



CHAPTER ONE

After breakfast, Pete sat in his treehouse, thinking. It was Saturday and, for Pete, Saturday was Mouseday.





At breakfast every Saturday, regular as clockwork, he asked his mum and dad if he could have what he most wanted in all the world – a white mouse with pink eyes.

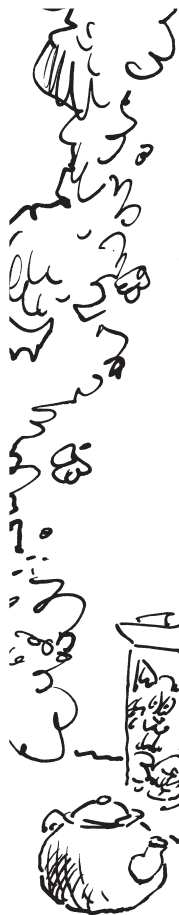
But the answers were always the same.

'No!' his mother said. 'I'm scared of mice.'

'No!' his father said.
'They smell.'

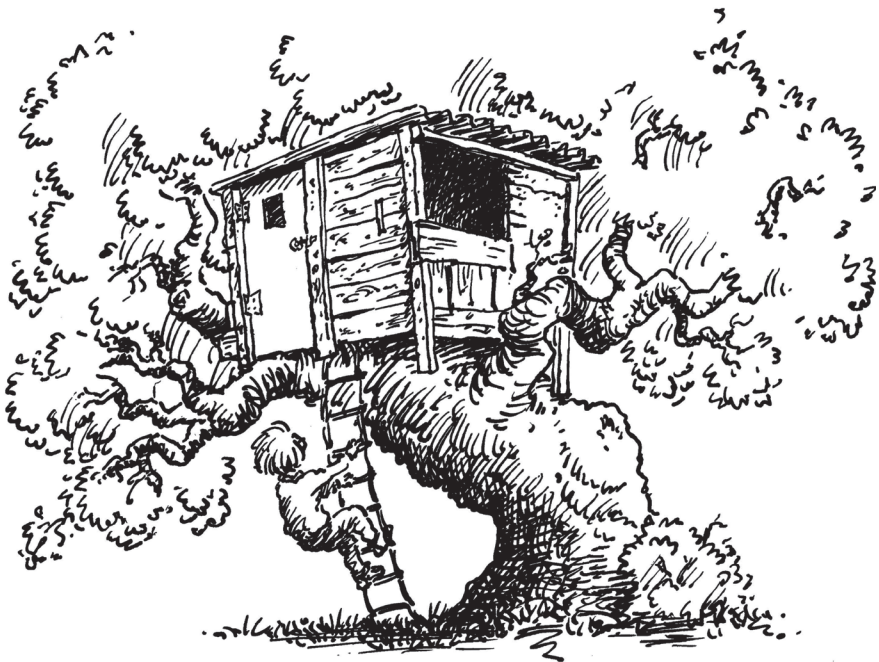


'Why can't you get it into your head, Pete,' one or other or both of them would say, 'that you are not keeping a mouse in this house? Ever!'



So every Saturday, after breakfast, Pete would climb up into his tree-house, thinking . . .

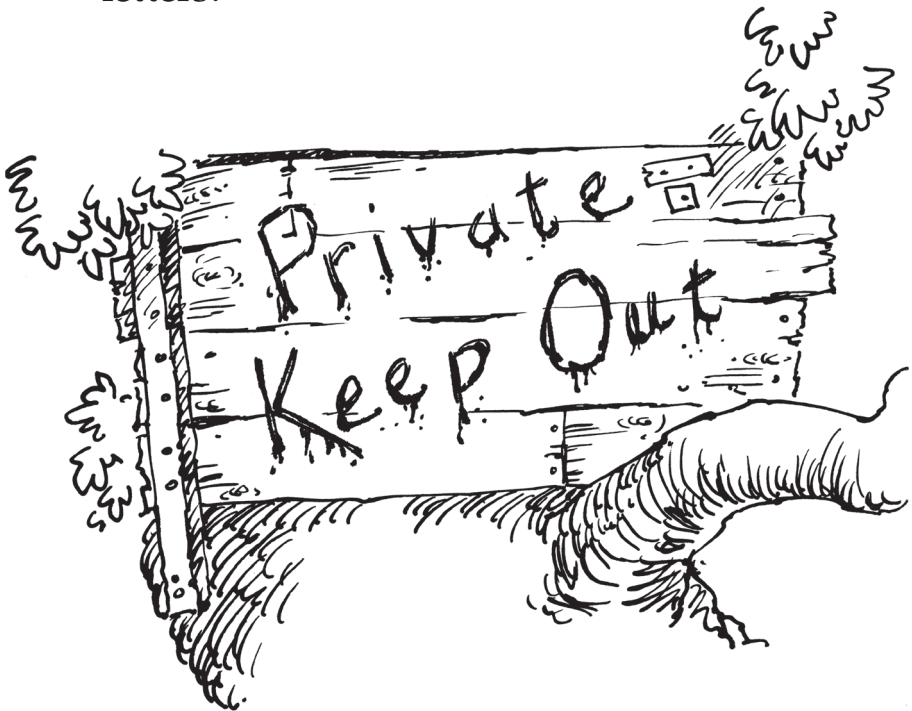
It's no use, they'll never let me, but I'll keep on trying anyway.



