upon by the locally socially acceptable in the mouse community. "Dump picking" is considered to be beneath the dignity of all self-respecting, hard-working members of the community, and consequently there is a guard shack just inside the thorny entrance which houses, on a permanent basis, two rather burly and formidable-looking rats of questionable social class, but considerable amounts of mouse-threatening capacity.

In his initial dump sojourns, Victor was somewhat intimidated by the impenetrable nature of this thick, thorny wall, and so, spurred on by his insatiable curiosity as to what might lie on the other side which would require such indomitable security, he has found several weak spots in the thorny barrier which he has carefully widened so as to make them difficult to spot except upon close examination. Further inspection of the perimeter wall of thorns revealed a vacated groundhog hole beneath the barrier, and two other vulnerable points where the small river enters the dump premises and again exits them. Times too numerous to count Victor has been spotted or heard by the dump guards and chased... having had to dodge numerous flying tin cans, grapefruit rinds, motor parts, as well as a string of abusive cursing and foul words, until he makes his high speed exit. Invariably, he would draw the guards into the dump in pursuit, and then exit through the main gate so they would not discover his secret entrances.

Arriving at the dump entrance well before its caretakers are prone to arise—a situation made clear by the sound of uproarious snoring emanating from the walls and open window of the caretaker's shack—Victor quietly tiptoes through the front entrance and makes his way down to the back of the dump where he can burrow through the mounds of tin cans and debris without being heard. He vaguely remembers seeing several castoff mouse doors in one general area, but is quite uncertain as to their level of burial or their ease or difficulty of extraction.

Victor can't understand why everyone doesn't love going to the dump. It's really like having one's own private treasure hunt without having to bother figuring out clues—or race someone else for the next clue. In the Dump game, the treasure is either there, right before one's very eyes, or there is nothing of interest on that particular day. There's always another new day and new items to be rescued from certain destruction by fire, rot, or burial ... and these are quite often items which at one time have been very expensive and which the wealthier mice have thrown away for no other reason than that they are tired of looking at them, or maybe don't want to bother to have them repaired ... or have perhaps just tossed them away in a fit of "getting-rid-of-stuff" fever.

Victor quickly finds the spot where he recollected seeing something like a door in one of his dump invasions, and immediately sets to work. How things fly! ... cans, bottles, garbage bags, baby toys, bed parts, lawn mower parts, and an endless list of castaway parts from daily life. Victor talks excitedly to himself as he rummages and burrows in and out, his nose and face peeking up every now and then to see if there is any sign of smoke from the guard shack's tin chimney which would mean the watchmen have awakened and are making coffee ... and in which event he doesn't have much time left for his search.

Victor always talks to himself because, as you might have already guessed, he is his own best friend. And furthermore, no one else can keep up with him—or has his own crazy interests—so he has to do everything by himself and ... well ... he just took to talking to himself as though there were really two Victors, and, bye and bye, and over time, Victor has begun to feel that there really ARE two of him. One is very wise, and one is very foolish, and he's never quite sure which one is the real him because they seem to change places on him faster than he can follow.

Anyway, as he frantically races through debris, fighting for time, he suddenly comes up short.

"Oh!... My goodness!" he exclaims, spying the most beautiful little couch, perhaps a little threadbare and worn, but nevertheless perfect for a tree house. Victor hauls, pushes, shoves, and yanks until the couch sits off in the open by itself. In doing so, and much to his surprise, he has miraculously uncovered the corner of a little pink door ... which he quickly begins to haul and yank on until it, too, is clear of debris.

Even given that the couch and door are mouse-sized, they're still each one a good load for any able-bodied mouse. So Victor now has a double ... well ... a treble dilemma! He looks up and there is smoke coming out of the guard shack chimney! As always, some part of Victor not exactly connected to his mind knows exactly what to do when the chips are down and the dice are about to tumble out onto the table.

Despite Victor's having developed numerous ways to extricate items from the dump without being detected by the rat guards, large items like a door or couch have to go out by way of the river which is the only opening large enough through the thorn fence other than the guarded gate itself. Unfortunately, the river flows right past the guard shack on its way through the thorn fence, thus requiring something of a minor miracle in conjunction with careful anticipation of the rat mentality!

Quickly assessing the situation, and realizing that since he doesn't already have a couch or door, but stands a slim chance of gaining both, Victor decides that he really has nothing to lose. So, talking to himself and pulling at the door, he manages to get it into the water where he ties it with a Weeping Willow branch to the door handle while he goes back after the couch.

