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Rumer Godden , Heidi Holder Godden

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Day in and day out the dutiful mousewife works alongside her mousehusband. The house of Miss Barbara Wilkinson, where the Mouses make their home, is a nice house and the mousewife is for the most part happy with her lot—and yet she yearns for something more. But what? Her husband, for one, can't imagine. "I think about cheese," he advises her. "Why don't you think about cheese?"

Then an odd and exotic new creature, a turtledove, is brought into the house, and the mousewife is fascinated. The mousewife makes friends with the strange dove, who is kept in a cage but who tells her about things no housemouse has ever imagined, blue skies, tumbling clouds, tall trees, and far horizons, the memory of which haunt the dove in his captivity. The dove's tales fill the mousewife with wonder and drive her to take daring action.

Rumer Godden's lovely fable about the unexpected ways in which dreams can come true is illustrated with beautiful pen-and-ink drawings by William Pène du Bois.

The Mousewife Details

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From Reader Review The Mousewife for online ebook

Ange says

An unexpected treasure unearthed from a second hand shop. Quite a familiar storyline about wishing for more out of life. In this case it's the Mousewife who has to look after her babies, do all the usual wifely things, and then get bitten on the ear by her Mouse husband when he wasn't happy. Nice illustrations too.

Heather says

This is a wonderful, thoughtful book for adults masquerading as a children's book. Wow. Just. Wow.

Cheryl says

An all-ages fable that I adored when I was a child. Glad to find I still respect and am moved by it. I love the bits of humor in this short story which is already rich in both melancholy and joy. Of course I also love the illustrations: Godden and du Bois are both great. Anybody who cages a wild animal after seeing the picture of the dove trying to show the mousewife what it means to fly (p. 22 this edition) has no soul.

I recommend you read this aloud to your family or pets early this coming spring.

Caren says

I absolutely love the New York Review Children's Collection, which is in the process of reissuing out-of-print children's classics. "The Mousewife" is one of their reissues. First of all, Rumer Godden is just a wonderful author. (When I was a child, I was enthralled by her "Miss Happiness and Miss Flower".)"Mousewife" is a simple little story, but with sophisticated emotional undertones. The little mousewife is quite ordinary, except that she longs for something more, something even she cannot articulate. Her boorish mousehusband is clueless and quite lazy. You have to wonder if Ms. Godden, having been abandoned by her husband in India, with two small children to support, is making a statement about husbands....Quite by accident, the mousewife discovers a caged dove and befriends it. In some sense, her own feeling of being caged is reflected in the dove's situation. I won't spoil the ending by speaking further of the plot. This book, like the best children's books, can be read on many levels and enjoyed by different ages, which is, of course, why it is a classic. (The illustrations were done by William Pene du Bois and are classic in their own right.)

N says

Do you ever feel like life goes around in a loop (feed people, drive to work, work, drive home, feed people, sleep, repeat) and sometimes feel compelled to stop and deliberately create something outside of your day-to-day activities? Ever so often I do, so I can relate to the mousewife who, "*...did no know what it was that she wanted, but she wanted more.*"

Her wanting doesn't interfere with her life like it did for Madame Bovary. She expands her small universe and is able to continue to care for the people already in it.

Carrie says

So far, the only Rumer Godden book I've actually enjoyed from beginning to end. (Usually I enjoy about the first 7/8ths of one of her books.)

Storywraps says

This is beautiful, gentle tale will tug at your heartstrings. The story was inspired by Dorothy Wordsworth's (an English poet and diarist). It is a story composed for her brother William. An ordinary little mouse has seeds of wonder and dreams planted deep in her heart and she always in her mind reaches beyond the everyday, mundane rhyme of her life knowing there is much more beyond her mouse dreary mouse hole.

"She looked the same; she had the same ears and prick nose and whiskers and dewdrop eyes; the same little bones and grey fur; the same skinny paws and long skinny tail. She did all the things a housewife does: she made a nest for the mouse babies she hoped to have one day; she collected crumbs of food for her husband and herself; once she bit the top off a whole bowl of crocuses; she played with the other mice at midnight on the attic floor.

"What more do you want?" asked her husband.
She did not know what it was she wanted, but she wanted more. "

The little mousewife is constantly looking out the window, her little nose twitching against the windowpane, wondering about apple blossoms, bluebells and what lays beyond the woods.

She and her husband are living in the house of spinster, Miss Barbara Wilkinson. Each day is the same with her daily routine of keeping house, stealing some crumbs to eat so they have meals, and running an efficient home for her husband. Then one morning everything changes. A boy brings a turtle dove that he caught in the woods to the mistress of the house. Happily the lady puts the dove in an elegant cage with gilt bars and serves him peas, lumps of sugar, and pieces of fat. Now the little mousewife is drawn to the dove's food. He refuses to eat it as he is crushed and heartbroken being caged up and he won't even drink the water.

"- he said he did not like water. 'Only dew, dew, dew,' he said.

'What is dew?' asked the mousewife.

