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# The Flying Mouse

Mariko Pratt

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# The Flying Mouse

Written and Illustrated by Mariko Pratt



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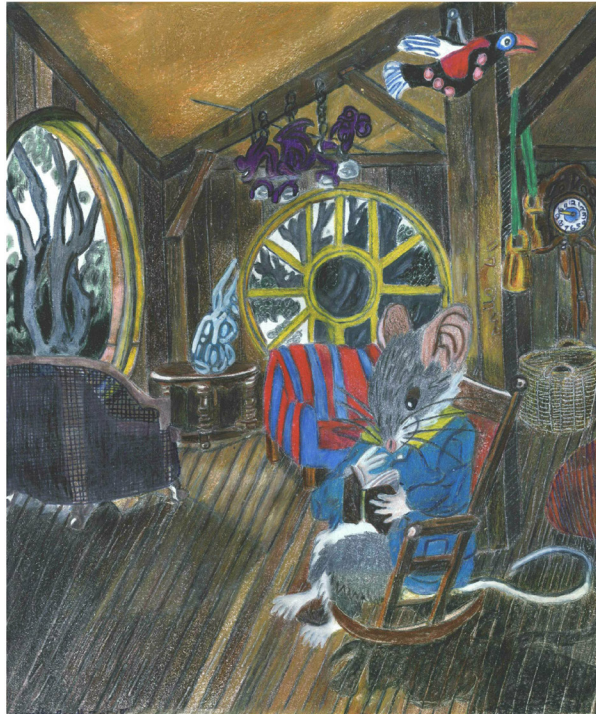
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# *For My Family*



## Acknowledgements

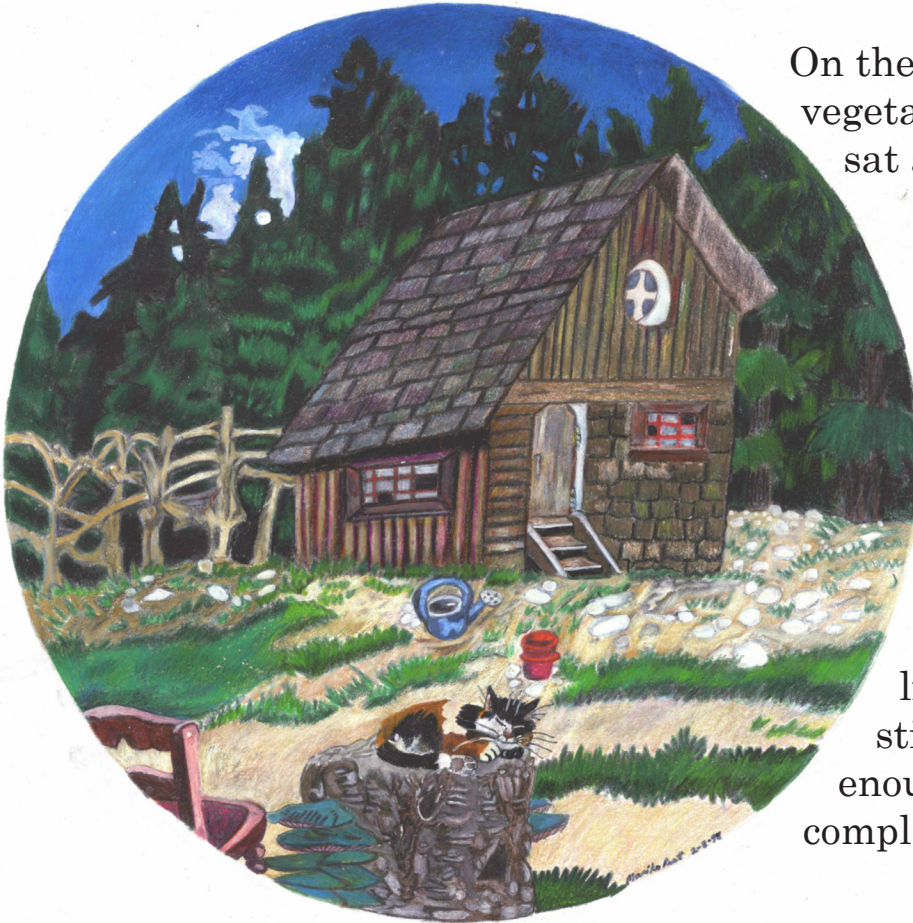
I would like to thank all my teachers and art instructors, my family, especially my dad who gave me the story idea in the first place , for encouraging me to keep working at my writing/illustrating career and not give up.

I also want to express my gratitude to Kumi Watanabe-Schock in Library media for first mentioning Humboldt State University Presses to me, and Teresa Stanley for telling me about online publishing, also to the wonderful staff at Humboldt University: Kyle Morgan, Melissa Starr and everyone else for helping make this project a success.



# The Flying Mouse





On the edge of a large vegetable garden, there sat an old ramshackle tool shed.

Although its paint was cracked and peeling and its weathered cedar shingles were marked with patches of moss and lichen, its owner still maintained it enough to prevent its complete collapse.



In one corner of the shed near the worktable, there was a hole, and in that hole lived a deer mouse family. There was a mother and father and their four small mouselings, Bluebell, Anemone, Nuttal, and Merton.



They weren't like the messy, mundane mice of the human towns and cities, nor was their hole a nasty smelling one with shredded bits of Kleenex and newspaper for bedding, and a careless jumble of food for a pantry.







It was a very  
comfortable dwelling:  
wooden floor  
and woven carpets,  
a sitting room,  
a kitchen,



bunks  
and match beds,  
a bathroom,  
bedrooms with closets,  
and several  
storerooms (each one devoted to  
a certain food).



Bluebell,  
Anemone,  
and Nuttal  
were helpful little mice,  
always quick to do the household  
chores such as sweeping and dusting,  
washing the dishes,  
and gathering firewood  
or winter supplies









Yet Merton  
(who was the middle child)  
would often lag  
behind his assigned tasks.

