

THE CRICKET

IN TIMES SQUARE

By George Selden



Garth Williams

DRAWINGS BY

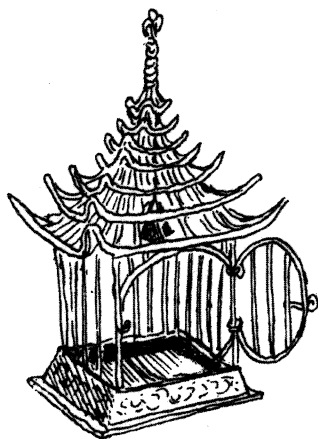
FOREWORD AND UPDATES BY STACEY LEE

GEORGE SELDEN

The Cricket in Times Square

ILLUSTRATED BY

Garth Williams



FOREWORD AND UPDATES BY

Stacey Lee



SQUARE
FISH

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX
New York



An imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC
120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271 • mackids.com

Copyright © 1960 by George Selden Thompson and Garth Williams.
Copyright renewed © 1988 by George Selden Thompson and Garth Williams.
Foreword copyright © 2022 by Stacey Lee. All rights reserved.

Square Fish and the Square Fish logo are trademarks of Macmillan and are used by
Farrar Straus Giroux under license from Macmillan.

Our books may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational, or business use.
Please contact your local bookseller or the Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales
Department at (800) 221-7945 ext. 5442 or by email at
MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-12640

Originally published in the United States by Farrar Straus Giroux
First Square Fish edition, 2008
Revised and updated edition, 2022
Square Fish logo designed by Filomena Tuosto
Printed in the United States of America by Lakeside Book Company,
Harrisonburg, Virginia

ISBN 978-0-374-39040-2 (paperback reissue)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

AR: 4.9 / LEXILE: 780L

CONTENTS

FOREWORD / vii

ONE: *Tucker* / 1

TWO: *Mario* / 8

THREE: *Chester* / 17

FOUR: *Harry Cat* / 27

FIVE: *Sunday Morning* / 35

SIX: *Mr. Fong* / 43

SEVEN: *The Cricket Cage* / 49

EIGHT: *Tucker's Life's Savings* / 57

NINE: *Supper with Mr. Fong* / 71

TEN: *The Dinner Party* / 79

ELEVEN: *The Jinx* / 91

TWELVE: *Mr. Smedley* / 101

THIRTEEN: *Fame* / 112

FOURTEEN: *Orpheus* / 125

FIFTEEN: *Grand Central Station* / 135

Foreword by Stacey Lee

For over sixty years, *The Cricket in Times Square* has enthralled children with its timeless tale of a business-savvy mouse and a kind alley cat who help a country cricket adapt to his new home in the New York City subway. With its themes of friendship and belonging, eight-year-old me devoured this story, each chapter bringing new complications as Mario tries to convince his parents, owners of a newspaper stand, to let him keep Chester Cricket as a pet. What would become of Chester after he accidentally eats the family's two-dollar bill? And could he win over Mario's grumpy mother with his music? As the only Chinese kid for miles and miles who never felt like I belonged anywhere, I felt a special connection with this lost cricket, especially since, like Chester, I could also play music by ear.

One thing always stood out to me, and that was George Selden's inclusion of two Chinese men in the story, one of whom sells Mario a cricket cage. When I read it as a child, I was thrilled to see Chinese people in a book. In my limited worldview, I simply accepted that the author's depiction of these men must be right. But stereotypes have a tricky way of reinforcing themselves, leaving fingerprints in the soft parts of a child's mind that, the more often they are pressed in, calcify into permanent marks.

Today's young readers are socially minded, independent thinkers, and we are counting on them to shape a more equitable future for all. Thanks to the generosity of George Selden's estate, we have an opportunity to redress some issues of representation we believe will make this story more in step with the times. To that end, we've taken out the broken accents and the bowing, and we've created authentic characters for Chester and his friends to meet. This version of *The Cricket in Times Square* is the same story we all know and love, with a few small but mighty changes. May it invite readers into Chester's world for sixty more years to come.

THE CRICKET IN TIMES SQUARE

ONE

Tucker

A mouse was looking at Mario.

The mouse's name was Tucker, and he was sitting in the opening of an abandoned drain pipe in the subway station at Times Square. The drain pipe was his home. Back a few feet in the wall, it opened out into a pocket that Tucker had filled with the bits of paper and shreds of cloth he collected. And when he wasn't collecting, "scrounging" as he called it, or sleeping, he liked to sit at the opening of the drain pipe and watch the world go by—at least as much of the world as hurried through the Times Square subway station.

Tucker finished the last few crumbs of a cookie he was eating—a Lorna Doone shortbread he had found earlier in the evening—and licked off his whiskers. "Such a pity," he sighed.

The Cricket in Times Square

Every Saturday night now for almost a year he had watched Mario tending his father's newsstand. On weekdays, of course, the boy had to get to bed early, but over the weekends Papa Bellini let him take his part in helping out with the family business. Far into the night Mario waited. Papa hoped that by staying open as late as possible his newsstand might get some of the business that would otherwise have gone to the larger stands. But there wasn't much business tonight.

"The poor kid might as well go home," murmured Tucker Mouse to himself. He looked around the station.

The bustle of the day had long since subsided, and even the nighttime crowds, returning from the theaters and movies, had vanished. Now and then a person or two would come down one of the many stairs that led from the street and dart through the station. But at this hour everyone was in a hurry to get to bed. On the lower level the trains were running much less often. There would be a long stretch of silence; then the mounting roar as a string of cars approached Times Square; then a pause while it let off old passengers and took on new ones; and finally the rush of sound as it disappeared up the dark tunnel. And the hush fell again. There was an emptiness in the air. The whole station seemed to be waiting for the crowds of people it needed.

Tucker

Tucker Mouse looked back at Mario. He was sitting on a three-legged stool behind the counter of the newsstand. In front of him all the magazines and newspapers were displayed as neatly as he knew how to make them. Papa Bellini had made the newsstand himself many years ago. The space inside was big enough for Mario, but Mama and Papa were cramped when they each took their turn. A shelf ran along one side, and on it were a little secondhand radio, a box of Kleenex (for Mama's hay fever), a box of kitchen matches (for lighting Papa's pipe), a cash register (for money—which there wasn't much of), and an alarm clock (for no good reason at all). The cash register had one drawer, which was always open. It had gotten stuck once, with all the money the Bellinis had in the world inside it, so Papa decided it would be safer never to shut it again. When the stand was closed for the night, the money that was left there to start off the new day was perfectly safe, because Papa had also made a big wooden cover, with a lock, that fitted over the whole newsstand.