The treehouse was no beauty. Pete's father had made it out of odds and ends of timber and put a tin roof on it. He had fixed it in a fork of the old apple tree. It wasn't very big, but it had a door of sorts, and a kind of window. Inside there was an old folding garden chair

for sitting on, and a shelf for keeping things on, and the whole treehouse was rainproof.

Most importantly, it was Pete's, and on its side was written in big black letters:





On this particular Mouseday, Pete was thinking about the actual words his mum or dad always used. ‘You are not keeping a mouse in this house,’ was what they said.

Suddenly he jumped up from his chair. Through the branches, he peered out across the lawn.

‘OK, so I can’t keep a mouse in *that* house,’ he said excitedly, ‘but what about in *this* house?’

Why not keep it here, in my treehouse? They would never know I had a mouse. I could make a nice cage for it and I could smuggle food up to it. We'd have a lovely time together, me and my secret mouse!'





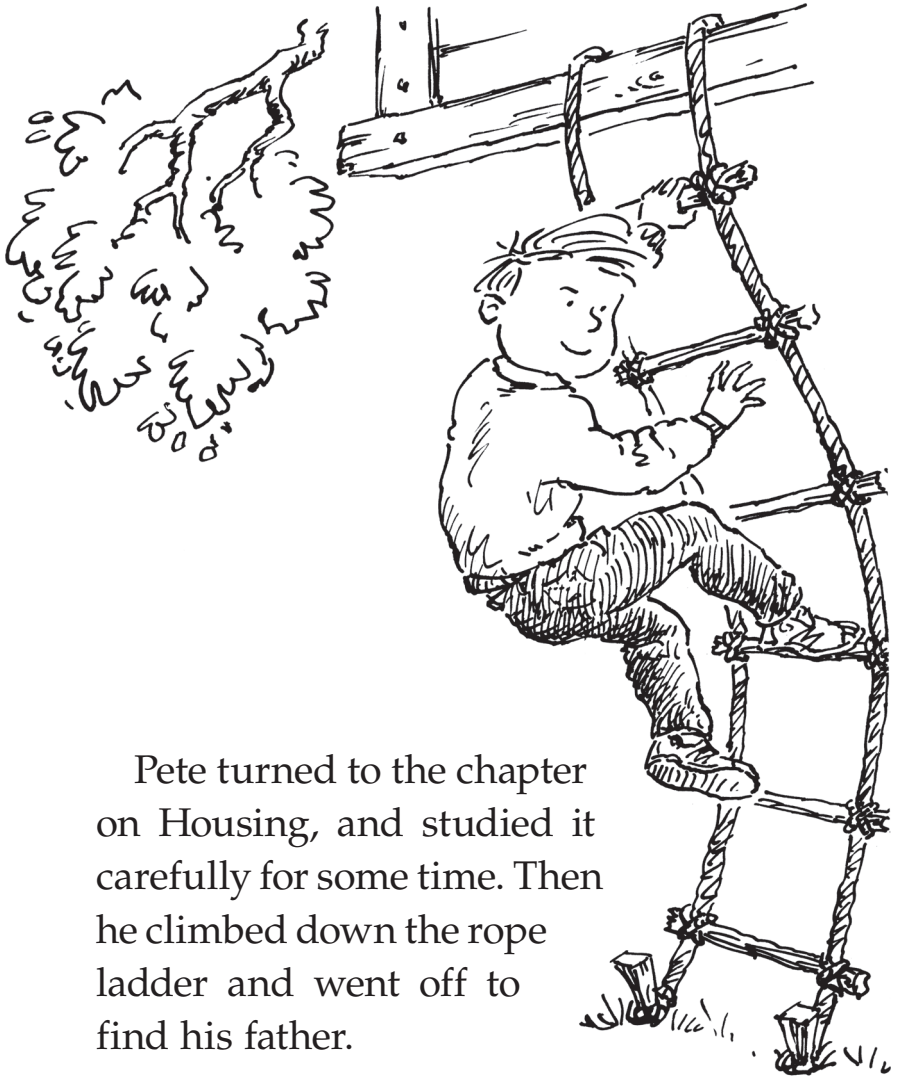
Pete sat down again and took from the shelf a battered little booklet. It was called *Mice and How to Keep Them*. He had bought it secretly a long while