It wasn't that he didn't like to  
work or didn't know how to do  
anything.

It was just that things like  
beetles, anthills,  
fat, fuzzy caterpillars, and  
bumblebee nests easily distracted  
Merton.



Instead of making himself useful, he would explore or chat with the  
various meadow and forest people.  
Sometimes he would play games with them,  
marbles or cards with tiny  
beads to serve as poker chips.





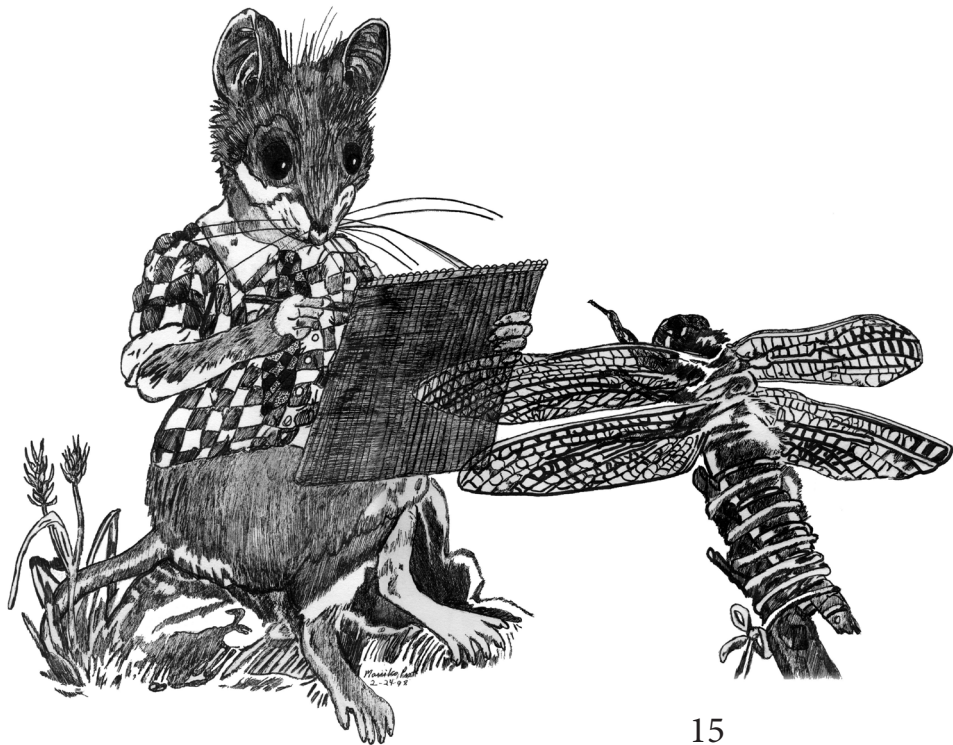
Merton also liked to collect  
things:  
broken bits of colored  
glass and crockery, twisted  
pieces  
of wood, empty snail shells,  
bundles of strings.  
Among his  
most treasured possessions was  
his collection of feathers;  
several sketch pads,  
and various books on flying  
machines  
and the flight of birds.



Flying fascinated him greatly.

Whenever he spied an insect or bird,  
he wished to fly like them, to be able to spread his  
arms and sail off.

He studied these creatures attentively,  
sketching down every detail of their wings.



The birds liked him,  
and would pose  
quietly as he examined  
their wings and  
feathers.

The insects found him  
a nuisance.

He was always  
catching them and  
tying them  
to sticks and strings so  
that he could  
see how  
their wings moved.  
However, being a very  
kind mouse,  
he always released  
them after he was  
done.



Merton's parents were annoyed by his expeditions to the fields and woods.

They worried about him falling into a hole or being eaten by a hawk or weasel.

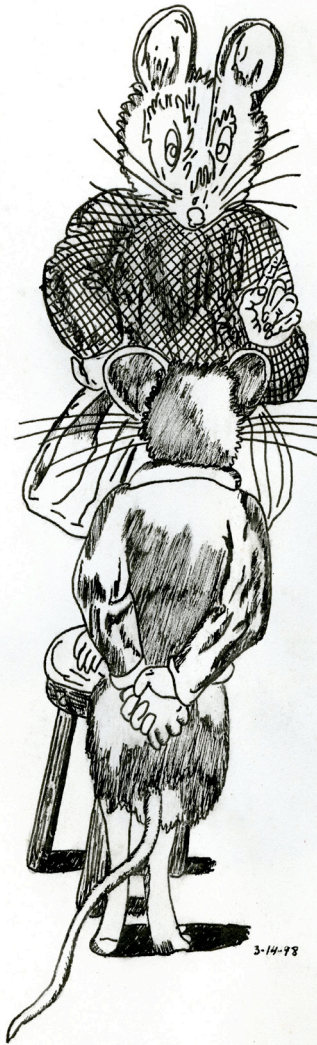
They also called his intense interest in flying "foolish" and "a waste of time."





So worried  
was the mother  
about her son that she  
watched him constantly  
from the knothole  
windows.

When she was  
too busy with  
other things,  
she asked his older  
sisters to watch him.



His sisters also disapproved of his solitary wanderings and attempts at flying.

Although they were twins, being about the same size and cinnamon color, they differed in disposition.

They also had different solutions for Merton's follies.

Bluebell, the dominant one, was bossy and bad-tempered. She tried to reason with her younger brother with threats and strict lectures on "commonsense" and "proper acting."





Anemone; on the other hand, was gentle and good humored instead of bullying Merton into behaving, she tried encouraging him toward refined interests—reading some classical literature or going to concerts and stylish plays.

However, in spite of their efforts, Merton still stuck to his one goal, to be the very first flying mouse.

It was June, shortly before the annual midsummer festival. Merton and Nuttal were bringing a present of beetle biscuits for their Aunt Olive.



