

LIFE IN THE CHOIR LOFT

Mr. Cowper, the organist, said I could write about him getting rid of the mouse. I could even watch as long as I didn't bother him. Every day Mr. Cowper waited for the quotidian mouse run across the pipe organ's sharps and flats. Maybe staying on the black keys was a rodent game, or maybe the creature sensed vermin were even more unwelcome on white. The sooty little offense always scooted between Cowper's practice period and his chime music broadcast, a noon tradition. People likened his winged arpeggios to angels blessing the town.

Cowper said he was sure the mouse was female, personifying grayish women skittering across his path, glitter-eyed, pointy-nosed, whiskery. Like the resident soloist, Letty Long, always wanting to rehearse, bringing him sticky-sweet cake, leaning her perfume over him.

Last week Cowper caught the mouse by the tail in a trap. The cheese was gone. The mouse must have flicked a triumphant parting gesture, then snap! Cowper was pleased with the crimp in its arrogance. When he felt its warm squirm, its scrabbling claws, he dropped it like a live coal. He saw it zip under the organ pedals, followed eye-level to poke with his umbrella, caused a bass eruption that jammed city hall's switchboard with queries about the unholy racket coming from the church cupola. He needed a sedative before

his own ganglionic halls rang again with cherubic chords.

Forthwith, Mr. Cowper pledged himself anew to rid his small space of pests, doubtless plural by then, he surmised. Thirty-nine years he'd played there, the mouse for two months. Bolder every day, avoiding devices guaranteed to dispatch, frolicking around janitorial efforts and congregational input.

Cowper decided to exercise a new approach. He filled Monday morning with Bach and righteous resolve. Something told me to retreat to the rear of the sanctuary.

The swell diapason rattled the rose windows, the flute tremolo segued a dirge, then silence. Mr. Cowper poised one classical hand. He didn't see Letty Long on the choir steps as the trespasser appeared at 11:58, defying toxic treats, defiling the keys. Miss Mouse. Cowper fired a can of Mace.