ago. He had read it from cover to cover, over and over again. Though he'd never owned one, there wasn't much Pete didn't know about handling and housing and feeding pet mice!



There were pictures of all the many different colours and markings of mice, but the grubbiest page was the one about Pink-Eyed Whites, or PEWs as they were known to proper mice experts.





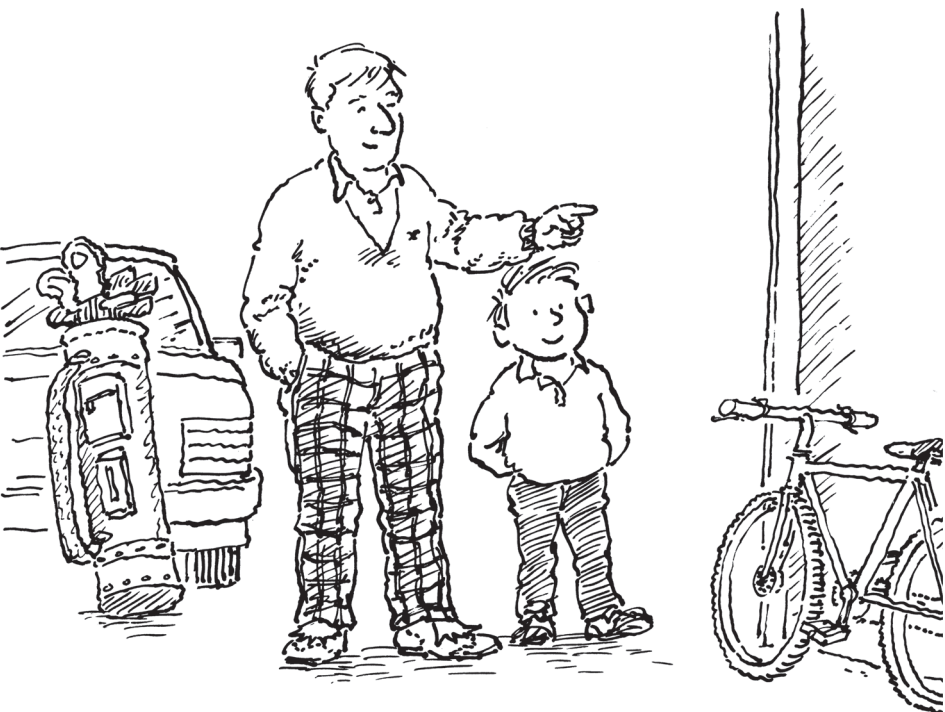
Pete turned to the chapter on Housing, and studied it carefully for some time. Then he climbed down the rope ladder and went off to find his father.

'Dad,' he said. 'Can I make something in your workshop?'

'Depends,' Pete's father said. 'What d'you want to make?'

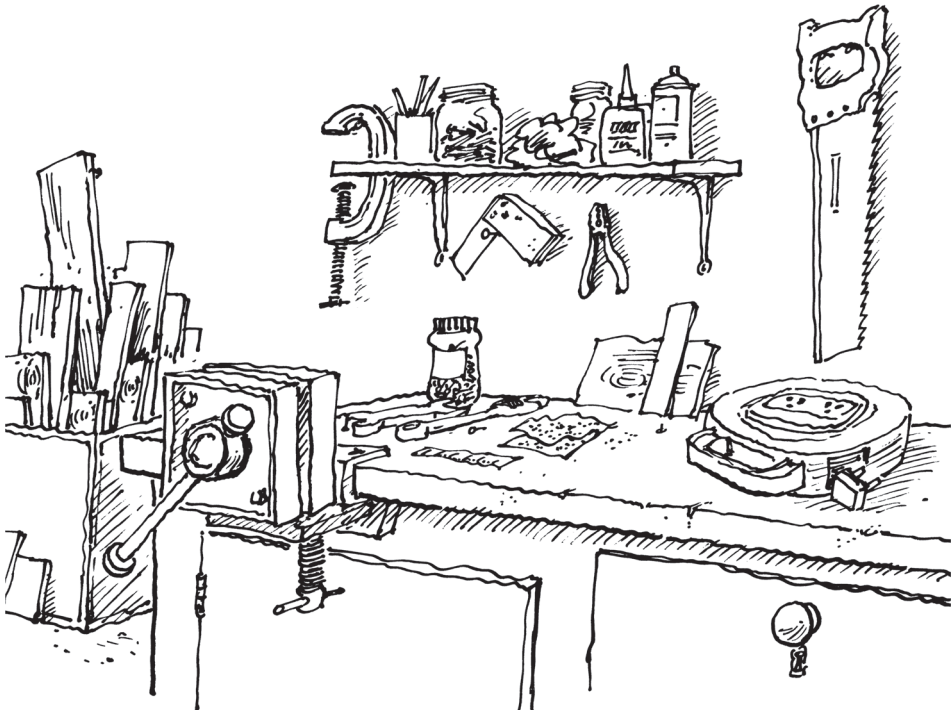
'Oh, just something I need for my treehouse. A kind of box.'