“Look!” said Nuttal suddenly.

“What?” said Merton.

“There’s something moving in that big tree over there.”

They both walked to the tree and peered up at the white object flapping at the top.



“What is it?” Nuttal asked nervously. “A barn owl?”

“Don’t be silly,” Merton replied. “It’s just an old kite someone lost. I think I’ll go get it.”

“Why?”

“You know,” said Merton. “So I can make it into a pterodactyl glider when we get home.”

His little brother was the only one in his family, whom he felt comfortable discussing his dreams with. Nuttal didn’t argue with him, nor did he call the whole flying thing rubbish or ridiculous. He just wanted to be daring and adventurous as his older brother.



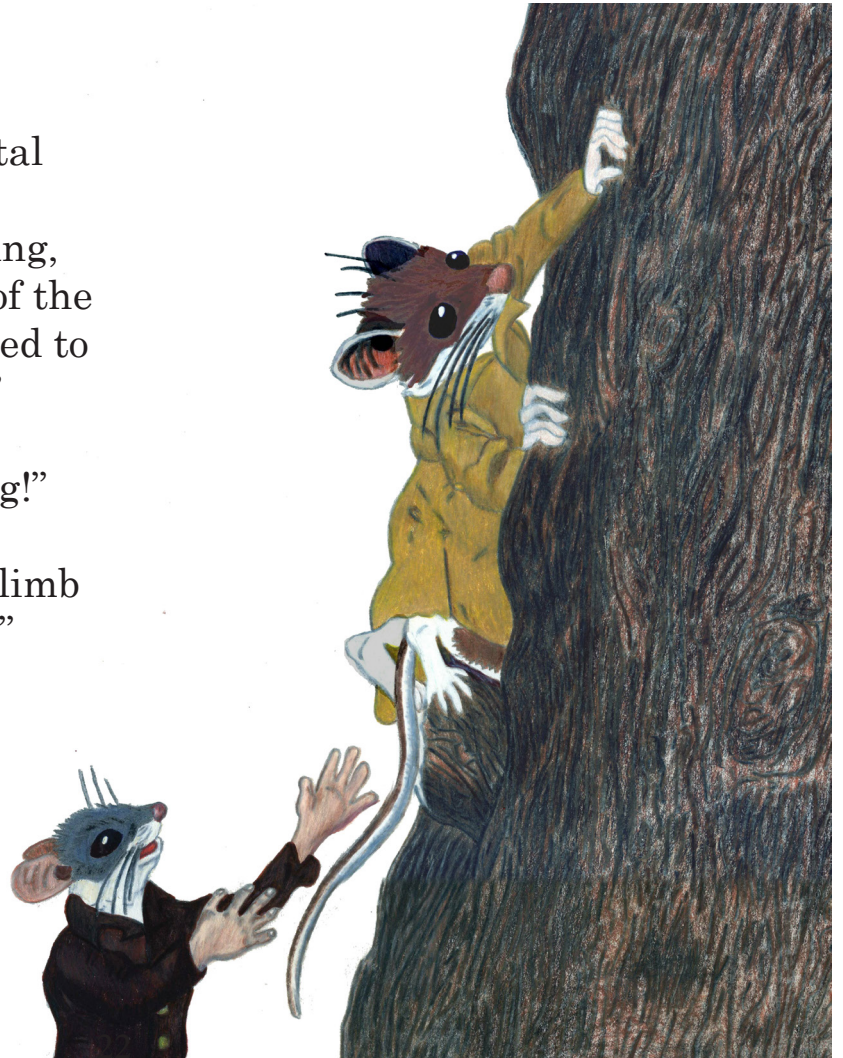
“That old thing?” Nuttal  
exclaimed.

“But it’s raggedly-looking,  
and what if you fall out of the  
tree? What am I supposed to  
tell Mom and Dad?”

“Ahh, quit your fussing!”

Merton grumbled.

“I won’t fall. Mice can climb  
as good as squirrels.”





Before Nuttal could say anymore.  
Merton was scrambling up the trunk and over the lower branches.  
It took him awhile to reach the limb where the kite string was  
tangled.

Just as he was done untying the cord, a sudden gust of wind came.  
Instantly, the kite shot straight into the air, pulling the mouse along  
with it.







Since the kite's  
wings were tattered  
and full of holes, it  
soon lost strength and  
he parachuted to earth.

To Nuttal's relief and  
amazement, Merton,  
though somewhat  
shaken, was not hurt.

After delivering the  
present to their aunt,  
they then carried the  
kite home, hiding it  
behind  
some flower pots.







They set about repairing the kite,  
using whatever scrap of cloth or wood they could find.  
Just looking for enough material made work slow,  
but two weeks of hard labor resulted in  
a large glider with a movable harness.



Although it didn't resemble a pterodactyl,  
it was better than  
nothing.  
For the finishing touches,  
Merton made himself a reptilian-looking mask  
and diamond-shaped rudder to fit on his tail.









They found a nearby hill as an ideal spot for their gliding tests. It was high, had steady winds, and was absent of obstacles like trees and buildings.

On the day of the high flight, the sun was shining and the sky was a clear diamond-blue.

A crowd of small creature gathered on the hilltop to watch the mouse fly.



Merton gazed at some  
fleecy white clouds and  
at the grass rippling in  
the wind.

He spied a raven  
flapping above.  
Soon, he would be in  
its place, not worrying  
about chores or  
overbearing sisters, just  
being wild and carefree.



Then suddenly Bluebell was there.

She had seen her brother lugging an enormous winged contraption up the hill.

She thought, what were they doing, flying that giant kite, when they should be preparing the house for the Midsummer Fest?





When she grabbed Merton by the arm, all his happy dreams were shattered, and he was jolted back to reality.

Without saying a word, she took each brother by an ear and led them straight home.

The parents were waiting impatiently at the front door.

