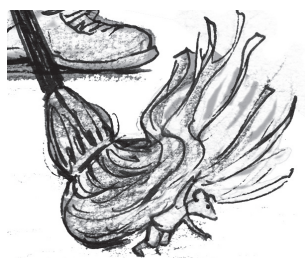


CHAPTER I

Danger in the Library



A ROCK SHATTERED ON THE SIDEWALK THREE inches in front of Louie LaSurie.

“Get out of here!” a man shouted. “Next time I won’t miss.” He clapped his hands. “Shoo!”

Louie froze in place, whiskers trembling and eyes opened wide. He had been daydreaming about playing soccer as he trotted down the sidewalk toward the Marseille Public Library. He should have been paying better attention.

Animals and humans could speak with each other, of course. But Louie’s mother said it was safer not to. “Humans are too unpredictable,” she warned. “A lot of them are nice enough, but some of them hate mice.”

This man was obviously one of the haters. But Louie was mad now. He forgot about his mother’s advice. “Why should I get out of here?”

The man sneered. “Why? Because you’re vermin.

You're just a mouse. You're nothing."

Louie clenched his paws. "I'm not nothing! I'm *somebody*!"

The man snorted and stomped away.

"I'm somebody!" Louie yelled again. "And you're a dope," he added under his breath.

His face hot with anger, Louie sprinted the rest of the way to the library. *In fact*, Louie thought, *I'm not just any somebody. I'm somebody who's going to be the first mouse soccer player in the history of the world!*

Louie squeezed under the door. The library was closed this late at night. He shook off the raindrops clinging to his beret. He stood still for a moment and breathed in the delightful smell of books. Then he shot across the cool marble floor of the lobby to the magazine room. He shimmied up the leg of a reading table in the sports section.

Louie was in luck. An article about the 1982 World Cup tournament was lying open on top of the table. With the newspaper spread out under him, Louie scampered back and forth across the page as he read each line of text.

What a team France had back then! What great players. Platini, Giresse, Tigana. He read how France lost to Germany in a penalty kick shootout in the semifinals. Louie groaned.

Jingle-clink. What was that? It sounded like jangling keys. Louie lifted his head.

A man carrying a mop sprang into the reading room. The janitor!

The man yelled, “*Et voilà!* Now I’ve got you, you scoundrel.”

Louie gasped. He was too shocked to run away. “I was only reading,” he said.

The man wore a nametag over his left breast that read, *Gaston Trudeau*. “I don’t care,” Gaston said. “I don’t allow mice in my library.”

Louie was about to say, “It’s not *your* library,” but he had no time because the janitor ran straight at him with the mop raised over his head.

Louie jumped off the table all the way to the floor. The impact knocked the wind out of him.

The janitor bounded toward him.

Gaspings for breath, Louie dodged between the man’s legs.

The janitor turned around fast. The mop came smashing down in an explosion of dust right next to Louie’s head. It sounded like a million firecrackers.

Louie saw stars. He didn’t know where he was any more. He ran straight up the inside of the janitor’s pant leg. The hairs on the man’s leg made Louie sneeze.

Gaston did a frantic dance and Louie tumbled back to the floor.

The man lifted his foot.

Louie saw the huge boot flying right at him. He rolled to his right.



The boot came crashing down a half inch from Louie's chest.

Louie scrambled under a table. His heart was pounding like mad.

The janitor, on hands and knees, followed him, poking at him with the mop handle.

"Please, calm down," Louie panted.

"I will *not* calm down!" Gaston yelled. He made a quick thrust with his mop and Louie felt a flash of pain as the mop handle slammed into his tail, pinning him to the wall.

He was trapped!