"He could not tell her what dew was, but he told her how it shines on the leaves and grass in the early morning for doves to drink. That made him think of night in the woods and how he and his mate would come down with the first light to walk on the earth and peck for food, and of how, then, they would fly over the fields to other woods farther away."

The dove and the mousewife strike up a friendship and she tries with all her might to nurture him and get him to partake of his food which he still refuses. Her crotchety old husband is not happy with her with all the time she spends away from him.

"I do not like it. The proper place for a housewife is in her hole or coming out for crumbs and frolic with me.
" The housewife did not answer. She looked far away."

Her husband once bit her on the ear for coming home late and not fetching his food properly and arranging it to his satisfaction. Why should she even bother to think about apple blossoms and such silly things when she could be thinking of cheese?

The mousewife has a nestful of babies so her first priority is to her young family and she is unable to visit the dove for quite some time. When she finally does she can't believe what she encounters and is truly shocked. The dove is weak and exhausted, his wings hang limply down because he thinks his close mouse friend has gone away forever and he has hardly eaten a morsel since she has left him.

"He cowered over her with his wings and kissed her with his beak; she had not known his feathers were so soft or that his breast was so warm. 'I thought you were gone, gone, gone,' he said over and over again. 'Tut! Tut!' said the housewife. 'A body has other things to do. I can't be always running off to you.' But, though she pretended to scold him, she had a tear at the end of her whisker for the poor dove."

How could this very tiny but big-hearted creature help this poor trapped dove who was fading away and trapped in that gilded cage? Her dilemma being that she loved having him there with her to tell her of the world beyond thus fuelling her dreams. She has to make a hard decision, should she opt to set him free and not only lose a very close friend and the treats she could attain from him for her ever growing family? Setting him free means he can go back to his beloved mate and his wonderful world outside of the window?

I think you can guess what she chose. I dreamer cannot help but make that choice and off he flew....out the open window...and gone!

'He has flown,' she said. "Now there is no one to tell me about the hills and the corn and the clouds. I shall forget them. How shall I remember when there is no one to tell me and there are so many children and crumbs and bits of fluff to think of?" She had millet tears, not on her whiskers but in her eyes.

Although it grieved her greatly to do so she knew deep down in her heart of hearts that she did the right thing and as she witnesses his ascent into the sky she sees the seemingly shiny little brass buttons twinkling there...

She knew now that they were not buttons but something far and big and strange. 'But not so strange to me,' she said, 'for I have seen them myself,' said the mousewife, 'without the dove. I can see for myself,' said the housewife, and slowly, proudly, she walked back to bed.

The story is enriched by the sketches and illustrations of William Pène du Bois. This truly is a timeless classic and I highly, highly recommend this book. It is another winner from the New York review Children's Collection.

RH Walters says

Thoughtful and well-illustrated, I was happy when Freddie brought this title over to me. We sat down and read it, and although she wandered away to play before we finished, I enjoyed the conclusion of the story. Kind of a Bridges of Madison County for rodents.

Anthony says

This story tells of the delicate relationship between a house mouse who is searching for more meaning in her life as a mousewife, and a caged turtledove who longs to be free. As their relationship grows they each learn something about and from each other. The mousewife takes a risk and helps the turtledove in his plight.

Natalie says

The mousewife is a dutiful homemaker, who tends to her family, but finds herself longing for something more. When the boy of the house captures a turtledove, and the woman of the house keeps it in a cage, she encounters something from the wild world outside the house. At first the dove will not acknowledge her, but soon looks forward to the visits from the little mouse. The dove talks about the beauty of the outside world, the joy of flying, and the way the world looks from high in the sky. The mousewife listens, enraptured by the images and new ideas the bird brings, and she returns more and more often. Finally her visits are discovered and anger her husband, she must choose between duty to family and the stories of freedom and new perspective she has come to love. She discovers a deep empathy for the caged bird and in a brave, impulsive action she sets the turtledove free. Now she looks out the window and realizes "I can see for myself." The thought provoking story contains many messages, including the desire in each of us to reach for something higher, responsibility, freedom, longing, new vision, the nurturing of womanhood, love as complete unselfishness, and many more. I found this a touching book, that spoke to the place inside me that longs for something more, for someone who sees the world as I see it, and that it may be in letting go of what I want most to be able to freely, lovingly, give what someone else wants most, I can really *see* with a deeper and far more satisfying eye of understanding.

Jane says

Is there a small girl in the world who could resist this tiny story of bravery and adventure? Godden paints the story like a miniature on ivory - every brushstroke tells. Adrienne Adams' illustrations pair perfectly with the text. A gem of a book!

Meggin Dail says

Beautiful, especially the Afterword.

Shelley Whitaker says

"What more do you want?" asked her husband. She did not know what it was she wanted, but she wanted more.

Amy says

I found this in a second-hand bookstore in London and literally felt like it was calling out to me. I read it in the middle of a London park, while my husband snoozed next to me on the grass. Perhaps it was the setting,

but I absolutely adored the story and really related to it. Here is to all the mousewives who know what it is to fly!

Barnaby Haszard Morris says

Sweet and sad, and genuinely for all ages.