Bluebell had told them everything.

Though they scolded both brothers harshly, it was Merton who got the most blame. Mom complained about him dodging work and leading little Nuttal astray.

Dad complained about his daydreams becoming dangerous, and making everything late in preparing for the Midsummer Fest.









Merton and Nuttal were kept busy with work.

They had to clean the house, help prepare the party food, work out the number of chairs and tables needed for the guests, and make large, colorful party decorations.

They never found out what happened to the glider until a few days later.





Nuttal found the parts  
in the wood bin, all  
broken up and useless.

The parents had  
reduced it to firewood.  
The moment Merton  
recognized the  
remains, he began  
sobbing bitterly.



Anemone did her best to comfort him, admitting finally that the punishment was a bit harsh.



Although she was gracious and kind, she wasn't very sympathetic with his adventurous taste.

"Now you listen to me for a bit," said Anemone, firmly.

"Remember, you're a mouse! So take my advice,

drop all this foolishness for flying and stay right here on the ground. There are plenty of things here to see and do, and it's a good place to be, unlike the sky with its storms and hooked beaks!"

Morosely, Merton went to help Nuttal with polishing the furniture. His brother looked up from his work.



“Are you feeling any better?”  
Nuttal asked.

“No,” Merton replied,  
scowling.





“Oh,” said Nuttal.  
He was quiet for a moment.  
“Maybe someone will bring us another kite for a gift,”  
said Nuttal finally.  
“Maybe,” said Merton, hopefully.



Eventually the guests arrived,  
and the rooms became packed with noisy relatives and neighbors.  
Poor Merton wasn't allowed a moment of peace.  
His sisters and parents were calling him to fetch plates,  
serve refreshment,  
and put away the occasional hat or jacket.





Finally,  
he slipped away from his task as  
butler,  
and peeked at the guests' many  
gifts.  
He almost wept from anger and  
disappointment,  
for although the packages were  
full of treats and trinkets,  
not one  
was a great winged kite.



Sadly, he went to his room. It was then he noticed that his entire collection of feathers and flying books were gone. Only his sketchbooks remained, the thief having deemed them as unimportant.

“Oh those,” said Bluebell, dismissively, when he went to her to complain. “Mom made me hide them...said you should concentrate on being a mouse rather than a bird”. Merton then ran up into the attic of the shed. There he sat, all by himself, thinking how he was still unable to fly. Was he to remain forever an ordinary earthbound mouse? Was his flying to be done only in his dreams?



“Hello, little mouse,” a voice said.  
Merton almost jumped right out of his skin.

“Who said that?” he squeaked.

“I did,” said the voice from above.

Looking up, Merton noticed  
a bat hanging from a rafter.

“I’m Melinda,” said the bat.

“Pleased to meet you.”

“Hello,” Merton answered.

“I’m Merton. What are you  
doing here away from the party?”

“I don’t like parties,” Melinda  
replied. “Too bright and noisy. I  
like it here where it’s dark and quiet.”

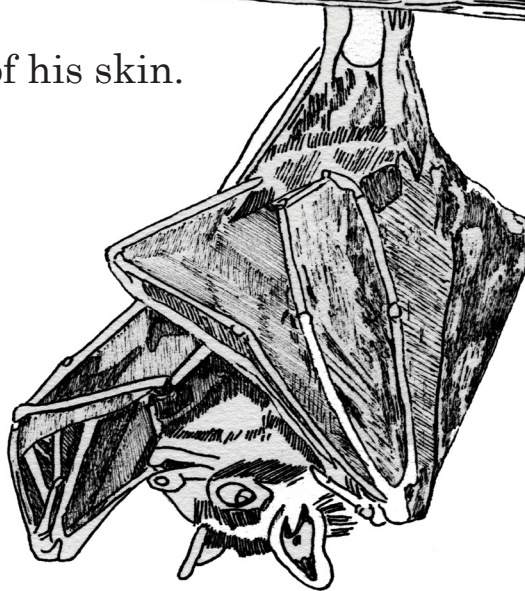
Merton nodded understandably.

“So,” she said. “What are you doing here all by yourself?  
Don’t you like the party?”

“I hate it,” he said dismally.

Then he told her everything.

How he and Nuttal found the kite and made a glider from it.



How it was all  
destroyed for firewood before they could test  
it. Now he was expected to forget his lifelong  
achievement  
and stay right here on the ground.

“That’s terrible,” said Melinda. “It must  
have been a really nice-looking glider.”

“It was,” he sighed. “Where am I going to  
find another kite? I don’t have enough sticks  
or scraps, and  
everyone’s watching me so I don’t get  
anymore.”

“Well, you can stop worrying,” said  
Melinda. “I can help you.”

“How?” Merton asked.

“I can bring you the parts.”

“Thank you! Thank you!” said Merton  
gratefully.





After saying goodbye, he hurried back home with  
a joyful heart.

From that day on, Merton followed the same  
routine.

Each morning he rose very early and hurried up  
to the attic.

There he would find the parts for glider; some  
sticks, a bit of horsehair, a few feathers.

These he carefully hid behind an old wooden  
crate.

As his collection grew, he began assembling the  
pieces together.

Since he no longer had his flying books to refer  
to, he had to rely on his sketchbooks and the bat's  
advice.





As a result, the glider's framework  
was bat like.  
However, this difference was hidden  
away by an outside  
layering of carefully sewed  
fabric and feathers.

"I suppose I could  
launch it out the  
attic window,"  
said Merton,  
thoughtfully.





“Better make that a hill,” said Melinda, promptly, “and not just any hill; a steep one to get enough lift. If you just launch it right out of a window, there’s no way of telling what might happen. You might take off, but you’re more likely to crash.”