Mario had been listening to the radio. He switched it off. Way down the tracks he could see the lights of the shuttle coming toward him. On the level of the station where the newsstand was, the only tracks were the ones on which the shuttle ran. The shuttle was a short train

The Cricket in Times Square

that went back and forth from Times Square to Grand Central Station, taking people from the subways on the west side of New York City over to the lines on the east. Mario knew most of the conductors on the shuttle. They all liked him and came over to talk between trips.

The shuttle screeched to a stop beside the newsstand, blowing a gust of hot air in front of it. Only nine or ten people got out. Tucker watched anxiously to see if any of them stopped to buy a paper.

"All late papers!" shouted Mario as they hurried by. "Magazines!"

No one stopped. Hardly anyone even looked at him. Mario sank back on his stool. All evening long he had sold only fifteen papers and four magazines. In the drain pipe Tucker Mouse, who had been keeping count too, sighed and scratched his ear.

Mario's friend Paul, a conductor on the shuttle, came over to the stand. "Any luck?" he asked.

"No," said Mario. "Maybe on the next train."

"There's going to be less and less until morning," said Paul.

Mario rested his chin on the palm of his hand. "I can't understand it," he said. "It's Saturday night too. Even the Sunday papers aren't going."

Paul leaned up against the newsstand. "You're up awfully late tonight," he said.



The Cricket in Times Square

"Well, I can sleep on Sundays," said Mario. "Besides, school's out now. Mama and Papa are picking me up on the way home. They went to visit some friends. Saturday's the only chance they have."

Over a loudspeaker came a voice saying, "Next train for Grand Central, track 2."

"Night, Mario," Paul said. He started off toward the shuttle. Then he stopped, reached in his pocket, and flipped a half dollar over the counter. Mario caught the big coin. "I'll take a Sunday *Times*," Paul said, and picked up the newspaper.

"Hey wait!" Mario called after him. "It's only twenty-five cents. You've got a quarter coming."

But Paul was already in the car. The door slid closed. He smiled and waved through the window. With a lurch the shuttle moved off, its lights glimmering away through the darkness.

Tucker Mouse smiled too. He liked Paul. In fact he liked anybody who was nice to Mario. But it was late now: time to crawl back to his comfortable niche in the wall and go to sleep. Even a mouse who lives in the subway station in Times Square has to sleep sometimes. And Tucker had a big day planned for tomorrow, collecting things for his home and snapping up bits of food that fell from the lunch counters all over the station. He was just about to turn into the drain pipe when he heard a very strange sound.

Tucker

Now Tucker Mouse had heard almost all the sounds that can be heard in New York City. He had heard the rumble of subway trains and the shriek their iron wheels make when they go around a corner. From above, through the iron grilles that open onto the streets, he had heard the thrumming of the rubber tires of automobiles, and the hooting of their horns, and the howling of their brakes. And he had heard the babble of voices when the station was full of human beings, and the barking of the dogs that some of them had on leashes. Birds, the pigeons of New York, and cats, and even the high purring of airplanes above the city Tucker had heard. But in all his days, and on all his journeys through the greatest city in the world, Tucker had never heard a sound quite like this one.

TWO

Mario

Mario heard the sound too. He stood up and listened intently. The noise of the shuttle rattled off into silence. From the streets above came the quiet murmur of the late traffic. There was a noise of rustling nothingness in the station. Still Mario listened, straining to catch the mysterious sound . . . And there it came again.

It was like a quick stroke across the strings of a violin, or like a harp that has been plucked suddenly. If a leaf in a green forest far from New York had fallen at midnight through the darkness into a thicket, it might have sounded like that.

Mario thought he knew what it was. The summer before he had gone to visit a friend who lived on Long Island. One afternoon, as the low sun reached long yellow fingers through the tall grass, he had stopped beside

Mario

a meadow to listen to just such a noise. But there had been many of them then—a chorus. Now there was only one. Faintly it came again through the subway station.

Mario slipped out of the newsstand and stood waiting. The next time he heard the sound, he went toward it. It seemed to come from one corner, next to the stairs that led up to Forty-Second Street. Softly Mario went toward the spot. For several minutes there was only the whispering silence. Whatever it was that was making the sound had heard him coming and was quiet. Silently Mario waited. Then he heard it again, rising from a pile of waste papers and soot that had blown against the concrete wall.

He went down and very gently began to lift off the papers. One by one he inspected them and laid them to one side. Down near the bottom the papers became dirtier and dirtier. Mario reached the floor. He began to feel with his hands through the dust and soot. And wedged in a crack under all the refuse, he found what he'd been looking for.

It was a little insect, about an inch long and covered with dirt. It had six legs, two long antennae on its head, and what seemed to be a pair of wings folded on its back. Holding his discovery as carefully as his fingers could, Mario lifted the insect up and rested him in the palm of his hand.

The Cricket in Times Square

"A cricket!" he exclaimed.

Keeping his cupped hand very steady, Mario walked back to the newsstand. The cricket didn't move. And he didn't make that little musical noise anymore. He just lay perfectly still—as if he were sleeping, or frightened to death.

Mario pulled out a Kleenex and laid the cricket on it. Then he took another and started to dust him off. Ever so softly he tapped the hard black shell, and the antennae, and legs, and wings. Gradually the dirt that had collected on the insect fell away. His true color was still black, but now it had a bright, glossy sheen.

When Mario had cleaned off the cricket as much as he could, he hunted around the floor of the station for a matchbox. In a minute he'd found one and knocked out one end. Then he folded a sheet of Kleenex, tucked it in the box, and put the cricket in. It made a perfect bed. The cricket seemed to like his new home. He moved around a few times and settled himself comfortably.

Mario sat for a time, just looking. He was so happy and excited that when anyone walked through the station, he forgot to shout "Newspapers!" and "Magazines!"

Then a thought occurred to him: perhaps the cricket was hungry. He rummaged through his jacket pocket and found a piece of a chocolate bar that had been left over from supper. Mario broke off one corner and held



The Cricket in Times Square

it out to the cricket on the end of his finger. Cautiously the insect lifted his head to the chocolate. He seemed to smell it a moment, then took a bite. A shiver of pleasure went over Mario as the cricket ate from his hand.

Mama and Papa Bellini came up the stairs from the lower level of the station. Mama was a short woman—a little stouter than she liked to admit—who wheezed and got a red face when she had to climb steps. Papa was tall and somewhat bent over, but he had a kindness that shone about him. There seemed always to be something smiling inside Papa. Mario was so busy feeding his cricket that he didn't see them when they came up to the newsstand.

"So?" said Mama, craning over the counter. "What now?"

"I found a cricket!" Mario exclaimed. He picked the insect up very gently between his thumb and forefinger and held him out for his parents to see.

Mama studied the little black creature carefully. "It's a bug," she pronounced finally. "Throw it away."

Mario's happiness fell in ruins. "No, Mama," he said anxiously. "It's a special kind of bug. Crickets are good luck."

"Good luck, eh?" Mama's voice had a way of sounding very dry when she didn't believe something.



