

THE **CRICKET**
IN TIMES SQUARE

By *George Selden*



Garth Williams

DRAWINGS BY

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.

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

The Cricket in Times Square

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 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

Tucker

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 thing.

Mario had been listening to the radio. He switched it off. Way down the tracks he could see the lights of the shuttle train coming toward him. On the level of the station where the newsstand was, the only tracks were the ones on which the shuttle ran. That was a short train that went back and forth from Times Square to Grand Central, 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 train 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!"

A MOUSE, a CAT, and a CRICKET take a BITE out of the Big Apple.

Tucker is a streetwise city mouse. He thought he'd seen it all. But he's never met a cricket before, which really isn't surprising, because along with his friend Harry Cat, Tucker lives in the very heart of New York City—the Times Square subway station. Chester Cricket never intended to leave his Connecticut meadow. He'd be there still if he hadn't followed the entrancing aroma of liverwurst right into someone's picnic basket. Now, like any tourist in the city, he wants to look around. And he could not have found two better guides—and friends—than Tucker and Harry. But Chester has a hidden talent and no one, not even Chester himself, realizes that the little country cricket may just be able to teach even the toughest New Yorkers a thing or two.

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