



Marcel is a French mouse who is a very fine secret detective. Thieves steal the famous White Star diamond ring which belongs to the opera singer, Zaza Dupont. But Marcel is determined to return it to her.

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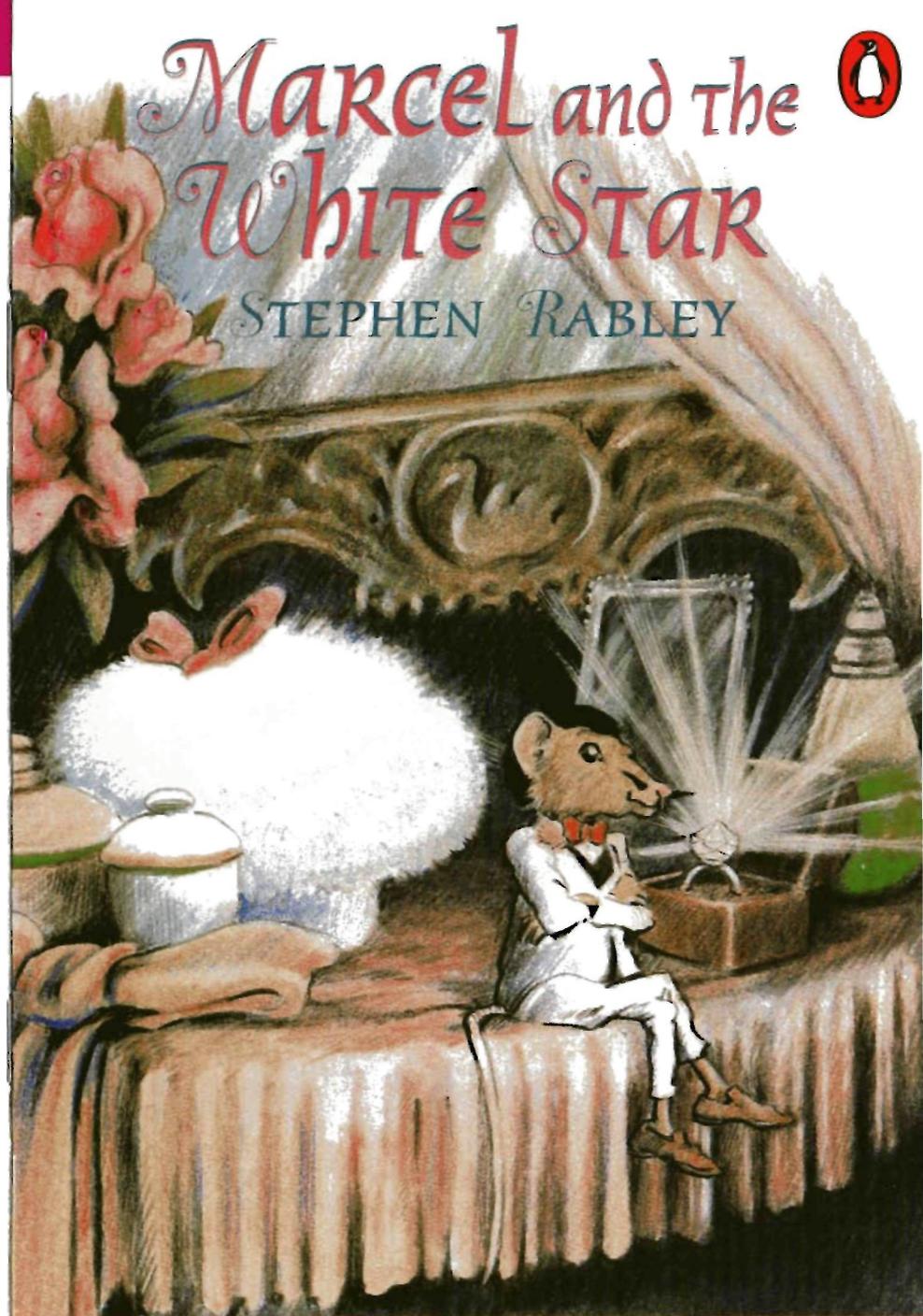
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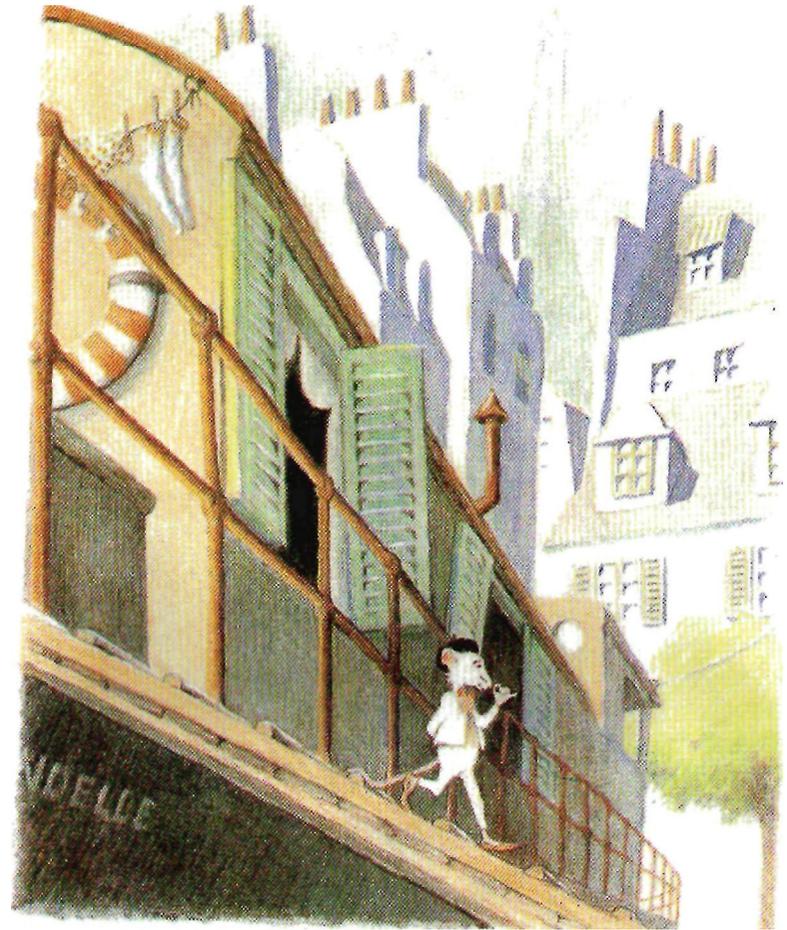


