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# The Tale of Despereaux



*illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering*

## *Chapter One* *the last one*

THIS STORY BEGINS within the walls of a castle, with the birth of a mouse. A small mouse. The last mouse born to his parents and the only one of his litter to be born alive.

"Where are my babies?" said the exhausted mother when the ordeal was through. "Show to me my babies."

The father mouse held the one small mouse up high.

"There is only this one," he said. "The others are dead."

"*Mon Dieu*, just the one mouse baby?"

"Just the one. Will you name him?"

"All of that work for nothing," said the mother. She



sighed. "It is so sad. It is such the disappointment." She was a French mouse who had arrived at the castle long ago in the luggage of a visiting French diplomat. "Disappointment" was one of her favorite words. She used it often.

"Will you name him?" repeated the father.

"Will I name him? Will I name him? Of course, I will name him, but he will only die like the others. Oh, so sad. Oh, such the tragedy."

The mouse mother held a handkerchief to her nose and then waved it in front of her face. She sniffed. "I will name him. Yes. I will name this mouse Despereaux, for all the sadness, for the many despairs in this place. Now, where is my mirror?"

Her husband handed her a small shard of mirror. The mouse mother, whose name was Antoinette, looked at her reflection and gasped aloud. "Toulèse," she said to one of her sons, "get for me my makeup bag. My eyes are a fright."

While Antoinette touched up her eye makeup, the mouse father put Despereaux down on a bed made of

blanket scraps. The April sun, weak but determined, shone through a castle window and from there squeezed itself through a small hole in the wall and placed one golden finger on the little mouse.

The other, older mice children gathered around to stare at Despereaux.

"His ears are too big," said his sister Merlot. "Those are the biggest ears I've ever seen."

"Look," said a brother named Furlough, "his eyes are open. Pa, his eyes are open. They shouldn't be open."

It is true. Despereaux's eyes should not have been open. But they were. He was staring at the sun reflecting off his mother's mirror. The light was shining onto the ceiling in an oval of brilliance, and he was smiling up at the sight.

"There's something wrong with him," said the father. "Leave him alone."

Despereaux's brothers and sisters stepped back, away from the new mouse.

"This is the last," proclaimed Antoinette from her bed. "I will have no more mice babies. They are such the disappointment. They are hard on my beauty. They ruin, for



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