

CALLING LADIES, GENTLEMEN, AND CHILDREN OF ALL AGES!!

Maximillian and Leroy are two circus mice cousins who think they've got it made in the shade at the old Farnsworth Circus Museum. There are no dogs around, there's a safe path to the full pantry in the old house, and the barn is full of dry hay and old circus wagons to hang out in.

But when a new generation of Farnsworths move in, things start to shake up. And when eight-year-old Lucy Farnsworth brings home a tiny rescue kitten and hides him in the barn because her dad is allergic to cats, Max and Leroy need to think fast if they're going to be able to stay.

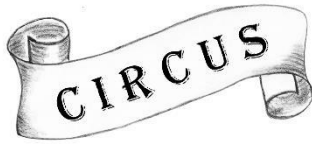
With the help of Boomer—the strangely silent family dog—Max and Leroy take the new kitten under their wing and show him the ins and outs of living at the museum, and flying “under the radar.” And when Leroy finds himself in deadly peril, it is **Finnigan the Circus Cat** who saves the day!

\$8.95 USD

Contents

	Prologue	1
One	New Arrivals	3
Two	Big Changes	10
Three	Boomer	15
Four	A “Cat Free” Zone	23
Five	The Kitten	35
Six	The Plan	46
Seven	All in a Name	59
Eight	Teamwork!	71
Nine	Growing Pains	88
Ten	Airborne!	97
Eleven	Home Alone	110
Twelve	Explorers	119
Thirteen	Uh-Oh	129
Fourteen	The Circus Cat	139
Fifteen	A Circus Family	146

Prologue



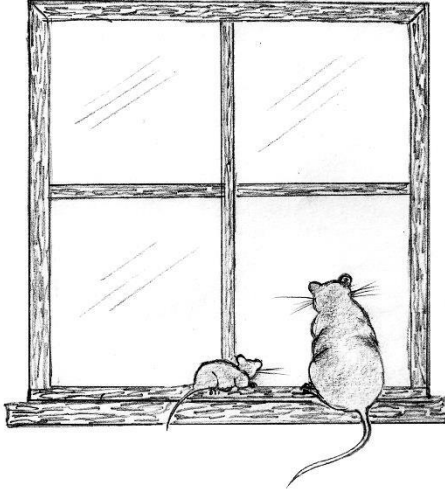
If there's one thing you can always count on about the circus, it's that there's a surprise around every corner. And for that matter, under every table, in every box, and behind every curtain!

My name is Maximilian—but my friends call me “Max” for short. And I am short. It comes with being a mouse.

And I am not just any mouse. I’m a CIRCUS mouse, and I come from a long and honorable line of circus mice. But...more about the family tree later. Right now, my cousin Leroy and I are still adjusting to the surprise package we just found sleeping under a sweatshirt in the basket on the handlebars of Lucy Farnsworth’s pink and white two-wheeler.

As far as we can tell, it’s soft, and fluffy, and cute, and it looks absolutely exhausted. And past that, well...we’re just going to have to back up the story a week or two.

Chapter One



NEW ARRIVALS

Things had been pretty quiet at the Farnsworth Circus Museum in Beechville, Wisconsin for the past couple of months. Old Man Farnsworth had owned the little museum since before he retired from being a circus clown, and my family had lived here with him for

more generations than I could count. We grew up going between the white frame farm house and the big red barn where Old Man Farnsworth kept his five circus wagons and the old daredevil cannon and his trunks full of costumes and other good memories.

He would open the place every Sunday for a few hours and show off the wagons and tell some pretty good stories to whoever stopped by to listen. But mostly he liked to just go down to the stream by the back of the property and fish. And when he got *really* old, he stopped doing even that and just sat on his big front porch instead, drinking lemonade and reading the newspaper.

Well, eventually Old Man Farnsworth took a nap on the porch and didn't wake up and went to the Big Top in the sky.

There never *was* a Mrs. Farnsworth in the picture, so the place has been pretty quiet lately. Until just two weeks ago.

Leroy and I had just got back from washing our faces in the stream one morning. We were stretched out on a hay bale in the barn, right under the east window. That spot is nice and warm in the morning, and its good place for drying out our whiskers before we start looking around for food again. And face it, we're mice. We are *always* looking for food. There was still a whole pantry full of goodies left after Old Man Farnsworth died, so Leroy and I had already eaten a good breakfast of dried apples and stale crumb cake. I was nearly asleep in the sunlight when Leroy gave me a dig in the ribs.