When, finally, after much perspiration, Victor lands the couch on top of the door, using the door as a sort of barge, he casts off the willow branch and falls exhausted onto the couch. The current then slowly sweeps them all downstream toward the guard shack, the opening underneath the thorn fence, and subsequent freedom.

As the pink door barge with couch on top and Victor collapsed on top of the couch approach the guard shack, two fat rat guards came out, coffee in hand, to stretch

in the early dawn light. Immediately upon seeing the guards, Victor scurries down under the couch and peers out from under the couch's cloth skirt.

At first the guards notice nothing, but as the barge draws closer, one guard looks at the other, then back at the floating illusion:

"What's THAT!" Rat #1 asks.

"I dunno", Rat #2 replies, "Looks like a couch on a door!"

"That's what I said" says Rat #1.

"That's what I thought you said", says Rat #2. "But what the hell's a couch doing on a door?...and...and ...what the hell's a couch doing on a door THERE in the middle of the river! Is this a dream or somep'm?"

"I dunno," says Rat #1. "The coffee's awful strong this mornin'."

"Well," says Rat #2, "it ain't movin' all THAT fast! Let's watch it for awhile; maybe it'll disappear."

"Good idear," says Rat #1.

A few minutes later, the door and couch start to slide under the thorn barrier.

"There, it's startin' to disappear awready," says Rat #2.

As the lazy guards lie back against the river bank in the early morning sun, the door barge drifts slowly out of sight under the thorn barrier toward freedom.

"Another day in Paradise," says Rat #2, yawning.

"Unless that darned little mouse comes around here again," adds Rat #1.

"MOUSE!!" exclaim both rats sitting up straight all at once.

"The door...uh,..cou... It's gotta be that darned mouse! AFTER HIM!" exclaims Rat #1.

Both rats throw their coffee cups aside and run clumsily toward the guard shack, out the gate, and down toward the river bank in a comedy of tripping, slipping, falling, helping each other over logs, and finally sliding down the muddy river bank to the edge of the river just outside the thorn barrier.

On arriving at the river's edge, what do the rat guards see but a couch dumped on the far bank...apparently abandoned.

"Ahhh...we missed 'im agin," says Rat #1. "He's gone on down the river on the door."

"Yeah....so whadda we do about the couch?" asks Rat #2.

"You wanna swim over and get it?" asks Rat #1.

"Get what?" asks Rat #2.

"The couch, you dummy!" says Rat #1

"What couch izzat?" says Rat #1, and both rats break out into uproarious laughter, smack each other on the shoulder and walk back together to the guard shack.

As soon as they're out of sight, Victor, holding himself out of sight under the thorn fence and still sitting on the barn door barge, slowly pulls the door and himself out from under the thorns and drifts over to the couch. Loading it up once again, he rests peacefully and smugly on the couch as the river does the work of floating him down to the river bank closest to his new tree house.

Once Victor arrives, he hauls his new possessions ashore and immediately heads for his storehouses which contain the accumulation of many many trips to the town dump. These storehouses are small caves and openings in rocks at the foot of the mountain, the entrance covered by a stone—or an opening in a hollow log—anyplace his treasures can be stored safely out of sight. Victor has in mind a wheeled dolly, a pulley, and a rope. He recalls from memory that he has all these items somewhere in storage, but just exactly where is unknown. However that's really okay because it's been fun finding these treasures at the dump in the first place and it's certainly going to be fun to find them all over again—and who knows what else he might find that he's completely forgotten about.

Victor arrives at the first of his storehouses, puts his back against the big stone he's rolled across the door, and grunts and groans until it moves enough for him to pass. Then again begins such a flurry and frenzy of activity and talking to himself that any passer-by might easily take the cave's occupant to be completely out of his mind. Victor's rummaging in the first storehouse makes him almost forget what he actually came there for. So many things have to be closely examined, marveled over, tried on, or set aside to be fixed as soon as the tree house is done, that Victor almost misses the coils of orange polyester rope he'll need to raise the door and couch up to his tree house.

Victor repeats the same procedure again and again at each of the next two storehouses. Finally, as is often the case in mouse world as well as several levels above mouse world, the very last item uncovered turns out to be the wheeled dolly and the pulley blocks. And also, of course, in keeping with the true nature of the obstructed universe, the dolly has a flat tire ... and Victor must run back home for his tools and tire repair kit before he can continue with his task.

