

THE TALE OF
Despereaux

Kate DiCamillo is a *New York Times* bestselling author whose books have been translated into over thirty different languages across the world. She is also a regular winner of awards, most notably the prestigious Newbery Medal, which she won for both *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* and *The Tale of Despereaux*, which was made into a feature-length film in 2008. Of *The Tale of Despereaux*, Kate says, “My best friend’s son asked me if I would write a story for him. ‘It’s about an unlikely hero,’ he said, ‘one with exceptionally large ears.’ ‘What happens to this hero?’ I asked. ‘I don’t know,’ he said. ‘That’s why I want you to write the story, so we can find out.’” Kate DiCamillo lives in Minneapolis, USA.

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Mercy Watson: Something Wonky This Way Comes

THE TALE OF
Despereaux

*The story of a mouse,
a princess, some soup and
a spool of thread*



Kate Di Camillo

illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering



WALKER
BOOKS

*For Luke, who asked for
the story of an unlikely hero*



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The world is dark, and light is precious.

Come closer, dear reader.

You must trust me.

I am telling you a story.



An intricate, hand-drawn decorative border in a dark, textured ink. It features a complex arrangement of swirling acanthus leaves, stylized flowers, and various motifs including a small bowl, a spoon, and a needle. The border is rectangular with slightly irregular, organic edges.

Book
THE FIRST

*A Mouse
Is Born*

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 over. “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 favourite 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 make-up bag. My eyes are a fright.”

While Antoinette touched up her eye make-up, 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.”

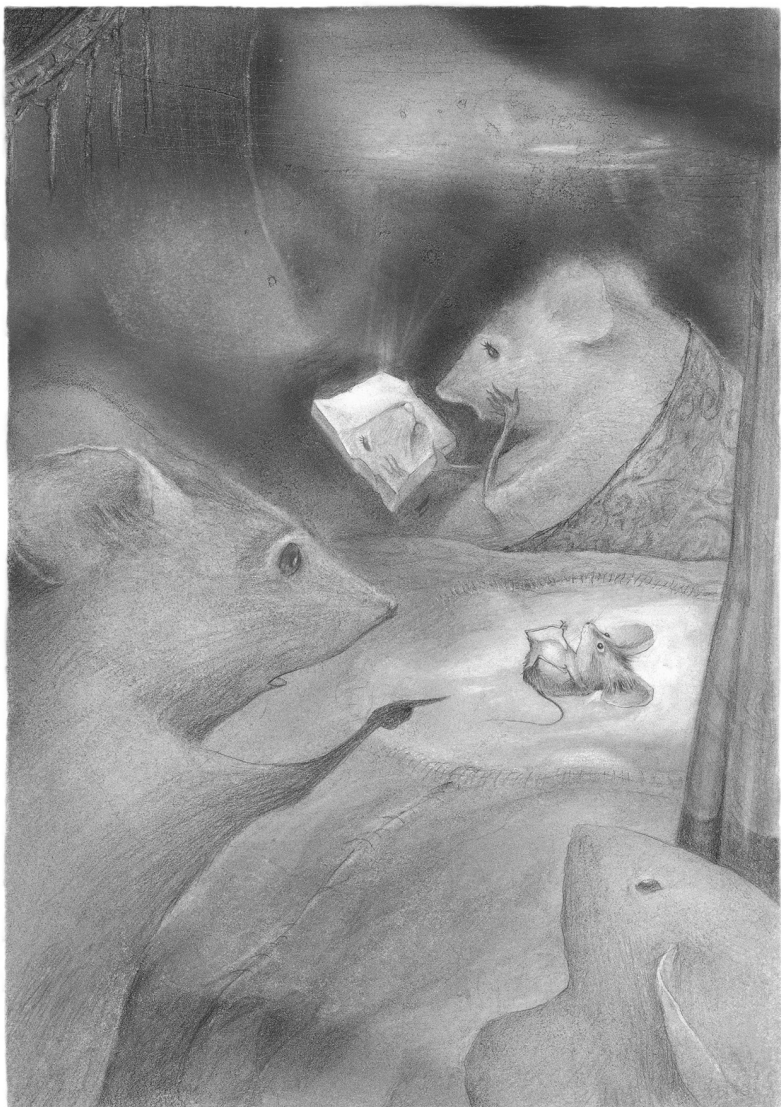
“Look,” said a brother named Furlough, “his eyes are open. Pa, his eyes are open. They shouldn’t be open.”

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.



Despereaux's eyes should not have been open.

They ruin, for me, my looks. This is the last one. No more.”

“The last one,” said the father. “And he’ll be dead soon. He can’t live. Not with his eyes open like that.”

But, reader, he did live.

This is his story.