The Cricket in Times Square

"Cricketers are good luck—so I suppose ants are better luck. And cockroaches are the best luck of all. Throw it away."

"Please, Mama, I want to keep him for a pet."

"No bugs are coming to my house," said Mama. "We've got enough already with the screens full of holes. He'll whistle to his friends—they'll come from all over—we'll have a houseful of cricketers."

"No we won't," said Mario in a low voice. "I'll fix the screens." But he knew it was no use arguing with Mama. When she had made up her mind, you might as well try to reason with the Eighth Avenue subway.

"How was selling tonight?" asked Papa. He was a peaceful man and always tried to head off arguments. Changing the subject was something he did very well.

"Fifteen papers and four magazines," said Mario. "And Paul just bought a Sunday *Times*."

"No one took a *Musical America*, or anything else nice?" Papa was very proud that his newsstand carried all of what he called the "quality magazines."

"No," answered Mario.

"So you spend less time playing with cricketers, you'll sell more papers," said Mama.

"Oh now now," Papa soothed her. "Mario can't help it if nobody buys."

"You can tell the temperature with crickets too," said

Mario

Mario. "You count the number of chirps in a minute, divide by four, and add forty. They're very intelligent."

"Who needs a cricketer-thermometer?" said Mama. "It's coming on summer, it's New York—it's hot. And how do you know so much about cricketers? Are you one?"

"Jimmy Lebovski told me last summer," said Mario.

"Then give it to the expert Jimmy Lebovski," said Mama. "Bugs carry germs. He doesn't come in the house."

Mario looked down at his new friend in the palm of his hand. Just for once he had been really happy. The cricket seemed to know that something was wrong. He jumped onto the shelf and crept into the matchbox.

"He could keep it here in the newsstand," suggested Papa.

Mario jumped at that idea. "Yes, and then he wouldn't have to come home. I could feed him here, and leave him here, and you'd never have to see him," he said to Mama. "And when you took the stand, I'd bring him with me."

Mama paused. "Cricketer," she said scornfully. "What do we want with a cricketer?"

"What do we want with a newsstand?" said Papa. "We got it—let's keep it." There was something resigned, but nice, about Papa.

"You said I could have a dog," said Mario, "but I never

The Cricket in Times Square

got him. And I never got a cat, or a bird, or anything. I wanted this cricket for my pet.”

“He’s yours, then,” said Papa. And when Papa spoke in a certain quiet tone—that was all there was to it. Even Mama didn’t dare disagree.

She took a deep breath. “Oh well—” she sighed. And Mario knew it would be all right. Mama’s saying “oh well” was her way of giving in. “But only on trial he stays. At the first sign of the cricketer friends, or if we come down with peculiar diseases—out he goes!”

“Yes, Mama, anything you say,” said Mario.

“Come on, Mario,” Papa said. “Help me close up.”

Mario held the matchbox up to his eye. He was sure the cricket looked much happier, now that he could stay. “Good night,” he said. “I’ll be back in the morning.”

“Talking to it yet!” said Mama. “I’ve got a cricketer for a son.”

Papa took one side of the cover to the newsstand, Mario the other, and together they fitted it on. Papa locked it. As they were going downstairs to the trains, Mario looked back over his shoulder. He could almost feel the cricket, snuggled away in his matchbox bed, in the darkness.

THREE

Chester

Tucker Mouse had been watching the Bellinis and listening to what they said. Next to scrounging, eavesdropping on human beings was what he enjoyed most. That was one of the reasons he lived in the Times Square subway station. As soon as the family disappeared, he darted out across the floor and scooted up to the newsstand. At one side the boards had separated and there was a wide space he could jump through. He'd been in a few times before—just exploring. For a moment he stood under the three-legged stool, letting his eyes get used to the darkness. Then he jumped up on it.

“Psst!” he whispered. “Hey, you up there—are you awake?”

There was no answer.

The Cricket in Times Square

"Psst! Psst! Hey!" Tucker whispered again, louder this time.

From the shelf above came a scuffling, like little feet feeling their way to the edge. "Who is that going 'psst'?" said a voice.

"It's me," said Tucker. "Down here on the stool."

A black head, with two shiny black eyes, peered down at him. "Who are you?"

"A mouse," said Tucker. "Who are *you*?"

"I'm Chester Cricket," said the cricket. He had a high, musical voice. Everything he said seemed to be spoken to an unheard melody.

"My name's Tucker," said Tucker Mouse. "Can I come up?"

"I guess so," said Chester Cricket. "This isn't my house anyway."

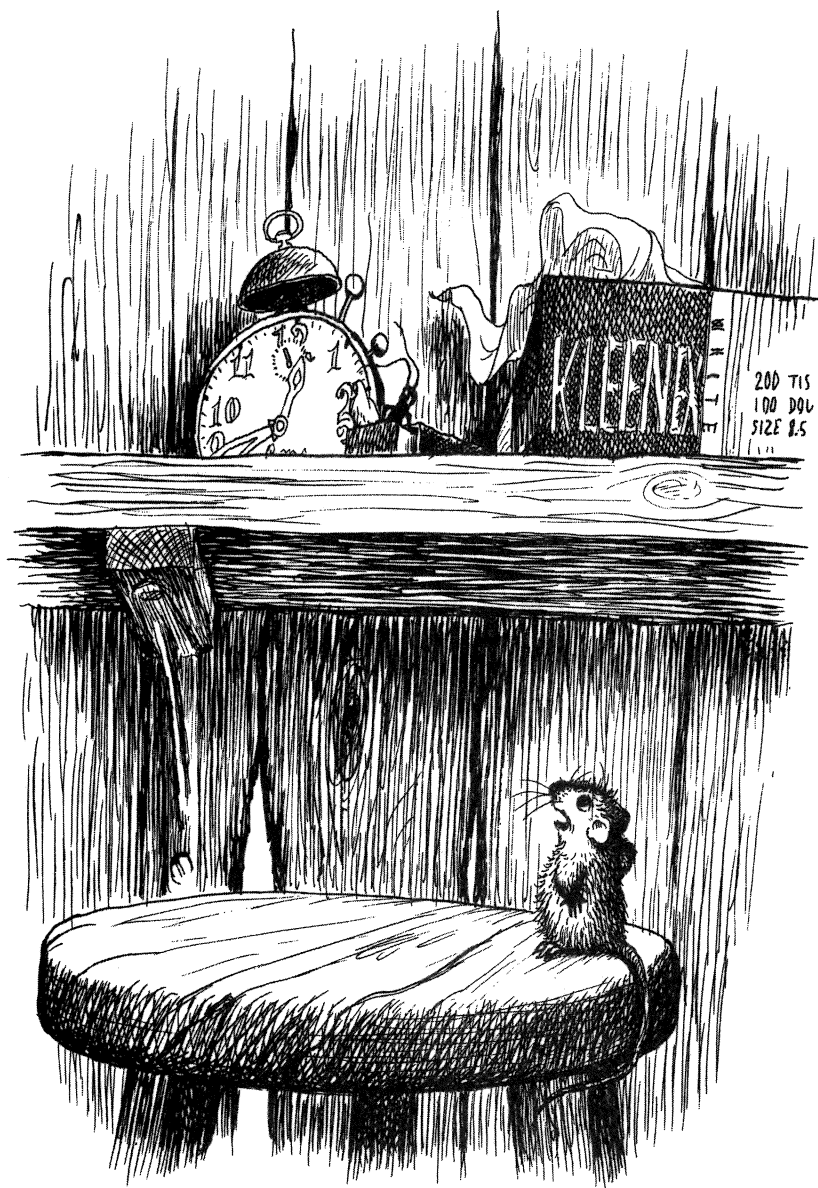
Tucker jumped up beside the cricket and looked him all over. "A cricket," he said admiringly. "So you're a cricket. I never saw one before."