Still undaunted by his harrowing tasks, and lugging the large coil of rope along with the several pulley blocks on top of the newly repaired dolly, Victor scurries up to his new tree home to make fast the pulley so he can haul up the door and couch. Being totally absorbed in his work and mind, Victor is startled almost into heart failure by the loud sound of someone very authoritatively clearing his throat immediately

behind him. He jumps back to find himself staring at two very large squirrels who are glaring at him, hands on their hips.

"Hi ," Victor says defensively.

There is no response from the squirrels as they size Victor up. Finally, the fatter one speaks aggressively.

"What're you doin' here?"

"Why ... uh ... building a tree house!" Victor replies timidly.

"MICE DON'T LIVE IN TREES!" yells the fat squirrel derisively.

"But ... but ... I'm not bothering anyone," Victor replies.

"Trees are squirrel territory, not mouse territory," the fat squirrel replies, and they moved threateningly toward him. Victor backs away, adding:

"Well ... I ... uh ... didn't think you'd mind if I ..."

"We mind! ... Now ... GET OUT! GET OUT BEFORE WE THROW YOU OUT!" Roars the squirrel.

With that, Victor's quick-thinking, mind remembers his father's sage advice:

"Discretion is the better part of valor!"

"Yes ... yes ... I suddenly remember that I have to be somewhere!" and Victor dashes down the tree, stopping only long enough at the bottom to wipe the sweat off his brow, but not too long because just as he moves, his tree house comes crashing to the ground behind him. Victor looks up in disbelief. The two squirrels glare down at him.

"BEAT IT!" says the fat one.

Chapter 2.

The Vital Nature Of Vigilance

And so Victor slowly makes his way home. One might say he is disillusioned, except ... except ... it really isn't that. One can say, however, that his wonderful illusions have been stepped down a notch or two into the realm of disappointment, as evidenced by Victor's tears of sorrow for himself, his imagined smashings and batterings of squirreldom demonstrated by a string of angry words, karate chops, kicks, and violent blows to the imagined head of a squirrel. Victor is, in fact, feeling so sorry for himself—and so angry at the same time—that his usual all-important vigilance is severely compromised. In his haste to return to the protection of his home, he takes a shortcut and wanders out into the open field, still angrily gesticulating and cursing all squirrels as bullies.

Suddenly—too late—he looks up. The eagle is diving on him at an incredible rate of speed, claws outstretched, beak open, eyes burning holes into Victor's stunned mind. The eagle's scream is so loud and piercing that it strikes terror into his heart. The



thought of his death flashes through his being and then everything goes blank. The eagle's wing smashes into Victor, picking him up and sending him sailing ten feet through the air to fall in a heap on the ground. Before Victor can realize what has happened, or get up and run, the eagle is on top of him again, screaming into his face, and bashing him with his wing again and again.

"Oh my gosh!" thinks Victor, "He's just playing with me before he eats me!"

Suddenly Victor becomes very calm. Standing tall, he looks very intently straight into the eagle's eyes, and for the tiniest second the eagle seems to recognize that look, then continues the buffetings and the screams, knocking Victor back into the shelter of the woods. The eagle then stops, looks about with a head-swiveling gaze, screams again into the sky, and flies off to orbit in the air currents high above.

Victor is clinging for dear life to a little bush and shaking uncontrollably. The bush's leaves rustle so much it sounds as though the wind is moving them. Part of Victor is shaking with fear, but another part of him has become very calm. There is a new look in Victor's eyes—a look not unlike the look of an Eagle! Something seems to have changed inside Victor, changed irrevocably so that he can never be the same again. He has confronted his death—and returned from the experience—all in the twinkling of an eye. His mind is very still—no thought capable of forming itself. The entire event is just stored away for future contemplation and Victor now shakily makes his way homeward once again, all anger disuaged, and vigilance now firmly enthroned at the center of his attention.

It is several days before Victor can regain his normal composure ... or even move from his room. His mother becomes quite concerned, peering into his room occasionally and asking kindly:

"Is everything all right, Victor? Are you feeling all right, Dear?"

"Yes, Mom," replies Victor. "I'm fine. I'm just needing a little rest."

Not for anything in the world would Victor let on what had happened with the eagle. That would surely put an end to his freedom and he is not about to let that happen. During these several days of rest, the event of the eagle's attack plays itself over and over again in Victor's imagination, sometimes waking him up in the middle of the night out of a deep sleep and leaving him terrified. Try as he might, he can make no sense of it with his mind. Still, in that split second when the eagle looked at him and he looked deeply into the eagle's eyes, he felt he had seen into the eagle's very being. There is something ... something that happened in that instant that he just cannot explain.