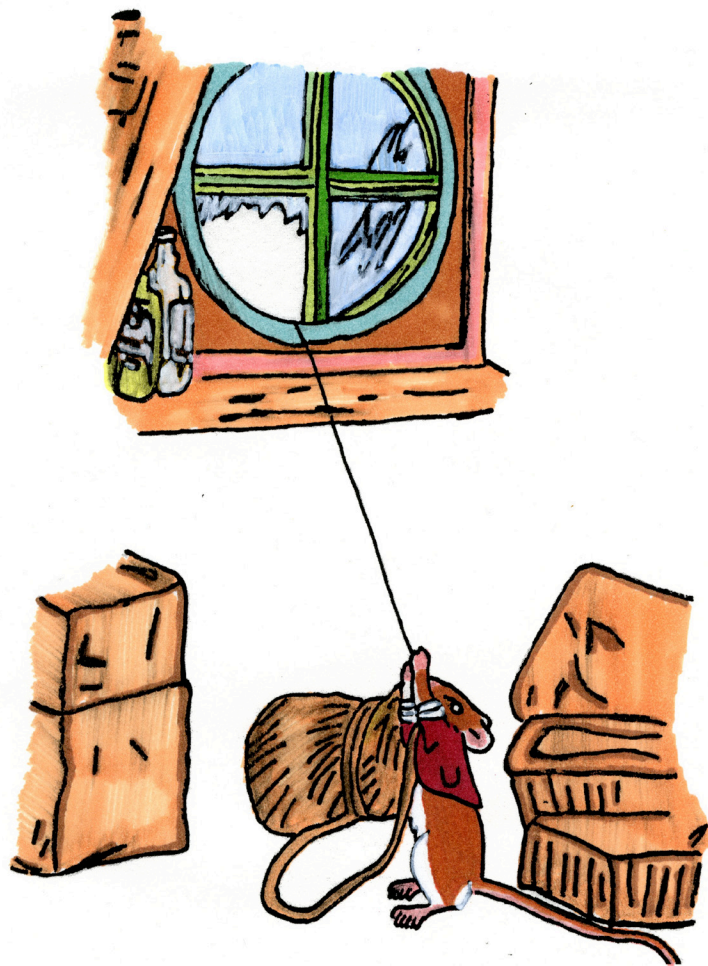
“Question is,” Merton wondered, “is how I’m going to sneak the glider outside without anyone seeing it?”

Unfortunately, Merton didn’t have time to puzzle over this problem; he had to go to school. It wasn’t till after he got home, that he finally thought out a solution.



He decided that the best thing to do would be to lower the glider out the window by means of a rope and basket.

He had no trouble locating a basket. There were several scattered throughout the attic. He chose one that was light and easy to carry. The rope presented a problem, however. It was too heavy and awkward to move. So, he had to make do with a roll of package twine instead.



As soon as the glider was lowered to the ground,  
Merton rushed downstairs. He cautiously snuck past  
the mouse hole and out the shed door.  
Just as he was walking toward the basket, he found  
himself thinking about his little brother.



Nuttal deserved the chance of seeing this glider fly,  
Merton thought. Even though I didn't have his help  
this time, he gave me plenty of help on the first one.  
It just wouldn't be right to leave him behind.  
He went back and found his brother in the sitting  
room doing homework.



When Nuttall heard about this latest project, he was very upset. "Why didn't tell me you were going to make a second glider?" he exclaimed. "I could have helped you get all the stuff like before?"

"Shh...keep your voice down!" Merton whispered urgently.

"You want the others to hear?"

"Well, how come you get to have all the fun then?" Nuttall whispered back. "And I get stuck inside having to do crummy chores and multiplication tables?"

"It wasn't all fun for me," Merton replied, firmly. "Look, I didn't want to get you into more trouble, so I had someone help me instead."

"Who?" Nuttall asked suspiciously.

"Melinda," Merton answered. "She's a bat who lives in the attic." Nuttall frowned as he considered this bit of news. "I didn't know we had any upstairs neighbors?"

"I didn't know either," said Merton, impatiently.

"So, are you coming or not?"



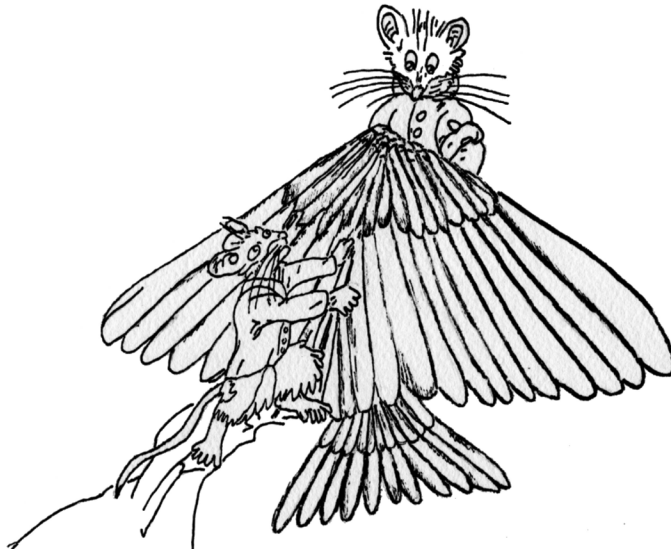
Nuttal frowned some more, and then answered. "Okay, I'll come, but this better not be a waste of time."

"Don't worry," Merton assured him. "It won't."

As soon as Nuttal saw the finished glider, his eyes lit up. Then he suggested that they should try it out far away from home this time. Merton, with Nuttal's assistance, carried the

glider into the hills. It was very difficult for them because of the steep terrain and their really short legs.

They clambered along over a narrow rocky path that winded its way through bushes and tall, thick grass. Hearing the rustling of the wind, they shivered and thought of foxes and weasels.