"I've seen mice before," the cricket said. "I knew quite a few back in Connecticut."

"Is that where you're from?" asked Tucker.

"Yes," said Chester. "I guess I'll never see it again," he added wistfully.

"How did you get to New York?" asked Tucker Mouse.



The Cricket in Times Square

"It's a long story," sighed the cricket.

"Tell me," said Tucker, settling back on his haunches. He loved to hear stories. It was almost as much fun as eavesdropping—if the story was true.

"Well, it must have been two—no, three days ago," Chester Cricket began. "I was sitting on top of my stump, just enjoying the weather and thinking how nice it was that summer had started. I live inside an old tree stump, next to a willow tree, and I often go up to the roof to look around. And I'd been practicing jumping that day too. On the other side of the stump from the willow tree there's a brook that runs past, and I'd been jumping back and forth across it to get my legs in condition for the summer. I do a lot of jumping, you know."

"Me too," said Tucker Mouse. "Especially around the rush hour."

"And I had just finished jumping when I smelled something," Chester went on, "liverwurst, which I love."

"You like liverwurst?" Tucker broke in. "Wait! Wait! Just wait!"

In one leap, he sprang down all the way from the shelf to the floor and dashed over to his drain pipe. Chester shook his head as he watched him go. He thought Tucker was a very excitable person—even for a mouse.

Inside the drain pipe, Tucker's nest was a jumble of papers, scraps of cloth, buttons, lost jewelry, small

change, and everything else that can be picked up in a subway station. Tucker tossed things left and right in a wild search. Neatness was not one of the things he aimed at in life. At last he discovered what he was looking for: a big piece of liverwurst he had found earlier that evening. It was meant to be for breakfast tomorrow, but he decided that meeting his first cricket was a special occasion. Holding the liverwurst between his teeth, he whisked back to the newsstand.

"Look!" he said proudly, dropping the meat in front of Chester Cricket. "Liverwurst! You continue the story—we'll enjoy a snack too."

"That's very nice of you," said Chester. He was touched that a mouse he had known only a few minutes would share his food with him. "I had a little chocolate before, but besides that, nothing for three days."

"Eat! Eat!" said Tucker. He bit the liverwurst into two pieces and gave Chester the bigger one. "So you smelled the liverwurst—then what happened?"

"I hopped down from the stump and went off toward the smell," said Chester.

"Very logical," said Tucker Mouse, munching with his cheeks full. "Exactly what I would have done."

"It was coming from a picnic basket," said Chester. "A couple of tuffets away from my stump the meadow begins, and there was a whole bunch of people having



Chester

a picnic. They had hard-boiled eggs, and cold roast chicken, and roast beef, and a whole lot of other things besides the liverwurst sandwiches which I smelled."

Tucker Mouse moaned with pleasure at the thought of all that food.

"They were having such a good time laughing and singing songs that they didn't notice me when I jumped into the picnic basket," continued Chester. "I was sure they wouldn't mind if I had just a taste."

"Naturally not," said Tucker Mouse sympathetically. "Why mind? Plenty for all. Who could blame you?"

"Now, I have to admit," Chester went on, "I had more than a taste. As a matter of fact, I ate so much that I couldn't keep my eyes open—what with being tired from the jumping and everything. And I fell asleep right there in the picnic basket. The first thing I knew, somebody had put a bag on top of me that had the last of the roast beef sandwiches in it. I couldn't move!"

"Imagine!" Tucker exclaimed. "Trapped under roast beef sandwiches! Well, there are worse fates."

"At first I wasn't too frightened," said Chester. "After all, I thought, they probably come from New Canaan or some other nearby town. They'll have to unpack the basket sooner or later. Little did I know!" He shook his head and sighed. "I could feel the basket being carried into a car and riding somewhere and then being lifted

The Cricket in Times Square

down. That must have been the railroad station. Then I went up again and there was a rattling and roaring sound, the way a train makes. By this time I was pretty scared. I knew every minute was taking me farther away from my stump, but there wasn't anything I could do. I was getting awfully cramped too, under those roast beef sandwiches."

"Didn't you try to eat your way out?" asked Tucker.

"I didn't have any room," said Chester. "But every now and then the train would give a lurch and I managed to free myself a little. We traveled on and on, and then the train stopped. I didn't have any idea where we were, but as soon as the basket was carried off, I could tell from the noise it must be New York."

"You never were here before?" Tucker asked.

"Goodness no!" said Chester. "But I've heard about it. There was a swallow I used to know who told about flying over New York every spring and fall on her way to the North and back. But what would I be doing here?" He shifted uneasily from one set of legs to another. "I'm a country cricket."

"Don't worry," said Tucker Mouse. "I'll feed you liverwurst. You'll be all right. Go on with the story."

"It's almost over," said Chester. "The people got off one train and walked a ways and got on another—even noisier than the first."

Chester

"Must have been the subway," said Tucker.

"I guess so," Chester Cricket said. "You can imagine how scared I was. I didn't know *where* I was going! For all I knew they could have been heading for Texas, although I don't guess many people from Texas come all the way to Connecticut for a picnic."

"It could happen," said Tucker, nodding his head.

"Anyway I worked furiously to get loose. And finally I made it. When they got off the second train, I took a flying leap and landed in a pile of dirt over in the corner of this place where we are."

"Such an introduction to New York," said Tucker, "to land in a pile of dirt in the Times Square subway station. Tsk, tsk, tsk."

"And here I am," Chester concluded forlornly. "I've been lying over there for three days not knowing what to do. At last I got so nervous I began to chirp."

"That was the sound!" interrupted Tucker Mouse. "I heard it, but I didn't know what it was."

"Yes, that was me," said Chester. "Usually I don't chirp until later on in the summer—but my goodness, I had to do *something*!"

The cricket had been sitting next to the edge of the shelf. For some reason—perhaps it was a faint noise, like padded feet tiptoeing across the floor—he happened to look down. A shadowy form that had been crouching

The Cricket in Times Square

silently below in the darkness made a spring and landed right next to Tucker and Chester.