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Marcel and the White Star

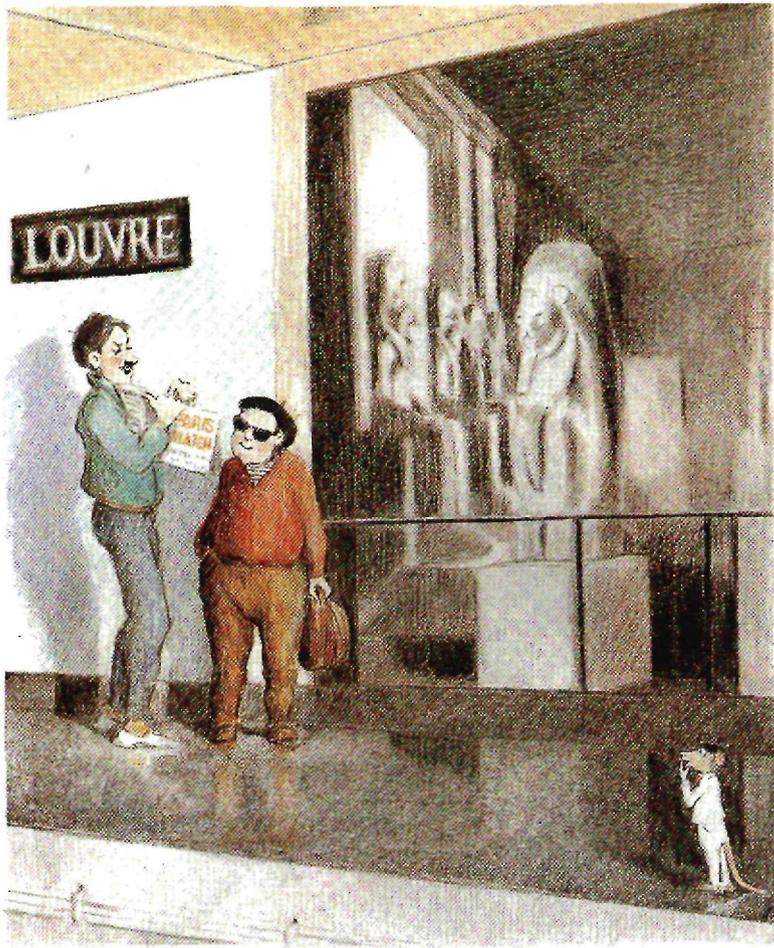
STEPHEN RABLEY





Marcel is a French mouse. He lives on a beautiful old boat in Paris. (His home is under the kitchen floor.) He likes books, restaurants and old films. He likes the opera, too.

One evening in June, Marcel finishes a detective story. Then he goes to have dinner with some friends. They live in the metro station at the *Louvre*.



After dinner, Marcel waits at the station. He sees two men standing next to him. The tall one is reading a magazine, “Look,” he says, “here she is: *‘Opera star Miss Zaza Dupont with her beautiful one million pound diamond ring — the White Star.’*”

“*‘Her’ beautiful diamond ring?*” The short man looks at the photo and laughs. “Not after tonight,” he says.

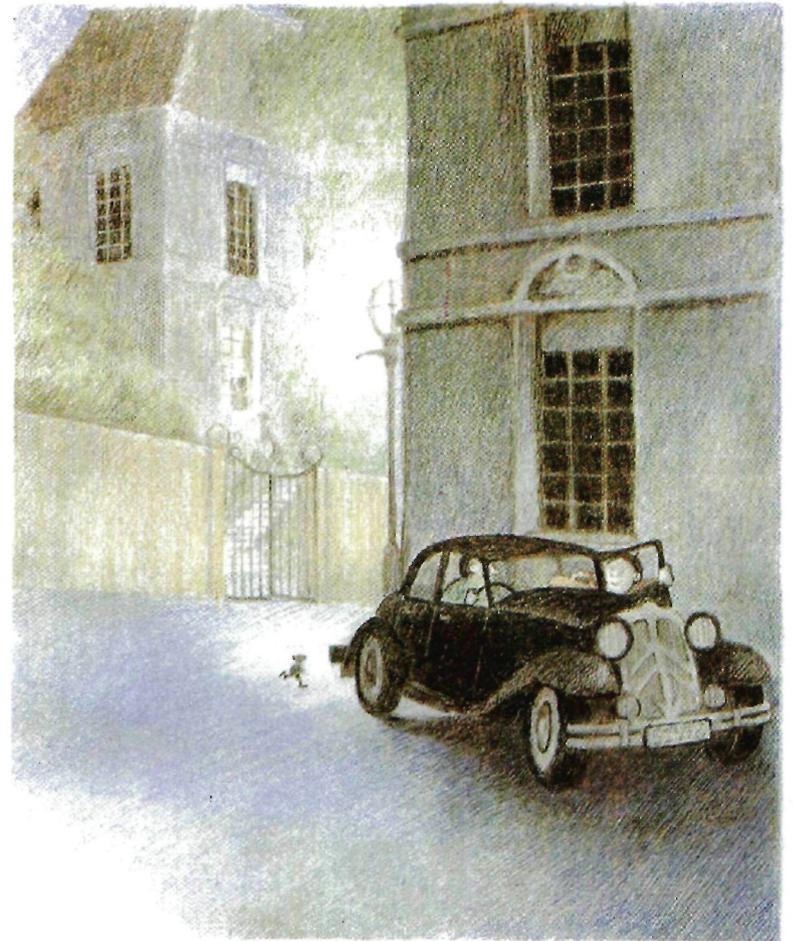


Marcel’s mouth opens. “What?! Are the men going to *steal Zaza Dupont’s diamond?*”