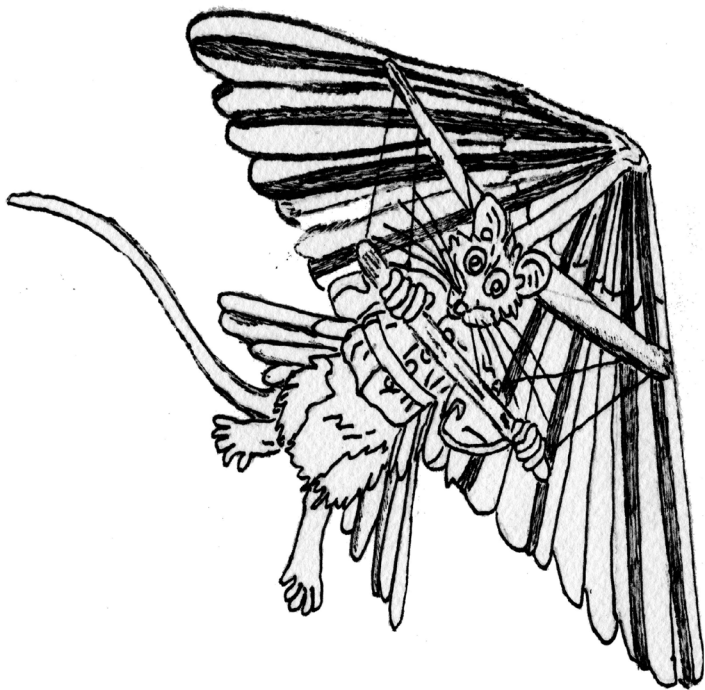
Finally they climbed up a hill that seemed to go straight up into the sky. Just when they thought it would go on forever, they reached the top.

After resting a bit, they got the glider ready.

Merton strapped himself into the harness and grabbed hold of the guide bar. Just as Nuttall was doing some last minute checking on the wings, a sudden rush of wind came.

Knocked off his feet, Nuttall gave a startled squeak as the glider soared straight into the sky.





“Help! Stop! Let me down!”

Merton shouted, but the glider continued flying upward.

“Oh no!” Nuttal groaned as he scrambled to his feet. Frantically, he chased after it, but it was all in vain. As he watched, horrified, it shrank to a small speck and finally disappeared.

“Help! Somebody!” Merton cried, but except for some curious sparrows there was no one to hear him.

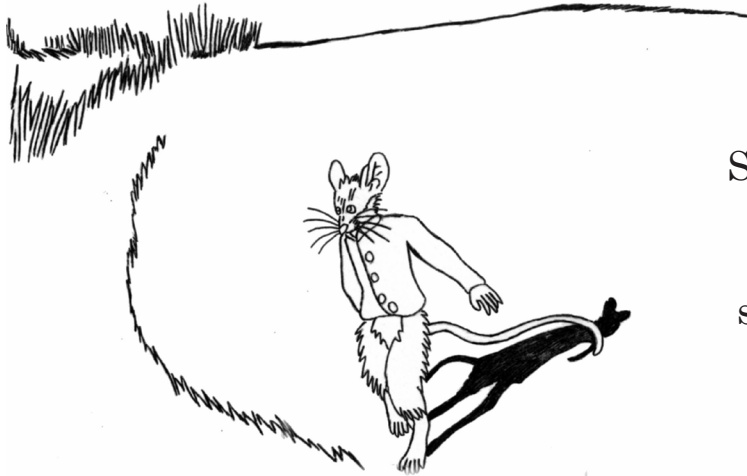






Back on the ground, Nuttal was pacing back and forth, wringing his ears in despair. "I've got to think of something!" he mumbled to himself. "I've got to save him, but how? I don't even know where he went!"

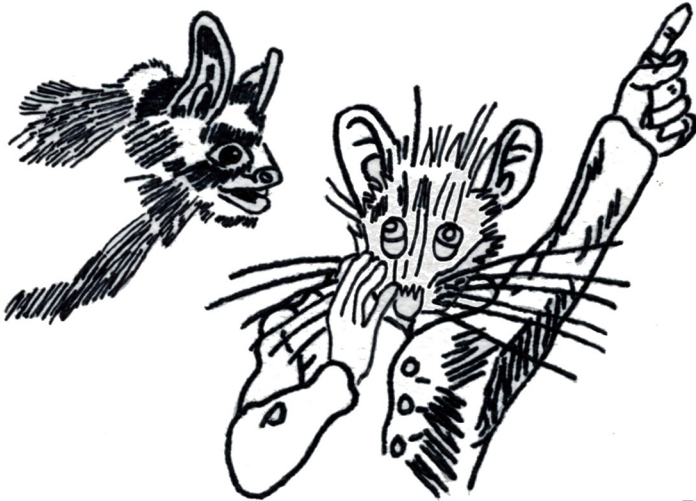
He thought long and hard and then he remembered something Merton had told him earlier. Of course! Why hadn't he thought of that sooner? The bat, Melinda.