“Watch out!” Chester shouted. “A cat!” He dove headfirst into the matchbox.

FOUR

Harry Cat

Chester buried his head in the Kleenex. He didn't want to see his new friend, Tucker Mouse, get killed. Back in Connecticut he had sometimes watched the one-sided fights of cats and mice in the meadow, and unless the mice were near their holes, the fights always ended in the same way. But this cat had been upon them too quickly: Tucker couldn't have escaped.

There wasn't a sound. Chester lifted his head and very cautiously looked behind him. The cat—a huge tiger cat with gray-green eyes and black stripes along his body—was sitting on his hind legs, switching his tail around his forepaws. And directly between those forepaws, in the very jaws of his enemy, sat Tucker Mouse. He was watching Chester curiously. The cricket began to



Harry Cat

make frantic signs that the mouse should look up and see what was looming over him.

Very casually Tucker raised his head. The cat looked straight down on him. "Oh, him," said Tucker, chucking the cat under the chin with his right front paw, "he's my best friend. Come out from the matchbox."

Chester crept out, looking first at one, then the other.

"Chester, meet Harry Cat," said Tucker. "Harry, this is Chester. He's a cricket."

"I'm very pleased to make your acquaintance," said Harry Cat in a silky voice.

"Hello," said Chester. He was sort of ashamed because of all the fuss he'd made. "I wasn't scared for myself. But I thought cats and mice were enemies."

"In the country, maybe," said Tucker. "But in New York we gave up those old habits long ago. Harry is my oldest friend. He lives with me over in the drain pipe. So how was scrounging tonight, Harry?"

"Not so good," said Harry Cat. "I was over in the ash cans on the East Side, but those rich people don't throw out as much garbage as they should."

"Chester, make that noise again for Harry," said Tucker Mouse.

Chester lifted the black wings that were carefully folded across his back and with a quick, expert stroke

The Cricket in Times Square

drew the top one over the bottom. A *thrumm* echoed through the station.

"Lovely—very lovely," said the cat. "This cricket has talent."

"I thought it was singing," said Tucker. "But you do it like playing a violin, with one wing on the other?"

"Yes," said Chester. "These wings aren't much good for flying, but I prefer music anyhow." He made three rapid chirps.

Tucker Mouse and Harry Cat smiled at each other. "It makes me want to purr to hear it," said Harry.

"Some people say a cricket goes 'chee chee chee,'" explained Chester. "And others say, 'treet treet treet,' but we crickets don't think it sounds like either one of those."

"It sounds to me as if you were going 'crik crik crik,'" said Harry.

"Maybe that's why they call him a 'cricket,'" said Tucker.

They all laughed. Tucker had a squeaky laugh that sounded as if he were hiccupping. Chester was feeling much happier now. The future did not seem nearly as gloomy as it had over in the pile of dirt in the corner.

"Are you going to stay a while in New York?" asked Tucker.

"I guess I'll have to," said Chester. "I don't know how to get home."

Harry Cat

"Well, we could always take you to Grand Central Station and put you on a train going back to Connecticut," said Tucker. "But why don't you give the city a try? Meet new people—see new things. Mario likes you very much."

"Yes, but his mother doesn't," said Chester. "She thinks I carry germs."

"Germs!" said Tucker scornfully. "She wouldn't know a germ if one gave her a black eye. Pay no attention."

"Too bad you couldn't have found more successful friends," said Harry Cat. "I fear for the future of this newsstand."

"It's true," echoed Tucker sadly. "They're going broke fast." He jumped up on a pile of magazines and read off the names in the half-light that slanted through the cracks in the wooden cover: "*Art News—Musical America*. Who would read them but a few long-hairs?"

"I don't understand the way you talk," said Chester. Back in the meadow he had listened to bullfrogs, and woodchucks, and rabbits, even a few snakes, but he had never heard anyone speak like Tucker Mouse. "What is a long-hair?"

Tucker scratched his head and thought a moment. "A long-hair is an extra-refined person," he said. "You take an Afghan hound—that's a long-hair."

"Do Afghan hounds read *Musical America*?" asked the cricket.

The Cricket in Times Square

“They would if they could,” said Tucker.

Chester shook his head. “I’m afraid I won’t get along in New York,” he said.

“Oh, sure you will!” squeaked Tucker Mouse. “Harry, suppose we take Chester up and show him Times Square. Would you like that, Chester?”

“I guess so,” said Chester, although he was really a little leery of venturing out into New York City.

The three of them jumped down to the floor. The crack in the side of the newsstand was just wide enough for Harry to get through. As they crossed the station floor, Tucker pointed out the local sights of interest, such as the Nedick’s lunch counter—Tucker spent a lot of time around there—and the Loft’s candy store. Then they came to the drain pipe. Chester had to make short little hops to keep from hitting his head as they went up. There seemed to be hundreds of twistings and turnings, and many other pipes that opened off the main route, but Tucker Mouse knew his way perfectly—even in the dark. At last Chester saw light above them. One more hop brought him out onto the sidewalk. And there he gasped, holding his breath and crouching against the cement.

They were standing at one corner of the Times building, which is at the south end of Times Square. Above the cricket, towers that seemed like mountains of light rose up into the night sky. Even this late the neon signs

Harry Cat

were still blazing. Reds, blues, greens, and yellows flashed down on him. And the air was full of the roar of traffic and the hum of human beings. It was as if Times Square were a kind of shell, with colors and noises breaking in great waves inside it. Chester's heart hurt him and he closed his eyes. The sight was too terrible and beautiful for a cricket who up to now had measured high things by the height of his willow tree and sounds by the burble of a running brook.

"How do you like it?" asked Tucker Mouse.

"Well—it's—it's quite something," Chester stuttered.

"You should see it New Year's Eve," said Harry Cat.

Gradually Chester's eyes got used to the lights. He looked up. And way far above them, above New York, and above the whole world, he made out a star that he knew was a star he used to look at back in Connecticut. When they had gone down to the station and Chester was in the matchbox again, he thought about that star. It made him feel better to think that there was one familiar thing, twinkling above him, amid so much that was new and strange.



FIVE

Sunday Morning

The next morning Mario came back to the newsstand with his father. Usually he slept late on Sunday, but today he was up before either of his parents and kept urging Papa Bellini to hurry.

They lifted off the cover and Mario dashed inside. He held up the matchbox and looked in. There was Chester, lying on the Kleenex. The cricket wasn't asleep though—he had been waiting for Mario. He chirped once.

Papa smiled when he heard the chirp. "He must like it here," he said. "He didn't run away in the night."

"I knew he wouldn't," said Mario.