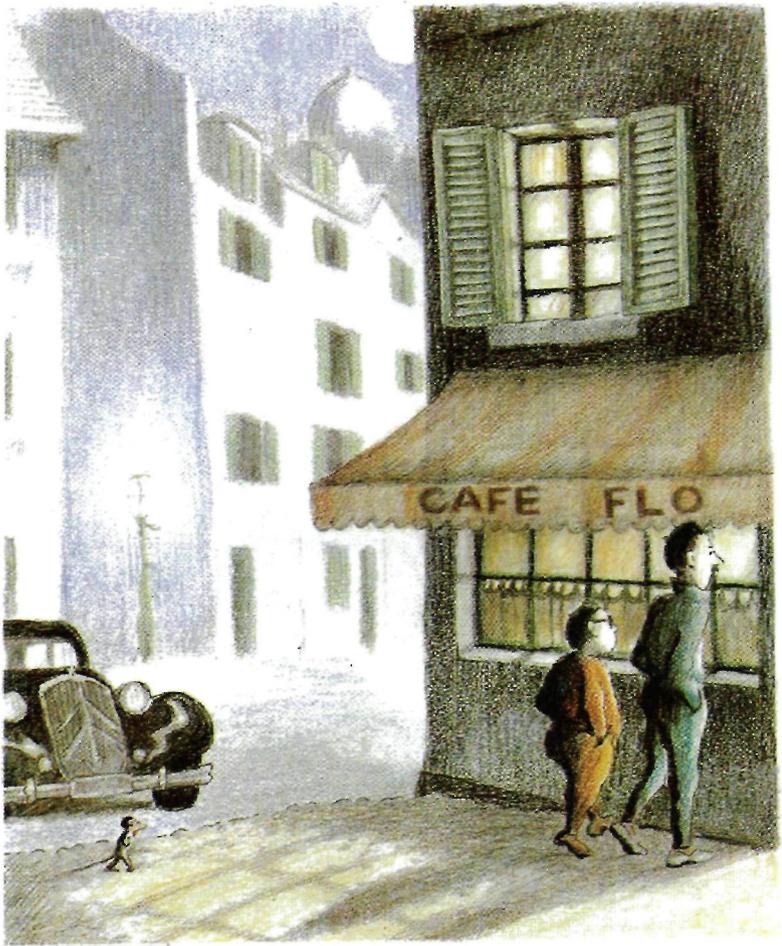
He remembers an evening at the opera two weeks before. Zaza’s green dress. The music. The beautiful White Star on her finger. No! They *can’t* steal it! The train comes and the men get on. Marcel pulls down his hat and follows them.



Half an hour later he gets off again at *La Mouette* station. But there are hundreds of people, and Marcel loses the two men. Then he sees an old mouse. “Excuse me,” he says. “Do you know where Zaza Dupont lives?” But when Marcel finds Zaza’s house, it is too late. “Yes — two men,” she is telling the police on the telephone. “And they've got the White Star.”