Just as time is the changer of all things, so is it also the healer of all things as well. Slowly ... slowly ... the memory of Victor's first brush with death fades into

the distance of all past events, and Victor comes back to life one morning when the wind is right ... the wind, that is, from the town dump which carries with it the smell of smoke from burning debris that only a dump can produce. Nothing can motivate Victor more at this time of his life than a treasure hunt, and no treasure hunt can match the eager expectations and curiosity brought on in anticipation of the week's accumulation at the dump during his absence ... and no treasure hunt can be announced more loudly than by the smell of dump smoke. To Victor, the smell of dump smoke is as enticing as the smell of fresh-baked bread to any other member of the mouse world ... or even higher worlds. It is really a visit to the dump that brings Victor fully back to life.

Going to the kitchen early, as he often does when only his mother is there fixing breakfast for the whole family, Victor grabs a bowl of sunflower seeds, stuffs some in his pocket, and tries to eat as quietly and inconspicuously as possible. As usual, his mother asks:

"What are you going to do today, Victor?"

And, just as always, Victor has an answer which is true enough to be true, but vague enough to give him vast amounts of the freedom which comes from other people not knowing the whole story.

"I'm going to ride on the garbage truck and help Smitty load up," replies Victor.

"Honestly," replies his Mom, "I wish you wouldn't do that every Friday. Your clothes smell so horribly I can hardly get them clean."

"Umhum," replies Victor, having learned the value of silence early on, and grateful that his mother does not know the difference in smells between a garbage truck and the smoke from the dump fires.

Victor glances at the clock and realizes he has only five minutes to get to Smitty's house and the garbage truck before it starts its early morning Friday pickup run. Rushing out of the house and down the street toward Smitty's place, he arrives just in time to see Smitty climbing into the driver's seat of the big garbage truck.

"Hi, Smitty ... got room for me today?" Victor asks.

"Hello, Victor. I always have room for you." Smitty replies. "You gonna visit your Aunt Daisy as usual?"

"Yep." Replies Victor, climbing into the dump truck cab.

As the truck backs around, Smitty's helper, "Big Jack", jumps on the platform at the truck's rear and signals he's ready to start pickups. As the truck moves slowly ahead, Victor's head peers out the window watching Big Jack, then glances back at Smitty to make sure he's not asleep at the wheel ... an event which occurs more frequently

than Smitty or anyone else is likely to admit. At each approaching intersection Victor yells out "Clear on the right" or "Car coming". Or, if the truck is moving too fast for Big Jack to keep up, Victor gives the appropriate command to wait or slow down. It isn't that Smitty can't see perfectly well in the side view mirrors, but rather that he's probably hunched over the steering wheel sound asleep. It appears to be such a problem that Victor wonders how the garbage manages to be collected when he isn't there ... and furthermore, there's a very large number of dents, bends, and scrapes in the truck's front end attesting to its numerous encounters with immovable objects.

When, finally, the truck approaches Aunt Daisy's beautifully flower-surrounded little mouse house, Victor knows that the thorn fence of the dump lies just a few hundred feet away. He thanks Smitty for the ride, then carefully makes his way through the bushes beside Aunt Daisy's house, ostensibly headed for the back door, but all the while masking the true purpose of his intentions. Only on rare occasions does Victor visit Aunt Daisy ... only often enough to not make a liar out of him. She's a real bore anyway!

So Victor has himself well covered. His Mom thinks he's on the garbage truck ... which he is ... for a while ... and that he smells because garbage smells ... which is true, at least in part. And Smitty thinks he just likes riding on the truck ... which is true ... and that he visits his Aunt Daisy on Fridays ... which is occasionally true. Only Victor knows that the whole thing has been carefully staged so Victor can go treasure hunting at the dump and not be discovered.

And there is that darned eagle again! ... quite a distance away to be sure, and high enough up in the old snag to be able to see Victor wherever he goes. So perhaps the eagle also knows when Victor goes to the dump, but Victor is very careful to not let himself be caught out in the open again. He has learned his lesson well about not allowing the preoccupation of anger to displace his vigilance.

