



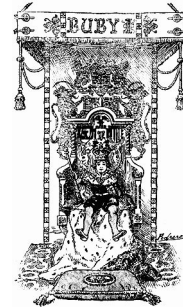
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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Mouse Perez, the Tooth Fairy

Luis Coloma

A long time ago, there was a king named Buby who was known for being a good friend to poor children and a protector of mice. He even started a toy factory for the children and strictly prohibited the use of mousetraps, enacting laws to limit cats' hunting instincts to self-defense. This all began when he lost his first tooth.



King Buby had begun to reign at the age of six with the help of his mother, who guided and watched over him. He was a charming king, and on gala days, when they put his golden crown on and his embroidered royal mantle, the gold of his crown was not brighter than his hair, nor was the ermine softer than his hair and the skin of his cheeks and hands. He looked like a doll, placed on the throne instead of the fireplace.

One day, while he was eating soup, one of his teeth began to wiggle. The entire court was alarmed, and the doctors arrived, one after another. The situation was serious, indicating that it was time for the king to lose his baby teeth.



The whole medical faculty consulted, and eventually, they agreed that the wiggling tooth had to be pulled. The doctors wanted to give him chloroform, but King Buby was cheerful and brave, so he tried to face the danger of pulling his tooth "face to face."

Thus, they tied a red silk thread around his tooth, and the eldest doctor began to pull with such force and success that the tooth, white, clean, and as precious as it was, popped out like a pearl without a setting.

A guard picked up the tooth and put it in a golden basket, then gave it to Her Majesty, the Queen. She immediately called a cabinet meeting to discuss what to do with the tooth.

Some wanted to encase the tooth in gold and keep it in the Crown's treasure chest. Others suggested placing it in the center of a rich jewel.

But the Queen decided that King Buby should write a polite letter to Mouse Perez, the Tooth Fairy, and that same evening, they should place the tooth under his pillow, as children do all over the world. Then Mouse Perez, the Tooth Fairy, would take the tooth and leave a beautiful gift in exchange.

King Buby began writing the letter, which was challenging, but he managed to do it. He only stained the five fingers of each hand with ink, as well as the tip of his nose, his left ear, a bit of his clothes, and his entire lace bib, from top to bottom.

That night, he went to bed earlier than usual and ordered all the chandeliers in the bedroom to be lit. He neatly placed the letter with the tooth under his pillow and sat on his bed, ready to wait for Mouse Perez, even if he had to stay awake until dawn.

Mouse Perez was very late, and the little king entertained himself by thinking about the speech he would give to the mouse. But gradually, Buby's eyes began to close, and he eventually shut them completely, his little body slipping under the covers, his head resting on the pillow.

Suddenly, he felt something soft stroke his forehead. He woke up, jumped up, and saw a very small mouse standing on his pillow, wearing a straw hat, gold-rimmed glasses, rough canvas shoes, and a red bag hanging over his back.



King Buby looked at him fearfully. When Mouse Perez saw him waking up, he took off his hat, bowed his head according to court protocol, and waited for His Majesty to speak.

But the king said nothing because he suddenly forgot how to speak. After much thought, he only managed to say something silly: "Goodnight..."

Mouse Perez was deeply moved by this and said, "I hope you had a great night!"



The Mouse also told him about his family. His two daughters, Adelaida and Elvira, and a teenage son, Adolfo, who was pursuing a diplomatic career. He spoke little about his wife and only in passing, so the king thought there might be problems between them.

King Buby listened in amazement to all of this and occasionally reached out to grab Perez's tail. But Mouse Perez was quick, and he would move his tail to the other side, teasing the child without disrespecting his majesty.

It was getting late, and since King Buby didn't think to send him away, Mouse Perez expertly suggested, without breaking etiquette, that he should go to Jacometrezo Street, number 64, that same night because of the tooth of another very young boy. A poor thing, his name was Gilito. It was a rough and somewhat dangerous road, for there was a cat with very bad intentions in the area, known as Gaiferos.

King Buby decided to accompany him on this expedition and asked Mouse Perez if it was possible. The Mouse thought about it and felt his whiskers. The responsibility was great, and he also had to stop by his own house to pick up the gift he was supposed to bring to Gilito in exchange for his tooth. Mouse Perez agreed to take the king with him.

King Buby jumped out of bed and began putting on his shirt. But suddenly, Mouse Perez jumped onto his shoulder and stuck the tip of his tail in the king's nose. The little king sneezed very hard and suddenly turned into the cutest and most cuddly mouse you could imagine. He shone like gold and was as smooth as silk, and he had small green eyes that sparkled like two emeralds.