For breakfast Mario had brought a crust of bread, a lump of sugar, and a cold Brussels sprout. He wasn't quite sure what crickets liked, so he decided to try him

The Cricket in Times Square

out on everything. Chester jumped over Mario's little finger into the palm of his hand where the food was. Back in the meadow his usual diet was leaves and grass, and every now and then a piece of tender bark, but here in New York he was eating bread and candy and liverwurst, and finding them very tasty at that.

When Chester had had as much as he wanted, Mario wrapped what was left in a piece of wax paper and put it inside the cash register. Then he slipped the cricket back inside the matchbox and took him over to one of the lunch counters.

"Look," he said to the counterman. "This is my new pet. He's a cricket."

The counterman's name was Mickey. He had red, curly hair. "That's a fine cricket," he said, peering in at Chester.

"May he have a glass of water, please?" asked Mario.

Mickey said, "Sure," and gave him the glass. Mario held Chester by the hind legs and lowered him carefully until his head was just above the water. Chester dunked his head in and had a big drink. Then he pulled it out, took a breath, and went in for another.

"Why don't you let him stand on the rim?" said Mickey. He was very interested in watching Chester, since he had never seen a cricket drinking from a glass before.

Sunday Morning

Mario set his pet on the edge of the glass and gently drew his hand away. Chester bent down to try to reach the water. But the glass was too slippery. He toppled in. Mario hauled him out and dried him off with a paper napkin. But Chester didn't mind the dunking. He had fallen in the brook a couple of times back in Connecticut. And he knew it would take him a while to get used to city life—like drinking out of glasses.

"How would the cricket like a soda?" asked Mickey.

"Very much, I think," said Mario.

"What flavor?" Mickey asked.

Mario thought a minute. "Strawberry, I guess," he answered. That happened to be his own favorite flavor.

Mickey took a tablespoon and put a drop of strawberry syrup into it. Then he added a drop of cream, a squirt of soda water, and a dip of ice cream about as big as your fingernail. That is how you make a cricket's strawberry soda. He also made one for Mario—a little larger than Chester's, but not too big, because it was free.

When the sodas were gone, Mickey took a paper cup and wrote **CRICKET** on it. "This is his own cup," he said to Mario. "You can come over and get fresh water any time."

"Thanks, Mickey," said Mario. He put Chester back in the matchbox. "I've got to go to get him a house now."



Sunday Morning

"Bring him back soon," Mickey called after them. "I'll make him a sundae too."

At the newsstand Papa Bellini was talking to Mr. Smedley. Mr. Smedley was the best customer the Bellinis had. He was a music teacher who came to buy *Musical America* at ten-thirty in the morning on the last Sunday of every month, on his way home from church. No matter what the weather was like, he always carried a long, neatly rolled umbrella. As usual, Papa and Mr. Smedley had been talking about opera. More than anything else the Bellini family liked Italian opera. Every Saturday during the winter, when the opera was broadcast, they would sit clustered around the radio in the newsstand, straining to hear the music above the din of the subway station.

"Good morning, Mr. Smedley," said Mario. "Guess what I have."

Mr. Smedley couldn't guess.

"A cricket!" said Mario, and held Chester up for the music teacher to see.

"How delightful!" said Mr. Smedley. "What an enchanting little creature."

"Do you want to hold him?" asked Mario.

Mr. Smedley shrank back. "Oh, I don't think so," he said. "I was stung by a bee when I was eight years old, and since then I've been a little timid about insects."

The Cricket in Times Square

"He won't sting you," said Mario. He tipped the matchbox up and Chester fell out in Mr. Smedley's hand. It made the music teacher shiver to feel him. "I heard him chirping last night," said Mario.

"Do you think he'd chirp for me?" asked Mr. Smedley.

"Maybe," said Mario. He put Chester on the counter and said, "Chirp, please." Then, so Chester couldn't misunderstand, he made a chirping noise himself. It didn't sound much like a cricket, but Chester got the idea. He uncrossed his wings and made a real chirp.

Papa and Mr. Smedley exclaimed with delight. "That was a perfect middle C," said Mr. Smedley. He raised his hand like an orchestra conductor, and when he lowered it, Chester chirped on the downbeat.

"Do you want to give him music lessons, Mr. Smedley?" asked Mario.

"What could I teach him?" said Mr. Smedley. "He's already been taught by the greatest teacher of all, Mario—Nature herself. She gave him his wings to rub together and the instinct to make such lovely sounds. I could add nothing to the genius of this little black Orpheus."

"Who is Orpheus, Mr. Smedley?" asked Mario.

"Orpheus was the greatest musician who ever lived," said the music teacher. "Long, long ago he played on

Sunday Morning

a harp—and he played it so beautifully that not only human beings but animals and even the rocks and trees and waterfalls stopped their work to listen to him. The lion left off chasing the deer, the rivers paused in their courses, and the wind held its breath. The whole world was silent.”

Mario didn’t know what to say. He liked that picture of everyone keeping quiet to listen. “That must have been awfully good playing,” he said finally.

Mr. Smedley smiled. “It was,” he said. “Perhaps someday your cricket will play as well. I prophesy great things for a creature of such ability, Mario.”

“You hear?” said Papa Bellini. “He could be famous, maybe.”

Mario heard, all right. And he remembered what Mr. Smedley had said later on that summer. But right now he had other things on his mind. “Papa, can I go down to Chinatown and get my cricket a house?” he asked.

“A house? What kind of a house?” said his father.

“Jimmy Lebovski said that you can buy special cages for them in Chinatown,” Mario explained.

“It’s Sunday,” said Papa. “Stores might not be open.”

“Well, at least I could see where to go later on,” said Mario.

“All right, Mario,” Papa Bellini began, “but—”

But Mario wasn’t waiting for any “buts.” He scooped

The Cricket in Times Square

Chester into the matchbox, shouted "Goodbye, Mr. Smedley" over his shoulder, and headed for the stairway leading to the downtown subway trains. Papa and Mr. Smedley watched him go. Then Papa turned to the music teacher with a happy, hopeless expression on his face, shrugged his shoulders, and the two of them began talking about opera again.

SIX

Mr. Fong

Mario took the IRT local subway downtown. He held the matchbox up at the level of his chest so the cricket could see out. This was the first time Chester had been able to watch where he was going on the subway. The last time he had been buried under roast beef sandwiches. He hung out of the box, gazing up and down the car. Chester was a curious cricket, and as long as he was here in New York, he meant to see as much as he could.

He was staring at an old lady wearing a straw hat, wondering if the flowers on it were real, and if they were what they would taste like, when the train lurched to a halt. Like most people who first ride the subway, Chester wasn't used to the abrupt stops. He toppled out of the matchbox into Mario's lap.

The boy picked him up again. "You've got to be

The Cricket in Times Square

careful," he said, putting his finger over the open end of the box so there was just enough room for Chester to poke his head out.