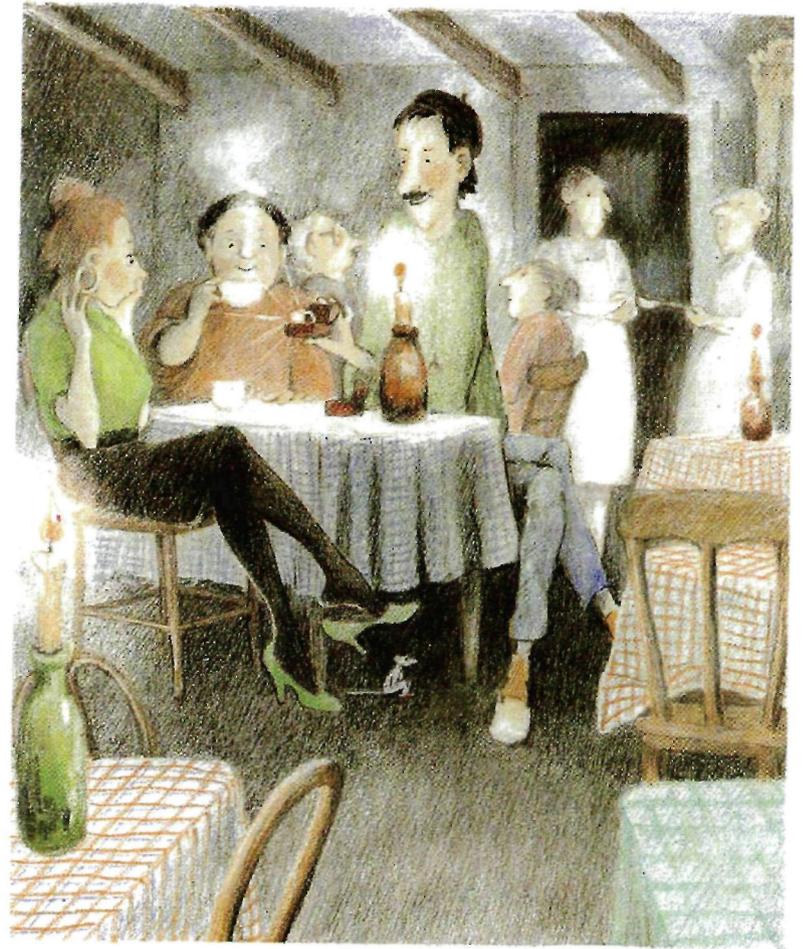


At that moment Marcel hears a motor start. “Where’s that coming from?” he thinks. Then he sees something at the end of the road. It's them! It's the thieves and they're stealing a car! He runs across Zaza’s garden and down the street. He can see the car’s number-plate. It’s near. Very near. “Can I ...?” he thinks, and he jumps.