'To keep something in, d'you mean?'



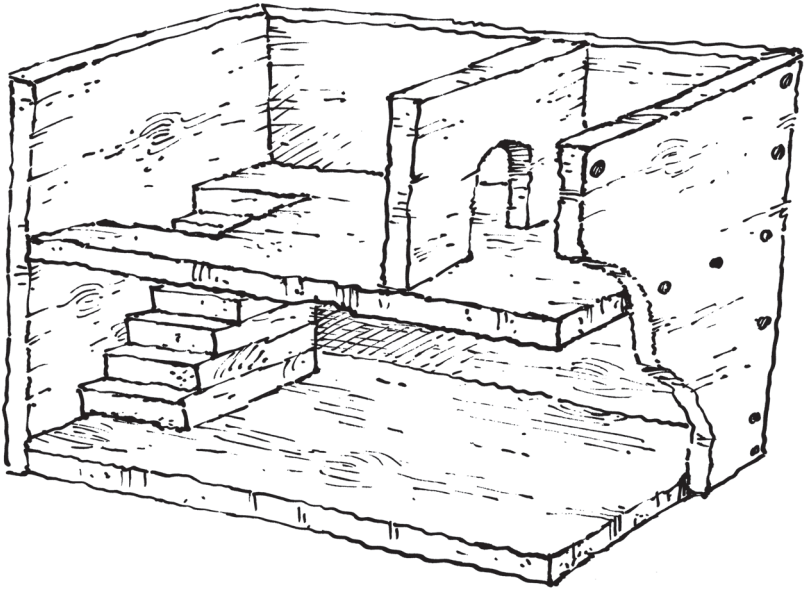
‘Yes,’ said Pete truthfully.

‘All right,’ his father said. ‘There are lots of bits of wood there, from that last set of bookshelves I made. I can’t help you – I shall be out for the rest of the morning – but mind you don’t hit your fingers with the hammer, and don’t cut them off with the saw either.’



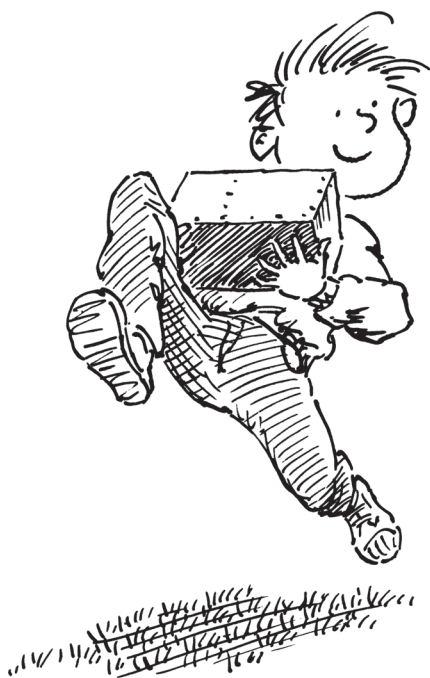


By the end of that morning, Pete had built a mouse cage. Like the treehouse, it was no beauty, but it was strongly made. Pete had followed the instructions in *Mice and How to Keep Them*. The cage



had a wire top and, inside, an upper storey reached by a little flight of stairs: for this upstairs part, or bedroom, he had made a small, cosy nest box.