Threading his way through the bushes and undergrowth beside Aunt Daisy's mouse house, Victor arrives at the high, thick, thorn fence which forms the dump's side boundary. He stops before a large flat rock, lifting one edge a few inches, and reaches underneath to grab a thick stick. Then, with a grunt and heave, lifts the edge of the rock high enough for the stick to hold it up. Victor then slips into the hole which has previously been hidden by the rock. This is one of Victor's many secret entrances to the dump—this one having been dug and abandoned by a groundhog. Once down inside the hole, he yanks the stick out, allowing the rock to drop over the opening

and hide it from any other prying eyes that might be patrolling the border fence. On the opposite side of the thorn fence, a pile of tin cans heaped up against the thorns starts to make a rattling sound from down underneath. The rattling continues and soon a few cans near the surface move ever so slightly. A little mouse nose—Victor's—pokes up into the air, sniffing for trouble. Discovering none, two mouse eyes emerge next to look in the direction of the guard shack not far away. The two rat guards sit at a makeshift table playing checkers, drinking coffee, and smoking cigars. They are quite absorbed in their game, cursing each other roundly for each move, but Victor decides to wait patiently for a proper diversion before dashing to the more-secluded parts of the dump. From past experience, Victor knows that Smitty will be arriving shortly at the dump gate to empty his load of garbage.

On this particular day, however, Victor knows there is one item on Smitty's truck the he wants to grab for sure. This is another reason he likes riding on the garbage truck ... so he can preview the day's garbage before it's loaded. Earlier today, it had been very difficult for Victor to constrain himself when he noticed a discarded "DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT"—the very best of the best vacuum cleaners made—amongst the trash bags at one of the wealthier mouse houses. Victor spotted it long before the truck drew alongside and his eyes grew very large. He was about to speak—or even jump out and grab it—but he couldn't give himself away. So ... with a look of immense sorrow on his face, he watched as Big Jack chucked it aboard unceremoniously with all the rest of the garbage.

"That's a vacuum cleaner!" says Victor, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible, yet wanting to see if Smitty recognizes it for what it is.

"Yep," says Smitty, "Prob'ly worn out .. ain't nothing but junk goes on this truck!"

"Well ...," thinks Victor to himself. "That's an education! Two pairs of eyes can sure see the same thing in completely different ways!"

As soon as the arrival of Smitty's truck diverts the guards' attention, Victor scurries to the approximate area where Smitty will be dumping his truckload of garbage. One is never exactly sure where the truck is going to disgorge its contents, consequently one has to be very nimble afoot when the first sign of debris comes catapulting over the face of the escarpment. More than once Victor has let his vigilance wander from what comes raining down from above to what interests him most at his feet, and been almost inundated with stinking garbage. But such is the inevitable fate of treasure hunters ... from mouse world up, if the truth be known!

Such is also the case today—however, with a slightly different nuance! Victor's attention is riveted on the upper edge of the garbage ledge. As Smitty's truck

begins to unload, Victor sees the vacuum cleaner come tumbling out, headed for almost certain destruction or inundation on impact. With absolutely no thought of his personal well-being, Victor charges into the wall of falling debris, his whole attention riveted on that twisting, turning, DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT. Despite the possibility of dire future consequences, Victor snags the DIRT SUCKER by its hose before impact and staggers out of the foul-smelling mess with both himself and the vacuum cleaner unharmed. Equally as quickly, he carries himself and his new-found treasure out of sight of Smitty and Big Jack who will surely be looking into the back end of the truck to make sure it is completely empty.

Upon cleaning himself and his new treasure at the edge of the river which runs through part of the dump, Victor becomes more and more excited. It looks ... well ... it looks used ... but not very used. The final question is: does it work? And this is a question that will have to remain unanswered for a while yet. The next major priority has already presented itself—that being how to get the DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT and himself out of the dump together in such a way that they both remain together and don't get caught. The tunnel by which Victor entered the dump is not a possibility; there's too much exposure. After a moment's thought, Victor realizes he has to create a diversion.

He remembers the whereabouts of certain crucial items he's stumbled across in his treasure-hunting excavations: a junked barbeque; an out-dated propane tank; and several worn-out tires. Scurrying to the farthest point of the dump away from the front gate, he drags these items together, one by one. He then hooks the propane tank to the barbeque and piles the tires on top of the barbeque along with as many aerosol cans as he can gather in 30 seconds. Then he lights off the barbeque burner, turning it up to "FULL ON". Knowing it will take a few minutes for things to "warm up", Victor meanders slowly back to where the DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT lies awaiting its salvation.