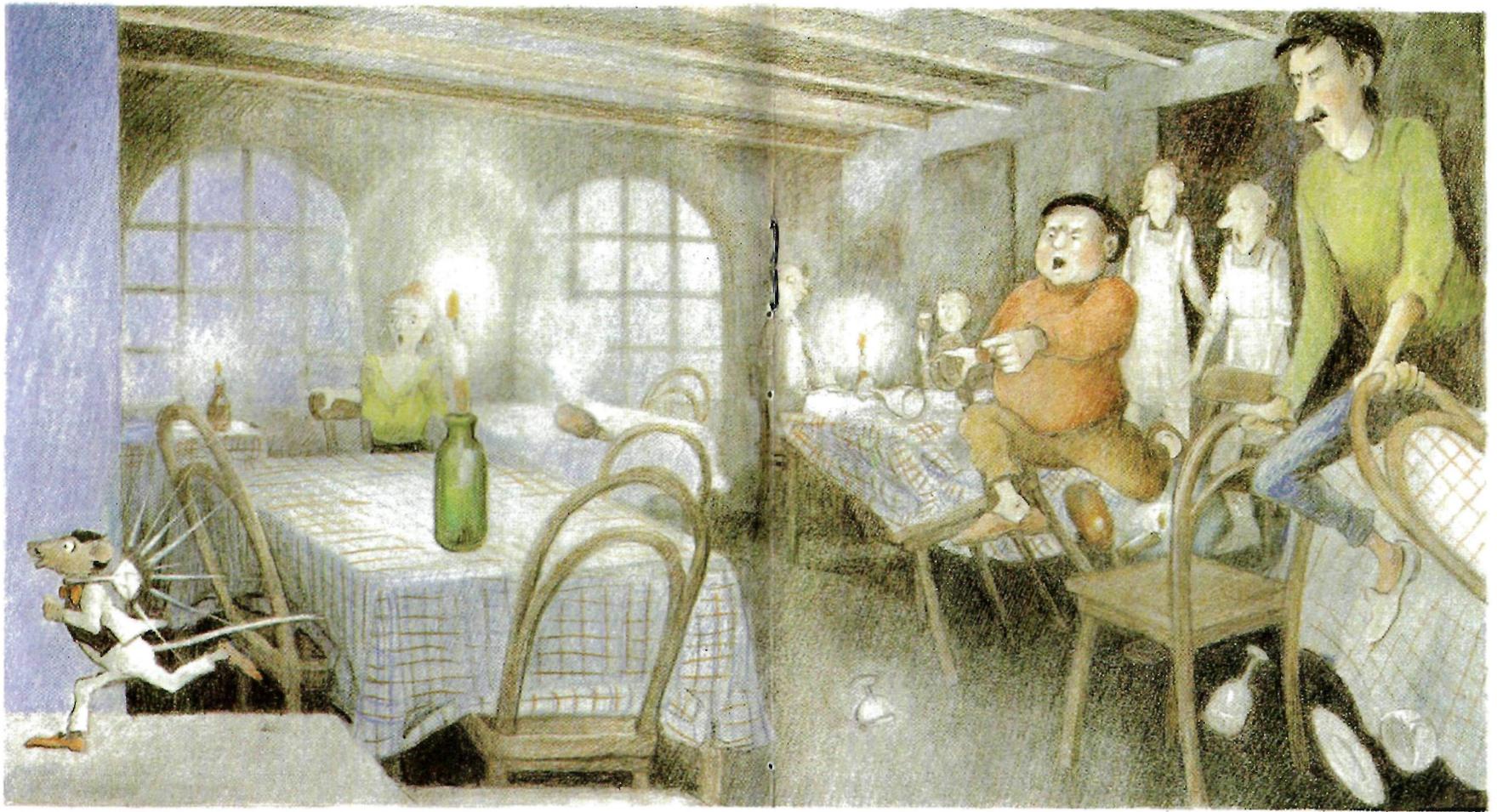


Yes!! Marcel sits on the number-plate. “Good,” he thinks. Then, after a second or two... “But what happens now?”

The thieves drive across Paris very fast. Marcel can hear them in the car. They are laughing and talking. But Marcel is not laughing. He is very, *very* angry. After half an hour the car stops next to a cafe.



It is late and the cafe is quiet. In one corner there is a woman. The thieves sit at her table. Marcel sits *under* the table and listens. “Have you got it?” the woman asks. The tall man takes a box from his jacket. Then he opens it. “Look,” he says. “Ahhh!” The woman puts a hand to her mouth. “What a *beautiful* diamond!” “This is it,” thinks Marcel. “This is the moment.”



