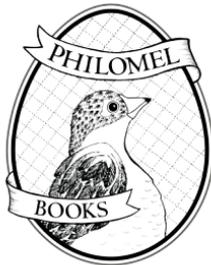




BRIAN JACQUES



Who says that I am dead
Knows nought at all.
I—am that is,
Two mice within Redwall.
The Warrior sleeps
‘Twixt Hall and Cavern Hole.
I—am that is,
Take on my mighty role.
Look for the sword
In moonlight streaming forth,
At night, when day’s first hour
Reflects the North.
From o’er the threshold
Seek and you will see;
I—am that is,
My sword will wield for me.

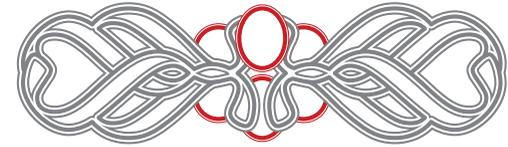
(Rhyme from beneath the Great Hall tapestry)

It was the start of the Summer of the Late Rose. Mossflower country shimmered gently in a peaceful haze, bathing delicately at each dew-laden dawn, blossoming through high sunny noontides, languishing in each crimson-tinted twilight that heralded the soft darkness of June nights.

Redwall stood foursquare along the marches of the old south border, flanked on two sides by Mossflower Wood’s shaded depths. The other half of the Abbey overlooked the undulating sweeps of meadowland, its ancient gate facing the long dusty road on the western perimeter.

From above, it resembled some fabulous dusky jewel, fallen between a green mantle of light silk and dark velvet. The first mice had built the Abbey of red sandstone quarried from pits many miles away in the north-east. The Abbey building was covered across its south face by a type of ivy known as Virginia creeper. The onset of autumn would turn the leaves into a cape of fiery hue, thus adding further glory to the name and legend of Redwall Abbey.

BOOK I
THE WALL



CHAPTER I



MATTHIAS CUT A COMICAL LITTLE FIGURE AS HE WOBBLED his way along the cloisters, with his large sandals flip-flopping and his tail peeping from beneath the baggy folds of an oversized novice's habit. He paused to gaze upwards at the cloudless blue sky and tripped over the enormous sandals. Hazelnuts scattered out upon the grass from the rush basket he was carrying. Unable to stop, he went tumbling cowl over tail.

Bump!

The young mouse squeaked in dismay. He rubbed tenderly at his damp snub nose while slowly taking stock of where he had landed: directly at the feet of Abbot Mortimer!

Immediately Matthias scrambled about on all fours, hastily trying to stuff nuts back into the basket as he muttered clumsy apologies, avoiding the stern gaze of his elder.

"Er, sorry, Father Abbot. I tripped, y'see. Trod on my Abbot, Father Habit. Oh dear, I mean..."

The Father Abbot blinked solemnly over the top of his glasses. Matthias again. What a young buffoon of a mouse. Only the other day he had singed old Brother Methuselah's whiskers while lighting candles.

The elder's stern expression softened. He watched the little novice rolling about on the grass, grappling with large armfuls of smooth hazelnuts which constantly seemed to escape his grasp. Shaking his old grey head, yet trying to hide a smile, Abbot Mortimer bent and helped to gather up the fallen nuts.

"Oh Matthias, Matthias my son," he said wearily. "When will you learn to take life a little slower, to walk with dignity and humility? How can you ever hope to be accepted as a mouse of Redwall, when you are always dashing about grinning from whisker to tail like a mad rabbit?"

Matthias tossed the last of the hazelnuts into the basket and stood awkwardly shuffling his large sandals in the grass. How could he say aloud what was in his heart?

The Abbot put his paw around the young mouse's shoulder, sensing his secret yearning, for he had ruled Redwall wisely over a great number of years and gained much experience of mouselife. He smiled down at his young charge and spoke kindly to him. "Come with me, Matthias. It is time we talked together."

A curious thrush perching in a gnarled tree watched the two figured make their way at a sedate pace in the direction of the Great Hall, one clad in the dark greeny-brown of the order, the other garbed in the lighter green of a novice. They conversed earnestly in low tones. Thinking what a clever bird he was, the thrush swopped down on the basket that had been left behind. Twisters! The basket only contained hard nuts, locked tight within their shells. Feigning lack on interest,

lest any other birds had been witness to his silly mistake, he began whistling jauntily a few bars of his melodious summer song, strolling nonchalantly over to the cloister walls in search of snails.