Victor is not quite there when the first of many rapid explosions turn the lazy days of dumpdom into a war-torn battleground of confusion. First to be affected, of course, are the guards, who, being ex-military, immediately respond according to their training:

"HIT THE DIRT!" yells Rat #1 and both rats scurry for hiding places.

"WHAZZAT?" yells Rat #2 from under the checker table.

"I think we're under attack," yells Rat #1 from under the guard shack.

"Hey, the dump's on fire! We been bombed!" exclaims Rat #2 upon seeing a mountain of black smoke billowing up in ever-increasing quantities from the rear of the dump.

"Call the Police! Call the Army! ... and ... and ... call the Fire Department!" orders Rat #1
"You call 'em," replies Rat #2. "I ain't movin' for nothin'!"
"You call 'em or you're fired!" retorts Rat #1.
"You can't fire me ... you work for ME!" yells Rat #2.
"Oh ... darn!" mumbles Rat #1 disappearing into the guard shack after the telephone.

In a few moments, the Army, the Police, and the Fire Department all arrive. Victor, meanwhile, has positioned himself with the DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT behind a pile of debris not far from the dump gate to await what he knows will inevitably happen. After a short argument about who goes first into the dump, the Army rats, with the Dump guards immediately behind them, creep surreptitiously like trained guerrillas toward the rear of the dump. The Police follow at a very safe distance, and the Fire Department, hoses at the ready, brings up the rear.

Victor, seeing the gate abandoned, makes his way towards it hauling the DIRT SUCKER'S DELIGHT by the hose over his shoulder so as to put some distance between himself and what will surely be an event requiring lots of explanations from many levels of government. Just as Victor makes it out the gate, Rat #2 looks back in that direction. His mouth falls open. He stammers, stutters, and points in the direction of Victor. Rat #1, quickly assessing the situation, slams his hand over Rat #2's mouth and knocks his pointing finger down.

"Shut up! ... Shut up!" he whispers emphatically. "That's not a mouse towing a vacuum cleaner!"

"It ... it ain't?" says mouse #2 incredulously.

"Nope! It's another one of them illusions," says Rat#1.

By this time the Army has discovered the barbeque and the burning tires and are glaring at the rat guards. Not to be daunted by the ridiculousness of the situation, Rat #2 assumes the position of authority and yells:

"IT'S THEM TERRORISTS AGAIN! Search the dump before they get to the village!"

And while the Police and Army organize for a massive search, the Fire Department promptly turns the hose on the barbeque and tires.

Chapter 3.

The Mysterious Eagle

After Victor's narrow escape from the wild scene he's created at the town dump, he heads by indirect means to his friend Roger's shop, which is where he most often goes for mechanical help. Though Roger doesn't feel very old, he is none-the-less old enough to be Victor's great-grandfather ... and certainly he's wise enough to be. Roger can repair anything mechanical, and thus the sign on the edge of his shop says simply: "REPAIRS". As Victor walks in towing the DIRT SUCKERS DELIGHT, Roger barely looks up from the grinding wheel where he's working.

"Been to the dump, I see," says Roger.

"Ummm," replies Victor, knowing well enough by now that he can tell no tall tales or put forth any veiled truths to Roger. It almost seems like Roger is psychic, but more than likely he just knows all kinds of things like the difference in smells between a mouse and the town dump. Victor stands there patiently waiting for Roger to finish his grinding, which he does soon enough, then walks over to put a critical eye on the DIRT SUCKER.

"Oh ... that's a good one!" says Roger. "I'll say one thing for you young fellow, you sure know a good thing when you see it. Well, go plug it in and see if it works."

Victor goes over to the workbench, plugs in the DIRT SUCKER and ... of course ... it doesn't work.

"Awww...," whines Victor, "DARN!"

"You don't get something for nothing in this part of the world, young man," says Roger. "They threw it away for a reason. Take it apart and let's see what doesn't work.

Victor sets to work frantically, and quickly has parts strewn all over the workbench.

"You do remember how it came apart, don't you?" asks Roger

"Yup!" says Victor confidently ... and Roger knows Victor knows, but then if Victor does forget, Roger also knows exactly how it goes back together. After a particularly prolonged period of silence and marked inactivity, Roger looks inquisitively towards Victor's work bench to see Victor sitting on his tall stool looking very dejected.

"What!" asks Roger.

"I can't find anything wrong; it all looks brand new," replies Victor.

Having arrived at this point numerous times with Victor on other projects, Roger

knows it's time for some brief, first-hand instructions. Picking up his ancient voltmeter, Roger moves over to Victor's workbench.