He bites the tall man's leg very hard. "Aiiiee!" The tall man throws up his arms. The box and the White Star fly across the room. "What's that on the floor?" one waiter asks. "I don't know," says another. "Is it ... ? No, it can't be a diam..." But before he can finish, Marcel runs across the room. He puts the White Star around his neck. Then he runs to the door.

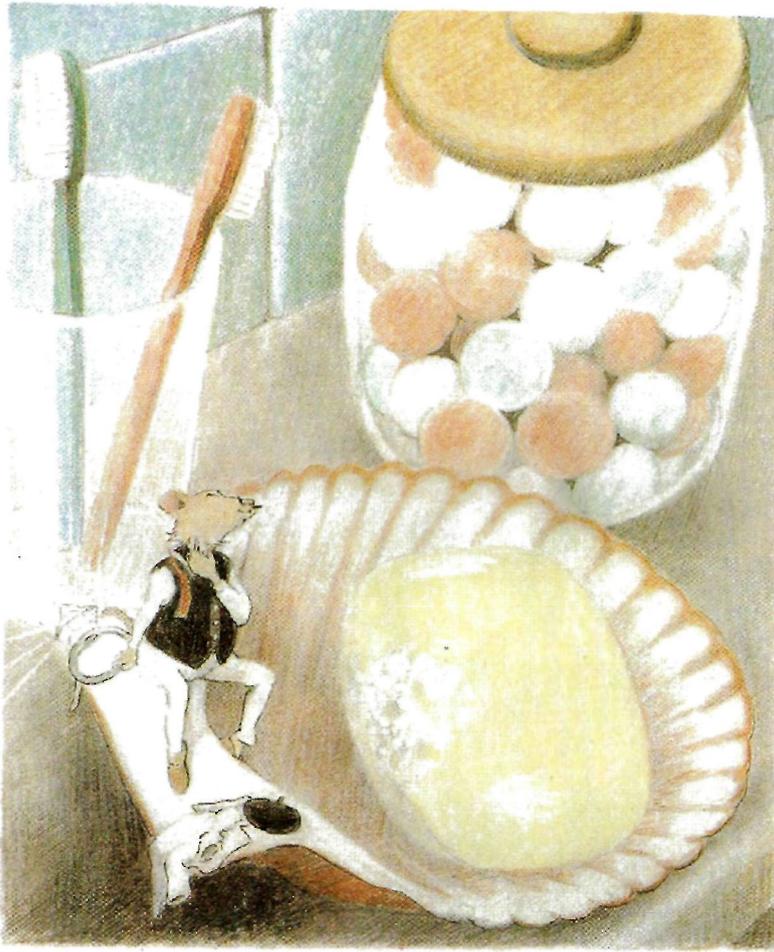
The thieves jump up and follow him. Suddenly there are tables and chairs everywhere. "What's happening?" an old man asks. "I don't know," his wife answers. "Who can understand young people these days?" "Stop that mouse!" says the tall man. "Shut the door!" says the short one. But they are too late. Marcel runs out of the cafe and does not look back.