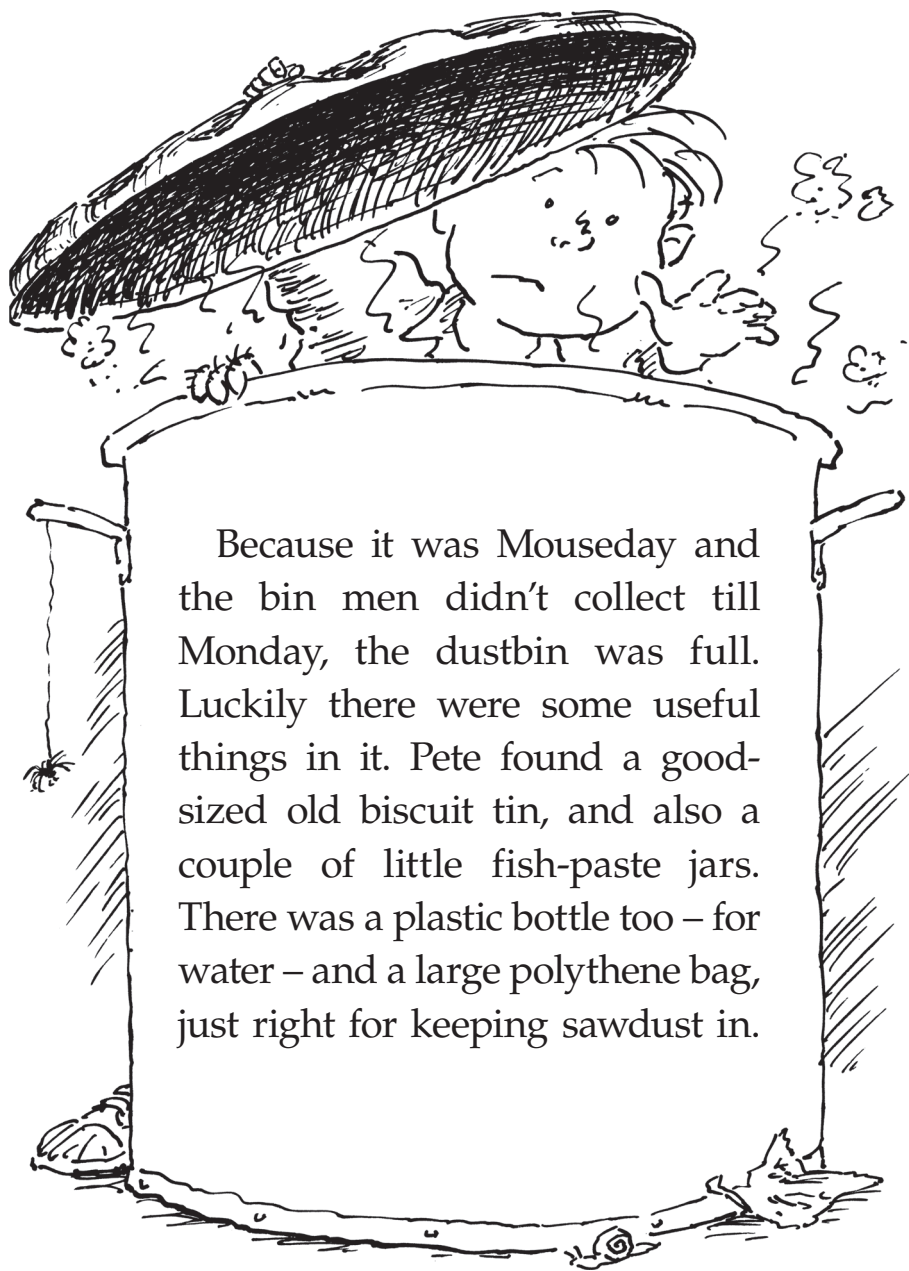
After a quick check to see that his father wasn't back and his mother wasn't looking, Pete climbed up into his treehouse with his mouse cage. He proudly placed it ready upon the shelf.



Much of the rest of the day was spent in preparing the other things that would be needed for his mouse.



I must have a tin to store its food in, Pete thought. I'll need some little bowls for it to eat out of and drink from. But I can't ask Mum – she'll want to know what I want them for.



Because it was Mouseday and the bin men didn't collect till Monday, the dustbin was full. Luckily there were some useful things in it. Pete found a good-sized old biscuit tin, and also a couple of little fish-paste jars. There was a plastic bottle too – for water – and a large polythene bag, just right for keeping sawdust in.



By bedtime, everything was prepared. The water bottle had been filled from the garden tap and the paste pots – thoroughly washed – stood ready on the sawdusted floor of the cage.



'Did you make your box?'

Pete's father asked at bedtime.

'Yes.'