At the Canal Street stop Mario got off and walked over several blocks to Chinatown. Chester craned his head out as far as he could to get his first look at New York by day. The buildings in this part of town weren't nearly as high as they were in Times Square, but they were still high enough to make Chester Cricket feel very small.

In Chinatown, as Papa had said, all the shops were closed. Mario walked up and down the narrow, curving streets, zigzagging across them so he could look in the windows on both sides. In some he saw the cardboard shells that open up into beautiful paper flowers if you put them in a glass of water, and in others the glass wind harps that tinkle when they're hung where the breeze can reach them. But he couldn't find a cricket cage anywhere.

Down at the end of an alley a man in striped trousers and a blue shirt with the sleeves rolled up was washing the windows of a shop. Through the glass, several instruments were displayed. The instruments were unlike any Mario had seen before. There was a thin, two-stringed instrument that stuck up like the mast of a ship, a pear-shaped guitar, and a cluster of pipes of different lengths.

Mr. Fong

Gold letters across the glass spelled MR. FONG'S FINE INSTRUMENTS.

The man stopped wiping the window and appraised Mario through his spectacles. His brown eyes were warm and curious. "Hello. Are you lost?"

"No. I was looking for somewhere to buy a cricket cage."

The man scratched his neatly styled hair, which was mostly black with a little bit of white. "Cricket cage, huh. You could check Chow's Emporium. But they are closed today."

Mario's shoulders sagged. He'd have to come back another day. He slid open his matchbox so his cricket could look around. It might be a while before they could come back.

The man peered at Chester. "Say, that fellow looks like a real fighter. Strong legs, thick head. That's a Black Head General."

Chester had never been in a fight before, but he was quite proud of his strong jumping legs.

The man picked up a bucket and tossed his rag into it. "Maybe I have something in my shop."

"Are you Mr. Fong?"

"Yes, I am. And who are you?"

"I'm Mario."

The Cricket in Times Square

"Pleased to meet you, Mario. Come in." He opened the door.

Mario's eyes widened at the sight of all the instruments neatly arranged by size on the wall shelves.

"Wait here." Mr. Fong disappeared through a door at the back of the shop.

On the counter, a rack of bronze bells engraved with Chinese characters swayed. Beside the counter, a porcelain vase with chrysanthemums painted on the side held bamboo flutes. Mario stooped to examine them. He really wanted to blow one but decided that was not a good idea. The instruments were probably expensive, and he didn't want to break anything.

Mr. Fong returned, carrying a red-and-green cricket cage in the shape of a pagoda. The roof consisted of seven tiers, each one a little smaller than the one below, with a golden spire poking out the top. At one side was a gate with a tiny latch on it. Mario wanted to own the cage so much that he tingled all over. But it looked as expensive as the instruments.

"This is a very special cricket cage. It was the home of a just and brave fighter who brought much luck to its owner."

"Are crickets lucky?"

"Very. We like to say, 'a little body often harbors a great soul.'"



The Cricket in Times Square

From his pocket, Mario dug out his money. All that remained from his weekly allowance of a quarter was a dime and a nickel. Mario closed his fingers around the coins, knowing the cage must cost more than that.

“Because your cricket seems so remarkable, I will sell the cage for fifteen cents,” Mr. Fong pronounced.

Mario couldn’t believe his ears. He knew Mr. Fong was just being nice, but since he really wanted the cage, he wasn’t going to argue. He handed Mr. Fong the money.

“Thank you.” Grinning from ear to ear, he headed for the door.

“One more thing,” said Mr. Fong.

Slowly, Mario turned around, hoping Mr. Fong hadn’t changed his mind.

“A Black Head General needs a bell to ring when a fight is over.” He removed the tiniest bell from the rack on his counter, which was the size of a thimble. With a length of waxed thread, he hung the bell on the inside of the cage. “That is my gift to you and your cricket.”

Mario put Chester into the cage. The cricket jumped up and knocked against the bell. It tinkled faintly. “I think he likes it. Thank you, Mr. Fong.”

“You’re welcome. I hope the general is happy in his new home.”

SEVEN

The Cricket Cage

That same night, after the Bellinis had gone home, Chester was telling Harry and Tucker about his trip to Chinatown. The cat and the mouse were sitting on the shelf outside, and Chester Cricket was crouched under the bell in the cage. Every minute or so, Tucker would get up and walk around to the other side of the pagoda. He was overcome with admiration for it.

"And Mr. Fong said I looked like a fighter and called me a Black Head General," Chester was saying. "He gave Mario a special bell to ring when a fight is over."

"You don't look the fighting type," said Harry Cat. "I bet you couldn't hurt a mouse."

Tucker Mouse stopped gaping at the cricket cage and his whiskers twitched. "I'll have you know we mice are very tough."

The Cricket in Times Square

A low rumble of a chuckle came from Harry Cat's throat. "Listen to the mouse," he said and gave Tucker a pat on the back that sent him rolling over and over.

"Easy, Harry, easy," said Tucker, picking himself up. "They should put a bell on you." He stood up on his hind legs and looked in through the painted bars of the cage. "What a palace," he murmured. "Beautiful! You could feel like a king living in a place like this."

"Yes," said Chester, "but I'm not so keen on staying in a cage. I'm more used to tree stumps and holes in the ground. It makes me sort of nervous to be locked in here."