After ten minutes he stops. There is nobody following him, but... where is he? Marcel looks right and left. Then he sees a big, white church. "Ah! — the Sacré Coeur," he thinks. "Now I know where I am." It is late and there are no metro trains, but Marcel is not tired. He walks back to Zaza's house. When he gets there, she is asleep in bed.



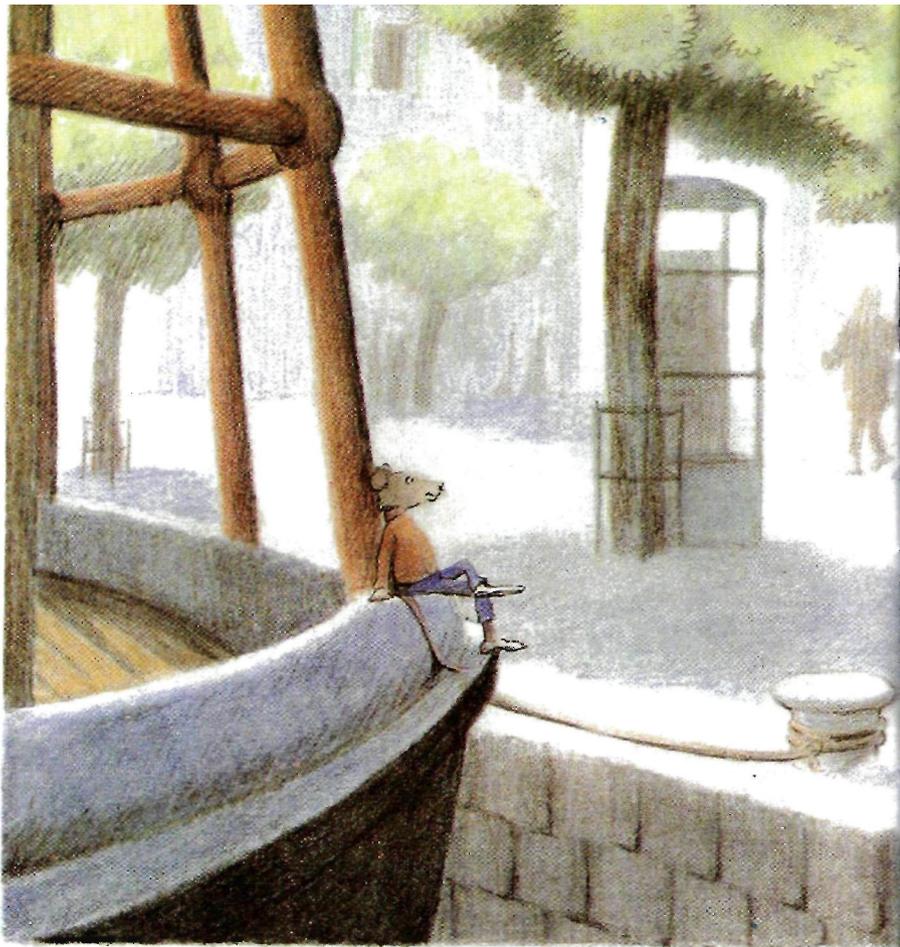
There is a table next to the window. On it Marcel can see lots of photographs, boxes and perfume bottles. He runs across the floor and up one leg of the table. "Now..." he thinks, "...it's time to take off the White Star. In the morning Zaza is going to be very..." Then Marcel stops. Oh, no! He cannot take the ring off. He pulls and pulls, but nothing happens.