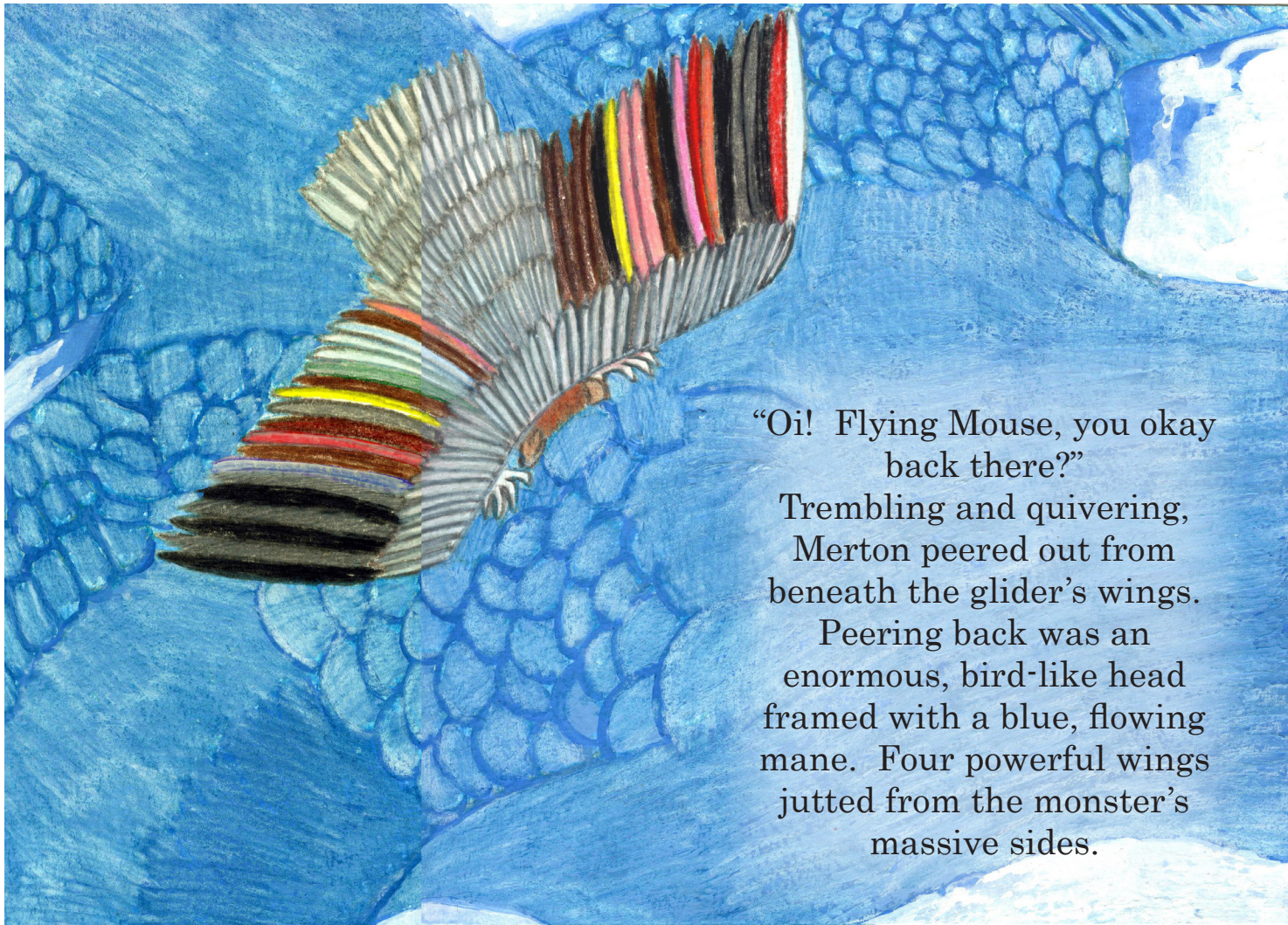
Unlike him, she could fly and use echolocation. She might be able to find and save his older brother. Nuttal ran pell-mell down the hill, stumbling and puffing until he found his way back.

By now, Merton was so frightened his eyes bulged to the size of peas. All he could do was hold on tight to the guide bar. Should he lose his grip, it was a one-way trip straight down.

He quickly shut his eyes to the landscape below. It was whirling around like a loose tidily-wink.



“Help! Help!” he shouted hoarsely. Then suddenly, he landed face first in something soft and cushiony as eiderdown.



“Oi! Flying Mouse, you okay  
back there?”

Trembling and quivering,  
Merton peered out from  
beneath the glider’s wings.

Peering back was an  
enormous, bird-like head  
framed with a blue, flowing  
mane. Four powerful wings  
jutted from the monster’s  
massive sides.



“A—a-g-g-g-griffin!” Merton stuttered in shock.

“Snalleygaster,” the monster corrected. “Griffins only have two wings, whereas we have four.”

Merton just gawked.

“So you want to get into the record books as the first flying mouse?”

Is that so?” asked the Snalleygaster.

Merton nodded dazedly.

“But you need practice flying that so?”

Again, Merton nodded.

“Y-y-yes, that’s right,” he answered in a small squeak.





“And you’re worried about going down like a lead balloon?”

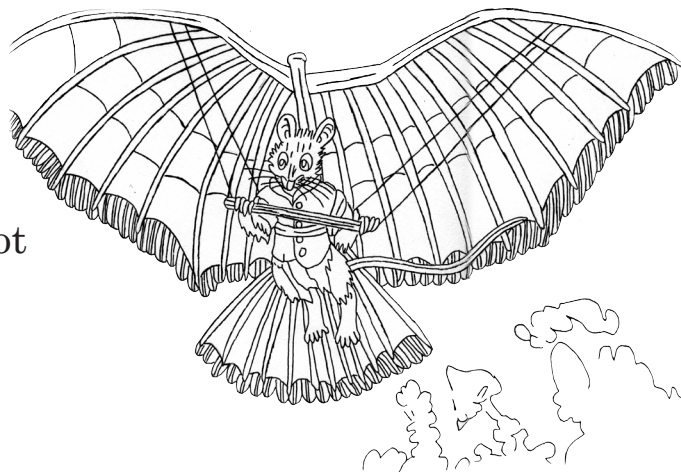
“Yes, yes.”

“Well, in that case,” the Snalleygaster said, “you can stop worrying, I’ll teach you to fly.”

“You will? Why?” Merton asked, puzzled. “You look like a carnivore. You probably like to eat little things like me.”

The Snalleygaster laughed a ringing laugh. “Eat you? Don’t be silly!” she said. “I don’t eat mice, I’m a vegetarian. I eat fruit and nuts. And besides, I admire your bravery and ingenuity.”