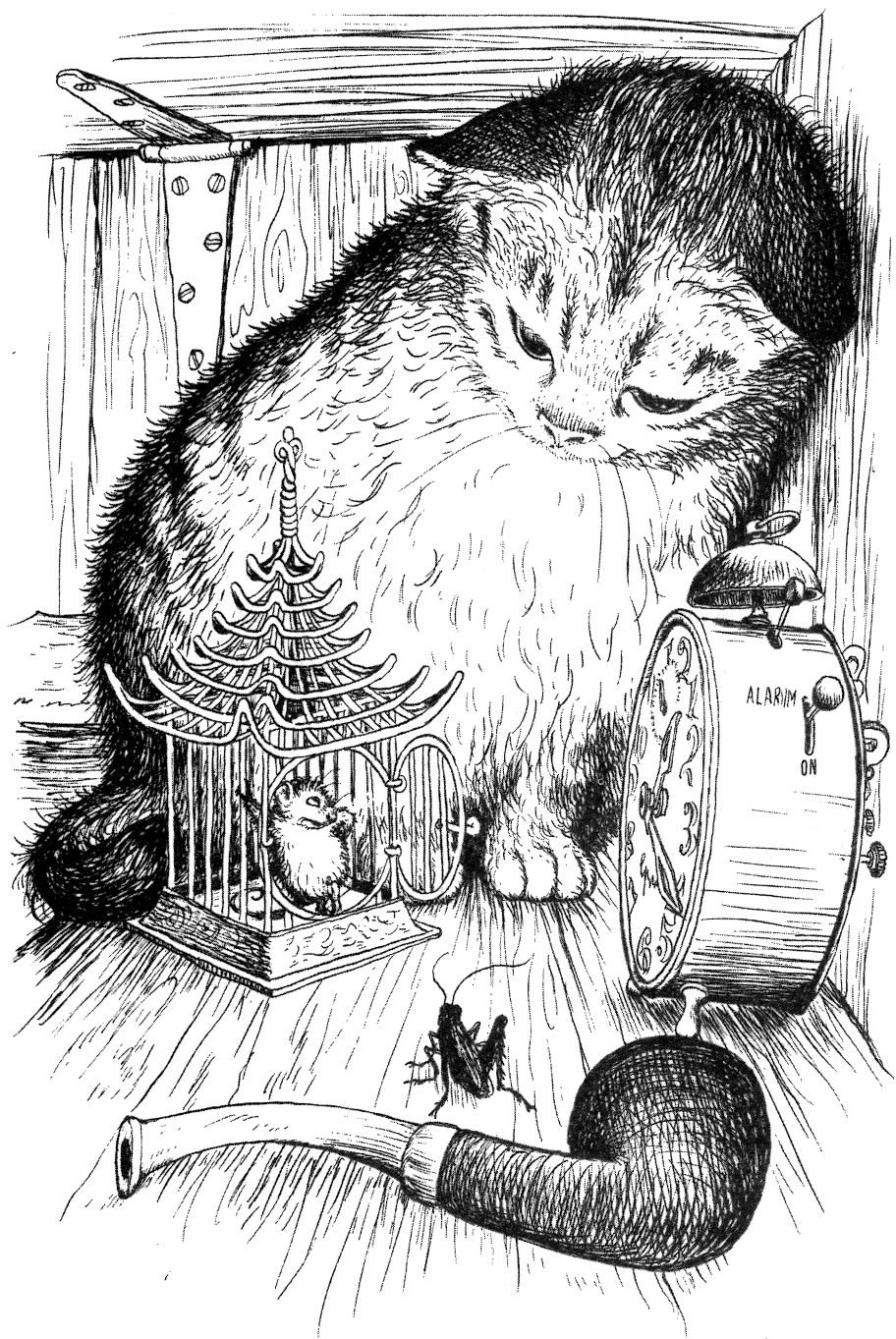
"Do you want to come out?" asked Harry. He sprung one of his nails out of the pad of his right forepaw and lifted the latch of the gate to the cage.

Chester pushed the gate and it swung open. He jumped out. "It's a relief to be free," he said, jumping around the shelf. "There's nothing like freedom."

"Say, Chester," said Tucker, "could I go in for a minute? I was never in a pagoda before."

"Go right ahead," said Chester.

Tucker scrambled through the gate into the cage and pranced all around inside it. He lay down, first on one side, then on the other, and then on his back. "If only I had a silk robe and slippers right now," he said, standing



The Cricket in Times Square

up on his hind legs again and resting one paw on a bar.
“How do I look, Harry?”

“You look like a mouse in a trap,” said Harry Cat.

“Every mouse should end up in a trap so nice,” said Tucker.

“Do you want to sleep in the cage?” asked Chester.

“Oh—could I!” exclaimed the mouse. His idea of luxury was to spend a night in such surroundings.

“Sure,” said Chester. “I prefer the matchbox anyway.”

“There’s only one thing,” said Tucker, stamping with his left hind leg. “This floor. It’s a little hard to sleep on.”

“I’ll go over and get a bunch of paper from the drain pipe,” volunteered Harry Cat.

“No, it’ll make a mess,” said Tucker. “We don’t want to get Chester in trouble with the Bellinis.” He hesitated. “Um—maybe we could find something here.”

“How about a piece of Kleenex,” suggested Chester. “That’s nice and soft.”

“Kleenex would be good,” said Tucker, “but I was wondering—” He paused again.

“Come on, Tucker,” said Harry Cat. “You’ve got something on your mind. Let’s have it.”

“Well,” Tucker began, “I sort of thought that if there were any dollar bills in the cash register—”

Harry burst out laughing. “You might know!” he said

The Cricket Cage

to Chester. "Who but this mouse would want to sleep on dollar bills?"

Chester jumped into the cash register drawer, which was open as usual. "There's a few dollars in here," he called up.

"Plenty to make a mattress," said Tucker Mouse. "Pass some in, please."

Chester passed the first dollar bill up to Harry Cat, who took it over to the cage and pushed it through the gate. Tucker took hold of one end of the bill and shook it out like a blanket. It was old and rumply.

"Careful you don't rip it," said Harry.

"I wouldn't rip it," said Tucker. "This is one mouse who knows the value of a dollar."

Harry brought over the second dollar. It was newer and stiffer than the first. "Let me see," said Tucker. He lifted a corner of each bill, one in either paw. "This new one can go on the bottom—I like a crispy, clean sheet—and I'll pull the old one over for a cover. Now, a pillow is what I need. Please look in the cash register again."

Harry and Chester searched the compartments of the open drawer. There was a little loose change, but not much else.

"How about a fifty-cent piece?" said Harry.

"Too flat," answered Tucker Mouse.

The rear half of the drawer was still inside the cash

The Cricket in Times Square

register. Chester crawled back. It was dark and he couldn't see where he was going. He felt around until his head bumped against something. Whatever it was, it seemed to be big and round. Chester pushed and shoved and finally got it back out into the dim light of the newsstand. It was one of Mama Bellini's earrings, shaped like a sea shell, with sparkling little stones all over it.

"Would an earring do?" he shouted to Tucker.

"Well, I don't know," Tucker said.

"It looks as if it is covered with diamonds," said Harry Cat.

"Perfect!" called Tucker. "Send it along."

Harry lifted the earring into the cage. Tucker examined it carefully, like a jeweler. "I think these are fake diamonds," he said at last.

"Yes, but it's still very pretty," said Chester, who had jumped up beside them.

"I guess it'll do," said Tucker. He lay down on his side on the new dollar bill, rested his head on the earring, and pulled the old dollar up over him. Chester and Harry heard him draw a deep breath of contentment. "I'm sleeping on money inside a palace," he said. "It's a dream come true."

Harry Cat purred his chuckle. "Good night, Chester," he said. "I'm going back to the drain pipe, where I can stretch out." He jumped to the floor.

The Cricket Cage

“Good night, Harry,” Chester called.

Soft and silent as a shadow, Harry slipped out the opening in the side of the newsstand and glided over to the drain pipe. Chester hopped into his matchbox. He had gotten to like the feeling of the Kleenex. It was almost like the spongy wood of his old tree stump—and felt much more like home than the cricket cage. Now they each had their own place to sleep.

“Good night, Tucker,” Chester said.

“Night, Chester,” Tucker answered.

Chester Cricket burrowed down deeper into the Kleenex. He was beginning to enjoy life in New York. Just before he fell asleep, he heard Tucker Mouse sighing happily in the cage.

