

## LIFE IN THE CHOIR LOFT

Mr. Cowper waited for the quotidian mouse run across the pipe organ console's sharps and flats. Maybe staying on the black keys was a rodent game, or maybe the creature sensed vermin were more unwelcome on white. The sooty little offense always scooted between Cowper's practicing and the chime music broadcast, a noon tradition. People likened his winged arpeggios to angels blessing the town.

Cowper was sure the mouse was female, personifying grayish women skittering across his path, too bright-eyed, <sup>next line</sup> pointy-nosed, whiskery. Like soprano soloist Letty Long, always wanting to rehearse, leaning her discordant perfume over him, always bringing him sticky cake and something in a bottle for her throat.

Cowper caught the mouse once in a trap that broke its tail. The cheese was gone. The mouse must have flicked a triumphant parting gesture, then snap! Cowper was pleased with the crimp in its impious arrogance. But 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, causing a bass eruption that jammed city hall's switchboard with queries about the unholy racket emanating from the church cupola. Cowper needed a sedative before his own ganglionic halls rang again with cherubic chords.

Forthwith Cowper pledged himself to rid his space of intruders, doubtless plural by now. Twenty-four years he had played there, the nervy mouse for six weeks, bolder every day, avoiding cunning devices guaranteed to dispatch, frolicking around janitorial efforts and congregational input, even Letty Longnose's homemade poison. He devised a new approach.

He filled a solitary Monday morning with Bach and righteous resolve for dealing with pests. Suddenly a chuckle escaped as Cowper's thoughts covertly included Long Letty and two flat tenors.

The swell diapason rattled the rose windows, the flute tremolo segued a stringy dirge, then silence. Mr. Cowper adjusted his 39-cent dust mask and poised one classically trained hand. The trespasser appeared at 11:57, defying toxic treats, defiling the keys. Miss Mouse. Cowper fired his Mace.