'I've hardly seen anything of him,' his mother said. 'He's been





up and down that old apple tree all afternoon.'

'That old treehouse,' his father said, with a touch of pride in his voice. 'A pretty good piece of work that, though I say so myself.'

*So's my mouse cage, thought Pete,
though I say so myself. There's only one
thing missing now . . .*





CHAPTER TWO

Buying the mouse, Pete thought, should be easy.

First, he already had some money saved up, in a red tin shaped like a pillar box, which stood on the shelf in the treehouse.

Secondly, the local pet shop was actually on his way to school. Every weekday, Pete and his friend Dave

would stop and gaze in at the animals.

Dave will have to know, Pete thought. I can't keep it a secret from old Dave. And I can't buy the mouse on a Mouseday – Mum and Dad would ask where I was going. I'll have to get it on the way home from school.



So, as they set out on Monday morning, Pete said to Dave, 'I'm going to buy my white mouse today.'



‘With pink eyes?’
Dave said. He knew
all about Pete’s
ambition. ‘Are your
mum and dad going
to let you have one
at last, then?’

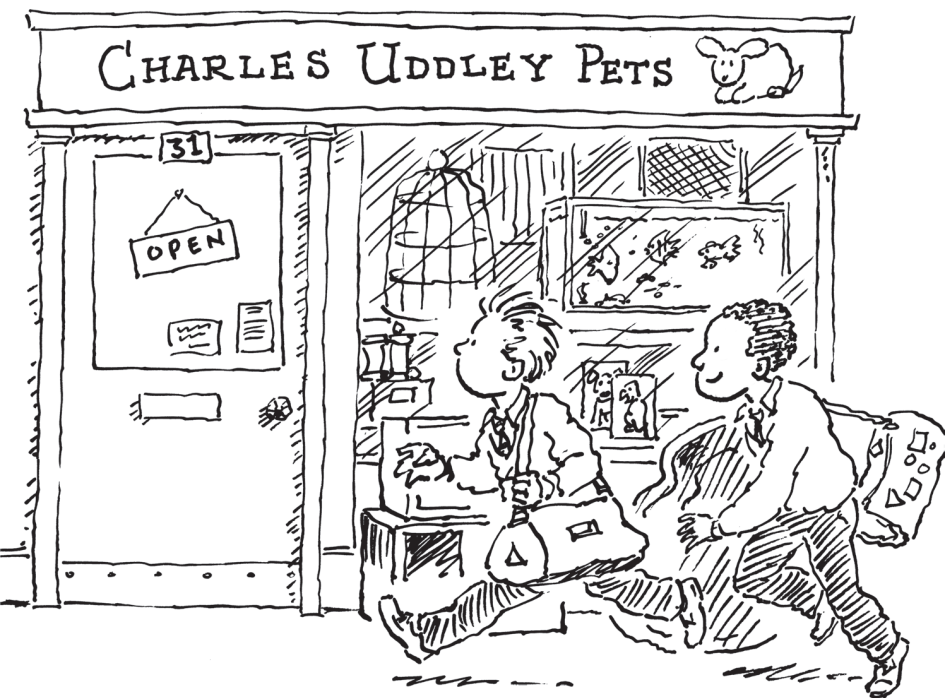
‘No. They won’t
know. It’s a secret,’
said Pete. ‘I’m going
to keep it in my
treehouse.’

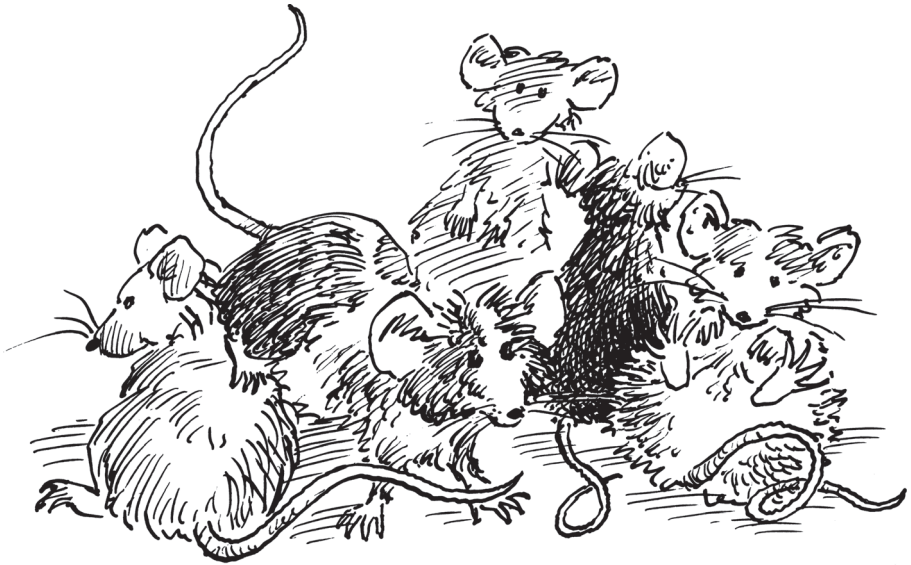
‘That’s brilliant!’
Dave said.