"Guess we'll have to do a few tests," says Roger, setting up his volt meter. "I've shown you how to use this thing before. Now ... take the leads and put them where I tell you. First of all, make sure there's power coming through the power cord to the motor."

Victor puts the leads of the meter where the cord joins the motor; the meter needle jumps.

"Good work" says Roger. "Now you know the plug and the power cord are good, but you also know the motor isn't working. Now smell the motor."

"Pew!" says Victor scrunching up his nose. "Smells like burned something!"

"And that's exactly what the problem is," says Roger. "The motor's burned out."

"Ohhh...No," exclaims Victor looking very dejected.

"That's maybe not so terrible as it might seem. See that pile of junk in the corner?" replies Roger

pointing to a huge number of old castaways and whatnots stacked to the roof in the far corner of the shop. "That's the stuff that still works. The bigger pile outdoors is the stuff that doesn't work, but I keep it around for parts."

"Is there a motor for a DIRT SUCKER in that pile?" asks Victor.

"You never can tell what's in that pile," says Roger. "You just go have to look for yourself."

Roger, being very wise—and fully understanding the enthusiasm of youth—knows full well there are several DIRT SUCKER motors in the pile—somewhere—and that



half the fun for Victor will be to discover one. With that, Roger goes back to his workbench and Victor goes to work feverishly tearing the pile apart.

"HEY!" admonishes Roger loudly. "CAREFULLY!"

"Oh!!," says Victor, slowing down to a more careful gait. "Sorry."

In record time, Victor uncovers a DIRT SUCKER motor, holds it triumphantly over his head for Roger to see ... and Roger smiles triumphantly as well. Also in record time, Victor has replaced the burned-out motor, has the DIRT SUCKER whining away at full speed cleaning, cleaning, cleaning everything in the shop. Every now and then he opens the dust bag to see what wonders he's picked up in the dark corners ... talking away to himself as he works. Roger can't help smiling to himself. He certainly has never seen anything like Victor before!

"What're you going to do with that thing, Victor?" asks Roger when Victor has tired of his cleaning activities.

"Uh-Oh! Now that's a problem," exclaims Victor, sinking into deep thought. He can't just put it in his storehouses; it's too nice. And he can't take it home; too many questions. Sensing the dilemma, Roger quickly comes to his aid.

"Put it over there under the work bench, Victor. Come back and get it when you figure out what to do with it."

"Thanks Roger," says Victor, coming back to life as he stuffs the DIRT SUCKER under the work bench and departs for further adventures. They are not long in coming.

When Victor arrives home, he starts to change his clothes when his mother, who somehow, and in a way mysterious to mothers, always knows exactly when her children are home, calls to him:

"Victor."

"Yes, Mom," replies Victor.

"Did your sister find you?"

"I haven't seen her lately," replies Victor.

"She went looking for you an hour ago," says Mom.

Victor immediately knows that this is not a good situation at all. Delores, being his twin sister, is the only sister who really matters to Victor, and thus the only one he calls his "Sister". The other five he knows as names, and though they live in the same house, for all they care about him they might as well live in another universe. Delores, however, is a different matter. Victor matters to Delores, and Delores matters to Victor ... that is to say, they care about each other deeply. And if Dolores has gone looking for Victor, Victor had better right away get on his four winged feet and find her because she does not know the treacherous nature of life in Victor's other world. But ... where to start looking?

"Let's see," thinks Victor to himself. "Where does she think I go on Friday? ... oh, yes, Aunt Daisy's". And straightaway Victor dashes over to Aunt Daisy's, pounds on the door and asks Aunt Daisy if she has seen Delores. Aunt Daisy, being small of mind and large of stature, either doesn't hear the question or has other more important (to her) things to say. She immediately begins to ramble on about the terrible things happening on the other side of mouse world while Victor waits patiently looking up at her and smiling, his foot tap-tapping the ground impatiently. Victor takes it as long as he can, then, wagging his open hand in front of her face to get her attention, says:

"Aunt Daisy! ... Aunt Daisy!"

"What, Victor?" she replies just as impatiently.

"Delores! ... where is Delores?"

"Delores? Is she lost? She was just here a few minutes ago! How could she be lost?" demands Aunt Daisy.

"Did she say where she was going, Aunt Daisy?"

"Um... let's see ... she said she was going looking for you ... but you're right here, aren't you?" replies Aunt Daisy.

"Where! ... Aunt Daisy ... where!" demands Victor.

