

Starring Prima!

The Mouse of the Ballet Jolie

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A Star Is Born

Ask anyone who knows beans about apple butter. It's usually just no big deal when a mouse is born.

It happens every second, you know. Why, there are about two thousand mice for every human on earth. When you're walking along the street in the city, you might not know it, but you're never more than six feet away from a mouse. And though mice are very good parents, they try not to get terribly attached to their children, because those children grow up so fast that, before their mamas and papas know it, they're setting out to raise their own families. And once those kids start raising their own families, it's rare that their parents even get a paws-card!

But once in a while, along comes a mouse who may change the world—the mouse world, that is, a world human people don't think about very much until they call the . . . well, the pest control folks.

Just such a mouse was born one dreamy, snowy Valentine's Day morning in a cozy nest under the lid of an old grand piano at the Ballet Jolie in New York City. She was one of a very special breed of mice, different from all the other mice in the world.

She was one of the artists.

Now, you've seen the work of the mouse painters, those who work in mixed media such as mud, cereal, snow, and peanut butter.

You know of the singing mice, such as Squeequido Domingo and James Tailer. There are the mouse authors, such as John Silverback, who wrote *Of Mice and Rats*, and of course, the famous German sable coat, Grimmouse, who wrote the nursery favorite *Whiskerella*. (Well, yes, of course it was a mouse! If you've ever had a mouse nibble your Halloween jack-o'-lantern, you know that whoever thought up turning a pumpkin into a beautiful coach had to be a mouse, not a human.)

Mouse artists have brighter eyes and glossier coats, as well as more protective and doting parents. They don't learn to scurry; they learn to stroll. They crawl tall. French or Japanese or Italian or American, they know who they are, and they are quietly proud of it.

Because of their natural speed and instinctive prowess at all sorts of jumps, among the most extraordinary of the mouse artists are the dancers. And the newborn baby girl was one of these.

All mice are born with the ability to jump. However, popping out from under a pile of

leaves is a long way from a ballet move such as a grand jeté. Not every mouse can make the leap. There's ever so much hard work involved, including hours of stretching and kicking while all the other mice are playing Freeze Mouse or Kick the Kibble.

Luckily the mice of the Ballet Jolie took their heritage seriously, and when that baby girl was born, though she was the last and tiniest of the litter, everyone sensed she was something special. Before she went to sleep on the night she was born, looking no more obviously unusual than a little pink shrimp, she spoke. She murmured softly, "I am born to dance."

Her dear mama was so surprised that she almost rolled over on the rest of the babies, who all peeped in protest. And wise mother that she was, she quickly sensed that a whole new era was about to begin at the Ballet Jolie.