Pete couldn’t wait
for school to end.



When it did, he and Dave ran all the way to the pet shop. Inside, Pete looked around at the rabbits and the guinea pigs, the hamsters and the gerbils – until at last he saw in a corner a large cage with a number of mice running





about inside it. Some were black, some were black and white, and some were gingery. But there was no white mouse with pink eyes.

‘Oh no!’ groaned Pete. He felt so disappointed.

The pet-shop man came round the counter.

'What's the matter, sonny?' he said.



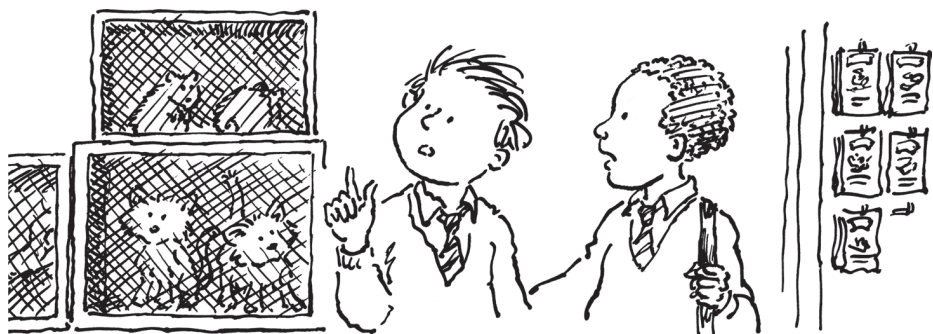
'Are these all the mice you've got?' asked Pete.

'Yes. Why?'

'I wanted a PEW.'

'A pew?' said the pet-shop man.
'That's something you sit on in church.'

'No,' said Pete. 'It stands for Pink-
Eyed White.'



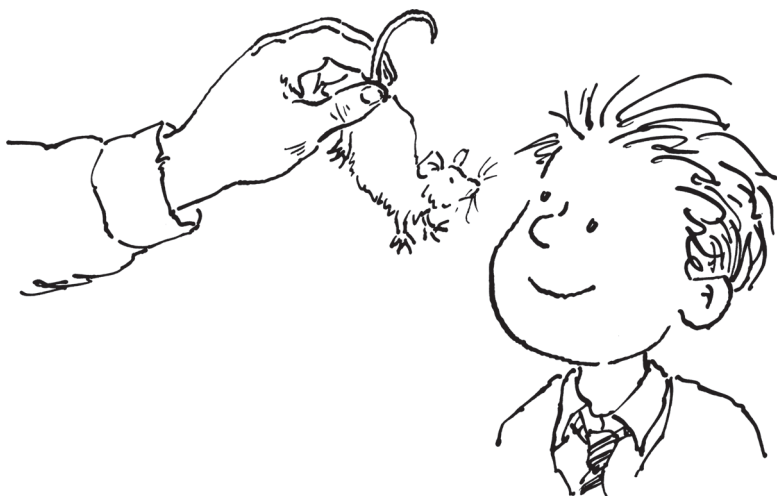
'Is that a fact?' said the pet-shop
man. 'Well, in that case, I think you're
in luck. I seem to remember there's
one of those left.' He opened the lid of
the cage.

In one corner was a big nest – a ball made of shavings and bits of straw and newspaper. The man opened it up with a finger.

Inside were some mice. One of them, Pete saw with a thrill, was a PEW!







‘Did you want a buck or a doe?’ the pet-shop man asked.

‘I don’t mind,’ Pete said, ‘but I’d sooner have a doe.’

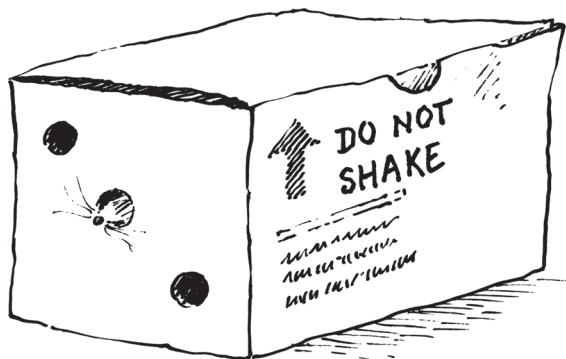
The man picked up the white mouse gently, holding it by the root of its tail.