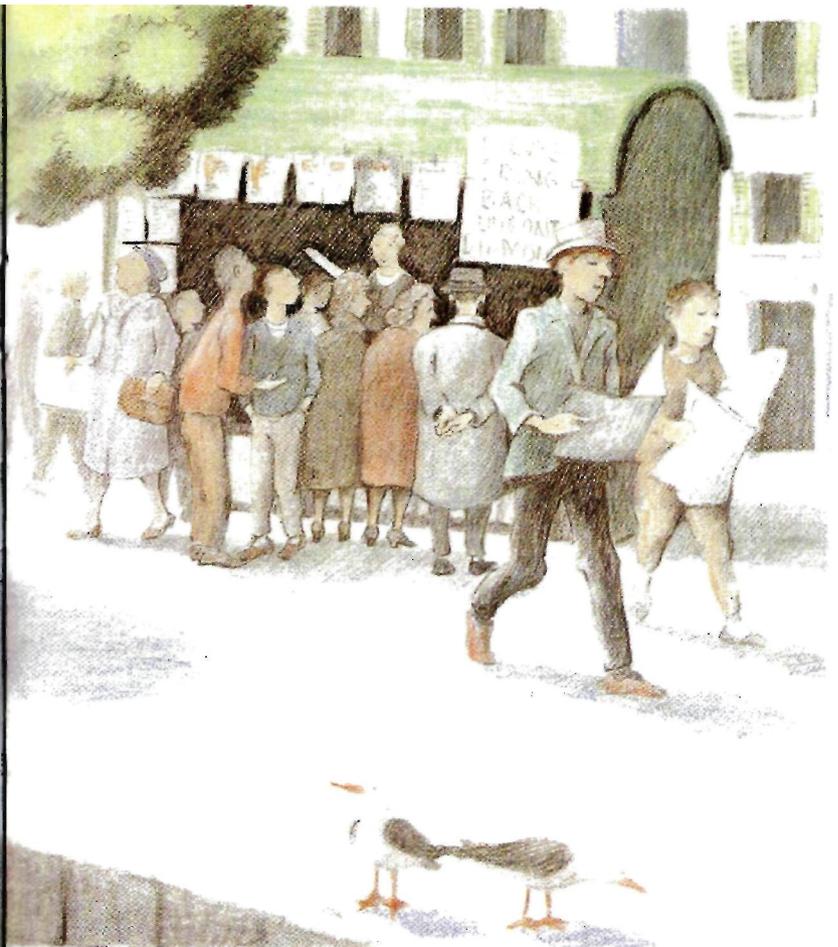
“Now what?” he thinks. Then... “Of course! Some soap!” He runs down the table leg and across the floor. Zaza’s bathroom door is open. Marcel goes in and looks up. A soap-dish is above his head. Ten seconds later he is sitting in it. He puts some soap on his neck. Then he closes his eyes and pulls again. Yes! This time the diamond ring comes off!



In the morning Zaza finds the White Star. It is on her bedroom table between two perfume bottles. “But... I don’t understand,” she says. “Thieves don’t bring things back. How...?” She looks at the ring. Then she looks at her face in the mirror. Then she looks at the ring again. “And why is there soap on it?” She telephones the police.



Next day, Zaza's story is in all the newspapers.
'OPERA STAR'S £1,000,000 RING IS SAFE' says one.
'THIEVES BRING BACK DUPONT DIAMOND' says another.
'NOW POLICE ASK, "WHY?"'
And there are lots of photos of Zaza with the White Star. At home. At the opera house. Standing in front of the Eiffel Tower. She looks very happy in all of them.



Marcel is happy, too. Back on his boat he reads the newspaper stories. Then he looks in the mirror. There is a thin, red line on his neck. "What a night!" he says. After that, he washes, has breakfast and opens the window. It is a beautiful, warm morning. Marcel looks up at the blue sky and smiles. "Now..." he thinks, "what's going to happen today?"

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