"Oh, I don't know, out in the forest I think ... but you don't go into the forest, do you Victor?"

"Not unless I can't help it," replies Victor. "Aunt Daisy ... I've got to go find Delores right away!"

"But ... but ... she's looking for you Victor!"

"Yes, I know, Aunt Daisy, but how can she find me if I don't find her?" and Victor quickly vanishes to leave Aunt Daisy wrestling with his last comment.

Victor first heads for the most dangerous part of his territory: the edge of the field where it joins the forest. Scurrying along his well-worn path just inside the forest, he keeps his eyes looking up as much as on the ground. The hawks do their stalking from the dead trees and snags at the forest's edge. Victor spots the eagle perched on one of his favorite snags, but far enough away so as to not be a source of concern.

Suddenly Victor hears screams that paralyze him with feelings that can only be described as terror mixed with helpless remorse. He instantly recognizes Delores' cries for help, and, looking in the direction of the cries, sees Delores clutched in the claws of a huge hawk flying off to devour her. Poor Victor can only watch helplessly at the plight of his sister whom he dearly loves. The thought that he is responsible in some way for her death makes him weep with such a heavy heart that even the

trees and grasses feel his sorrow and pain. Even the wind cries a mournful moan through the pine trees above him as he watches. With only the feeblest little voice, he cries out to the wind and the sky and the Something he knows is Somewhere, but can never be found.

"Oh...Help! ... please, please, Help! Take me ... not Delores! She's too good to die!"

And with these words, Victor notices the eagle spread his giant wings and take flight. His powerful wings seem to tear at the air, his ferocious head reaching into the sky as he fights for altitude with unequaled power. Victor is transfixed. His mind is still, as though some unknown part of him knows an unusual event is about to occur.



There is no apparent interest on the eagle's part with the drama unfolding—and indeed there is nothing unusual about a hawk keeping the mouse population under control as a means to his own survival. The eagle continues to climb as high and as fast as he can in a great wide circle. As the eagle comes between the sun and himself, Victor loses sight of him. He is unable to see those giant wings fold and the eagle drop like a bullet under complete control, emerging from the brilliant light of the sun with such force that when he slams into the hawk there are feathers everywhere. The hawk, caught completely by surprise and stunned by the violent impact, immediately let's go of Delores in order to defend himself against whatever it is that has collided with him. Seeing that it's the eagle, and knowing full

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well the eagle's size and ferocious nature, the hawk flees for the protection of the forest, and the eagle climbs to altitude again and continues to circle high above.

As fate or some greater intelligence might have planned things, Delores' fall lands her directly in the river ... a fact quickly ascertained by Victor who has scurried up the closest pine tree for a better view. With no thought at all for his own safety, Victor puts his legs into overdrive and heads for the probable point of Delores' impact, all the while mumbling incoherently to himself as his four little legs eat up the distance to the river. Arriving at the river bank precisely at the moment of Delores' cannonball landing in the water—and the subsequent plume of water flying high in the air above the point of impact—Victor leaps into the water and swims out to help her. As Delores breaks the surface sputtering and flailing the water, she sees Victor and exclaims excitedly:

"WOW!... did you see my cannonball, Victor! It must've been fantast...."

"Be quiet, Delores! Grab hold of my fur," which she does without hesitation and Victor swims for shore.

Delores looks up and behind her to see the hawk turning to renew his attack—this time for a double prize.

"Oh, Victor, here comes the hawk again," she exclaims. "What can we do?"

But before either can move, there is a dull thud and feathers flying all over the place again as the eagle impacts on the hawk stunning him and knocking him off balance. Two more times the eagle attacks the hawk, keeping him from his prizes.

And then, just as Victor and Delores gain the river bank, the eagle himself dives on them, screaming a blood-curdling scream, and the wind from his wings—or is it his wings themselves—knocks them into the tall grasses next to the river bank. When Victor finally peers out of the grass, he sees the eagle chasing the hawk away down the river.

"How terribly lucky we are," says Delores. "Oh, what a nightmare! ... being attacked by a hawk and then an eagle. Thank heavens they both missed us. Victor, I am so sorry. Thank you for saving me."

"Umh..." grunts Victor, still deep in thought. After a minute he adds:

"Delores ... eagles never miss their mark!"

"Victor! ... What are you saying? ... that the eagle helped us? Why ... that's unheard of!" replies Delores.

"I can't be sure he didn't ... and besides ... anything's possible in my world," says Victor, and together they carefully and cautiously make their way home.