‘It *is* your lucky day,’ he said. ‘This one’s a doe.’

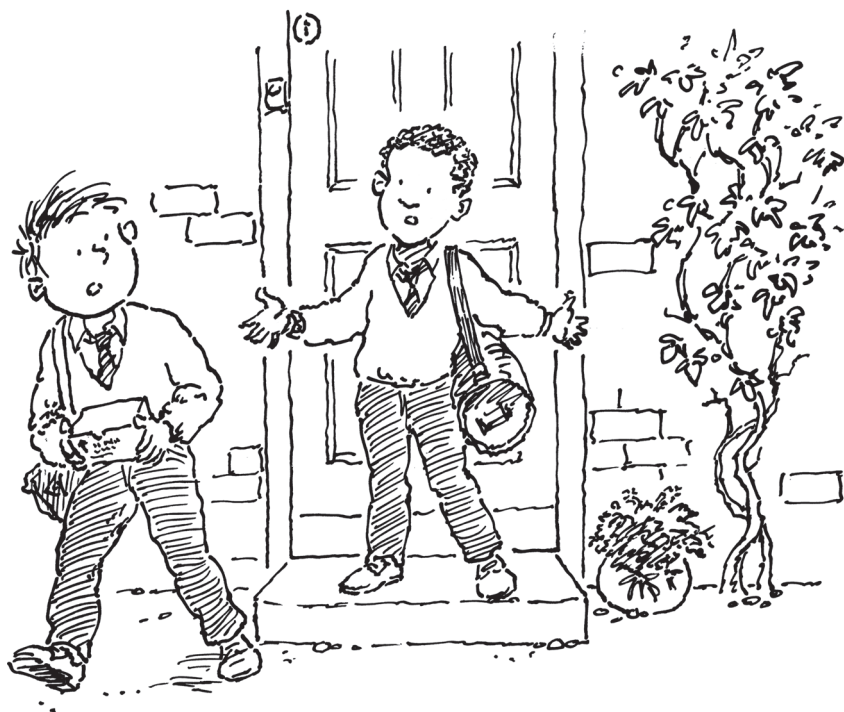
'Oh, good!' said Pete. He knew, from *Mice and How to Keep Them*, that it was only the bucks that smelled.

The booklet also said that mice like canary seed, so he bought a packet of that too, and the pet-shop man provided a special little cardboard box for Pete to carry the PEW home in.

When they reached Pete's gate, he said to Dave, 'Can you go and ring the



bell and then, when Mum comes, talk to her for a bit? I don't want her to see me getting up into the treehouse with this lot.'



'What shall I talk about?' said Dave.

'Oh, I don't know. Anything. Just keep her busy till I get back.'



So Dave rang the bell and, when Pete's mum came to the front door, he said, 'Hello.'



'Hello, Dave,' said Pete's mum.
'Where's Pete?'
'Who?' said Dave.

'Pete.'

'Oh, Pete,' said Dave.

'Yes. Didn't he walk back from school with you?'

'School?' said Dave.

'Yes.'

'Oh,' said Dave. 'School. Yes. He did.'

'Well, where is he?'

'Who?' said Dave.

'Oh, don't start that again,' said Pete's mum. 'Where is Pete?'

At that moment Dave saw his friend running back across the lawn, making a thumbs-up sign.

'Oh, there's Pete!' said Dave to Pete's mum. 'I've got to go. Goodbye.'

'Where've you been, Pete?' asked his mother.

'In my treehouse.'



‘Well, I don’t know what’s up with your friend Dave. He comes and rings the bell and then talks a lot of rubbish. I couldn’t get any sense out of him.’

‘He’s like that, old Dave is,’ said Pete. ‘Can I have a biscuit, Mum?’

'Can't you wait till teatime?'

'I'm hungry.'

'Oh, all right.'

When he got back to the treehouse,
Pete put his PEW in the mouse cage.



He filled one pot with birdseed and the other with water.

The white mouse hurried around her home, examining everything with twitching whiskers.



She climbed the stairs to her bedroom and inspected the bedding in the nest box.

When she came downstairs again, Pete offered her a little bit of biscuit. She took it in her small pink paws and began to nibble at it.

You look quite at home already, Pete thought. But you need a name. What shall I call you?