It was cool inside the Great Hall. Sunlight flooded down in slanting rainbow-hued shafts from the high, narrow stained-glass windows. A million colored dust-motes danced and swirled as the two mice trod the ancient stone floor. The Father Abbot halted in front of the wall on which hung a long tapestry. This was the pride and joy of Redwall. The oldest part had been woven by the Founders of the Abbey, but each successive generation had added to it; thus the tapestry was not only a priceless treasure, it was also a magnificent chronicle of early Redwall history.

The Abbot studied the wonderment in Matthias's eyes as he asked him a question, the answer to which the wise mouse already knew. "What are you looking at, my son?"

Matthias pointed to the figure woven into the tapestry. It was a heroic-looking mouse with a fearless smile on his handsome face. Clad in armor, he leaned casually on an impressive sword, while behind him foxes, wildcats and vermin fled in terror. The young mouse gazed in admiration.

"Oh, Father Abbot," he sighed. "If only I could be like Martin the Warrior. He was the bravest, most courageous mouse that ever lived!"

The Abbot sat down slowly on the cool stone floor, resting his back against the wall.

"Listen to what I say, Matthias. You have been like a son to me, ever since you first came to our gates as an orphaned woodland mouse, begging to be taken in. Come, sit by me and I will try to explain to you what our Order is all about."

“We are mice of peace. Oh, I know that Martin was a warrior mouse, but those were wild days when strength was needed. The strength of a champion such as Martin. He arrived here in the deep winter when the Founders were under attack from many foxes, vermin and a great wildcat. So fierce a fighter was Martin that he faced the enemy single-pawed, driving them mercilessly, far from Mossflower. During the rout Martin fought a great battle against overwhelming odds. He emerged victorious after slaying the wildcat with his ancient sword, which became famous throughout the land. But in the last bloody combat Martin was seriously wounded. He lay injured in the snow until the mice found him. They brought him back to the Abbey and cared for his hurts until he regained his strength.

“Then something seemed to come over him. He was transformed by what could only be called a mouse miracle. Martin forsook the way of the warrior and hung up his sword.

“That was when our Order found its true vocation. All the mice took a solemn vow to never harm another living creature, unless it was an enemy that sought to harm our Order by violence. They vowed to heal the sick, care for the injured, and give aid to the wretched and impoverished. So it was written, and so has it been through all the ages of mousekind since.

“Today, we are a deeply honored and highly respected Society. Anywhere we go, even far beyond Mossflower, we are treated with courtesy by all creatures. Even predators will not harm a mouse who wears the habit of our Order. They know he or she is one who will heal and give aid. It is an unwritten law that Redwall mice can go anywhere, through any territory, and pass unharmed. At all times we must live up to this. It is our way, our very life.”

As the Abbot spoke, his voice increased in volume and

solemnity. Matthias sat under his stern gaze, completely humbled. Abbot Mortimer stood and put a wrinkled old paw lightly on the small head, right between the velvety ears, now drooping with shame.

Once more the Abbot's heart softened towards the little mouse. “Poor Matthias, alas for your ambitions. The day of the warrior is gone, my son. We live in peaceful times, thank heaven, and you need only think of obeying me, your Abbot, and doing as you are bidden. In time to come, when I am long gone to my rest, you will think back to this day and bless my memory, for then you will be a true member of Redwall. Come now, my young friend, cheer up; it is the Summer of the Late Rose. There are many, many days of warm sun ahead of us. Go back and get your basket of hazelnuts. Tonight we have a great feast to celebrate—my Golden Jubilee as Abbot. When you've taken the nuts to the kitchen, I have a special task for you. Yes indeed, I'll need some fine fish for the table. Get your rod and line. Tell Brother Alf that he is to take you fishing in the small boat. That's what young mice like doing, isn't it? Who knows, you may land a fine trout or some sticklebacks! Run along now, young one.”

Happiness filled Matthias from tail to whiskers as he bobbed a quick bow to his superior and shuffled off. Smiling benignly, the Abbot watched him go. Little rascal, he must have a word with the Almoner, to see if some sandals could be found that were the right fit for Matthias. Small wonder the poor mouse kept tripping up!