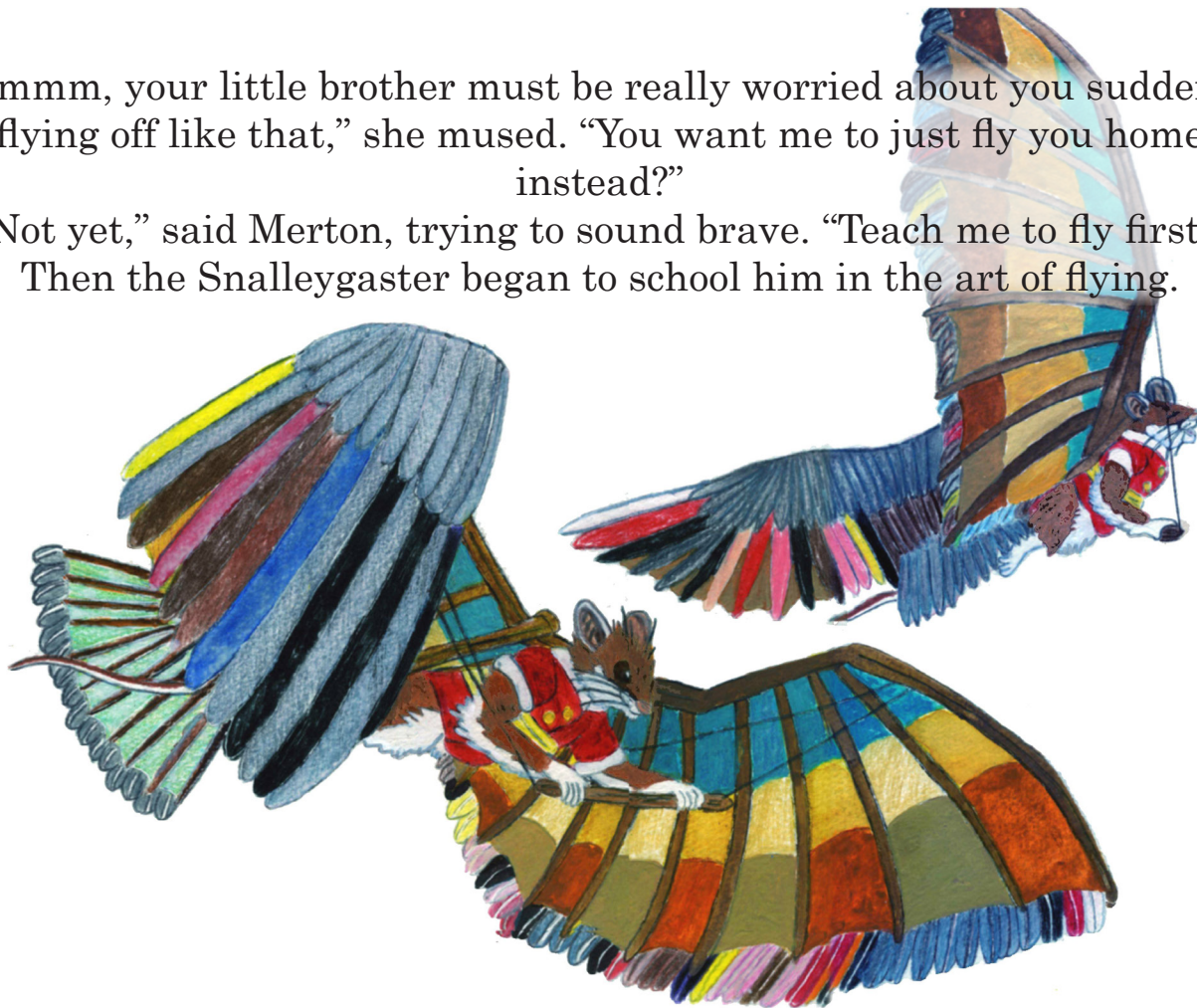
“Thanks,” said Merton gratefully. “I had help though.” And while they hovered there in midair, Merton told the Snalleygaster about the help he got from Nuttal and Melinda.





“Hmmm, your little brother must be really worried about you suddenly flying off like that,” she mused. “You want me to just fly you home instead?”

“Not yet,” said Merton, trying to sound brave. “Teach me to fly first.”  
Then the Snalleygaster began to school him in the art of flying.



Soon he was swooping like a swallow with the wind buffeting his face and streaming past his wings. Merton laughed and shouted with sheer delight as he spiraled and swooped in the sunlight. The Snalleygaster warned him that he should not exert himself; flying was dangerous, especially for a novice. Reluctantly, Merton returned to his perch on her back, and in that fashion he was flown back home.



Merton gave the Snalleygaster directions to his home and she soon had it in view, from a height of two thousand feet.



The Snalleygaster announced her arrival by going into a steep dive and pulling out, with a tremendous “whoosh” right over the tool shed. She then began a series of barrel rolls while making a loud “oogah” sound, like a lighthouse foghorn.



Merton's family  
dashed outside,  
thinking it was an  
earthquake or  
maybe the end of the  
world.

Nuttal and  
frantically fluttering  
Melinda followed  
them shortly.



The Snalleygaster made one more circle and landed, against the wind, in the alfalfa field behind the old tool shed. She extended her left wind so Merton could slide down to the ground, still holding on to his kite glider.



He walked up to his family and said, “What’s for dinner? I’m really hungry.”

His mother and father were too astonished to scold him.





Then the whole family watched as the Snalleygaster  
walked down the field, turned to face the wind and  
began a flapping run  
which soon had her airborne, and she  
flew off toward the setting sun.





The End





# About the author

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Mariko Pratt was born in Mountainville, California and grew up in McKinleyville, California where she now divides her time between writing and illustrating and garden work. She had taken up a career writing in order to combat bouts of artistic block. Her artwork had been featured in several local shows along with artwork by her mother Tsuya Pratt.

Her first completed short story, Paulie's Puppy was narrated online in 2012 and there are plans to feature this work in a series collection set in an alternate Humboldt County where the bizarre and surreal is commonplace.