Mouse Perez took him by the hand and led him through a hole under the bed, hidden by the carpet, and then they were outside on the road.

Sometimes the Tooth Fairy would stop at a crossroads to explore the ground before proceeding. All of this made King Buby a little nervous. But he remembered that fear is normal and that one must be brave.

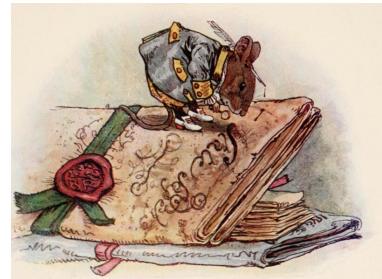
Soon they arrived at the house where Mouse Perez's family lived, under the pavilion of Carlos Prats.

Mouse Perez introduced King Buby to his family. The young ladies were doing homework and Mrs. Perez was embroidering a beautiful Greek cap for her husband. They were sitting in front of a fireplace where a fire of raisin stems was happily burning.

Tea was served by Adelaida and Elvira in beautiful bean cups, and then there was some music. Adelaida sang some songs. She was not very pretty, but she had very polite manners. Elvira, on the other hand, was lively and beautiful.

Adolfo also came home from the Club, where he, much to his parents' regret, wasted time and money playing poker with foreign diplomats. Spending all that time with these diplomats had made him conceited and alienated, and he had no other topics of conversation than polo and tennis.

King Buby would have liked to stay there all evening, but Mouse Perez told him it was time to leave so they could bring the poor boy his gift.



As they stepped outside, they were accompanied by a large platoon of sturdy mice with weapons. Mouse Perez admitted that he had provided some security to protect the little king from the big cat.



Suddenly, King Buby saw that the entire vanguard had disappeared through a narrow hole. The moment of danger had arrived and Mousie Perez, slowly and gently quivering the tip of his tail, put his snout bit by bit through that terrifying hole. He looked, took two steps back, slowly went forward again, and suddenly grabbed King Buby's hand and shot through the hole at the speed of an arrow. He shot as fast as a breath through a huge kitchen and disappeared again through another hole opposite, behind the stove.

In a flash, King Buby saw the kitchen and also saw the feared, sleeping, enormous cat, Gaiferos, whose bushy mustache went up and down to the rhythm of his slow breathing... There was also a very ugly old woman who was sleeping in a chair.



The danger had passed once the exit hole was reached, and all that was left was to climb to the last attic of that same house where Gilito lived.

King Buby looked around the small room and was saddened. An icy wind came in through all the cracks, water dripped from the ceiling, and there were almost no furniture except for an old, small bed made of straw and rags where Gilito and his mother slept in each other's arms. When King Buby saw the poor conditions, pain and amazement lived in the heart of the little king, pain and sorrow, and he began to cry.



He had never seen anything like it before. How was it possible that until then he had not known that there were poor children who were hungry and cold and who were dying of misery and sadness in a terrible bed?

Mousie Perez was also sad, but tried to calm King Buby's grief by showing him the shiny little golden coin that he would put under the boy's pillow in exchange for his first tooth.



Then Gilito's mother woke up and had to get up to earn a meager wage, washing in the river. She woke up the boy, and they began their morning prayer, and then Gilito found the gold coin and cried out in joy.

King Buby and Mousie Perez were happy and began their silent journey back, and half an hour later, King Buby went into his bedroom with the Tooth Fairy.



There, the Mouse again stuck the tip of his tail in the king's nose, and the king sneezed again. And then he lay down again on his bed, in the arms of the queen, who, like every day, woke him up with the loving kiss of a mother.

He thought it had all been a dream, but he promptly lifted the pillow, looking for the letter to the Tooth Fairy that he had put there the night before, and... the letter was gone! Instead of the letter, he found a beautiful gift that the generous Mousie Perez had given him in exchange for his first tooth.

Suddenly, he said, with that serious and dreamy expression that children sometimes have when they think or suffer: "Mom... Why do poor children pray the same prayer as I do, the Our Father, who art in heaven?"

The queen replied, "Because God is their father, just as he is yours."

"So," Buby replied, even more thoughtfully, "we are brothers."

"Yes, my son, they are your brothers."

The queen pressed him with immeasurable love against her heart, kissed him on his forehead, and said to him, "Because you are the king, you are like the older brother. Do you understand, Buby? God has given you everything so that you can help take care of the poor children who have nothing."

"I didn't know that," said Buby. "But I will take that task very seriously."

And that is the story of how King Buby started to help poor children and protect mice.



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