"Hey, did you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what," I mumbled with my eyes shut.

"I thought I heard a car drive up!" he said. "Didn't you hear it too?"

Now Leroy may be family, but he's never been what you'd call the brightest bulb in the chandelier. And he tends to get a bit nervous when he thinks he hears strange noises.

"Leroy, are you trying to wake me out of a perfectly good nap because you heard a car?" I asked. "We live in town. Of *course* cars are going back and forth." I said. I rolled over on my back and spread my whiskers a bit wider in the sun to dry. Ah, life was good!

"No, really Max, I heard something!" he said. "This could mean trouble! We should hide!"

"Leroy," I replied, "just because once you almost got run over by a fire truck when you were eating a piece of toast in the middle of the street doesn't mean it's going to happen again." I was absolutely positive his imagination was just running wild.

He tugged on my arm. "Max," he said. "Come on!"

I turned away from him...and then I heard the noise too. I looked back at him. Leroy still had that same worried look on his face.

"What are you waiting for?" I said. "Let's go check it out."

We picked a spot at a window that looked over at the house. Leroy wiped a spot clean with his elbow so we could see better. A big blue minivan turned into the

driveway. A black pickup truck was right behind it. They both pulled up to the front porch and parked next to each other.

“I wonder what they’re doing here,” said Leroy. I wondered the same thing. Nobody had driven in here since Old Man Farnsworth’s funeral.

A mom and two kids—a boy and a girl—got out of the minivan, and a man stepped out from behind the wheel of the truck. A big short-haired yellow dog followed him out of the truck and started to sniff his way silently around the edge of the yard. The dad stretched his arms above his head like he was stiff, and then reached into the van and pulled out another little kid from some contraption in the back seat. This one was smaller,

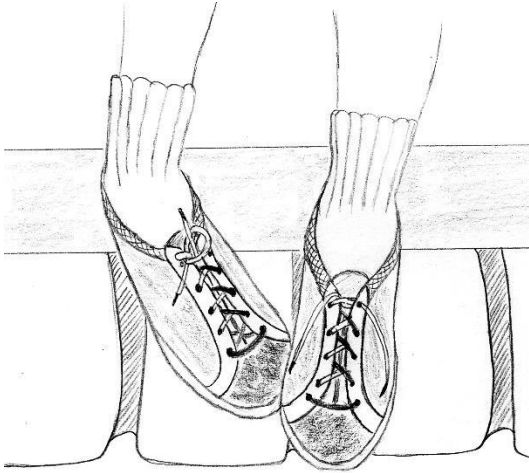
and he seemed a bit wobbly when he stood up.

“Would you look at that,” said Leroy. “People!! Don’t they know this place is closed?”

“It sure doesn’t look like it,” I said.

They all went up the front stairs and looked around the porch and through the windows. We watched as the dad took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. Then they all walked right in to the kitchen like they owned the place.

Chapter Two



BIG CHANGES

In nudged Leroy in the ribs. “We have *got* to get a closer look,” I said, and we both headed to the top floor of the barn. There’s more than one way to the house that doesn’t involve climbing, but with that dog sniffing around in the yard, we weren’t taking any chances. So up we

went, under a broken shingle, across the power cable running from the utility pole to the house, then to the tree branch that crossed the cable and up to second floor window, to a tiny hole under the sill.

I squeaked through with no trouble, as usual, but Leroy found it a tight fit. He's big-boned for a mouse. Oh heck, he is *enormous*. He's just about the size of an average rat. Though don't tell him that. He's a bit sensitive about it. Particularly the thing about the tail.

Rats have tails that look like earthworms, all pink and smooth and squishy. Mice don't. We have short, smooth hair on them from end to end, and just the right amount. My mother often told me my tail is one of my best features. Tell Leroy that he looks just like a rat, and he's likely to punch you first

and apologize later. Maybe...on the apology.

I don't know where Leroy got his size, but the circus has always been known as a place for folks who are a bit...unusual. Big, little, bearded, tattooed, prone to swallowing swords and fire. So you could say he's in the perfect place for a guy like him.

"You're going to have to lay off the carbs," I told Leroy. He's used to it.

"We could find a bigger hole," he replied, and tugged the last bit of his haunches inside, while his tail trailed behind him.

We stayed on the second floor for a good long time, out of sight and under a dresser. We heard the sound of footsteps clomping up and down the stairs as the

kids snooped around and the grownups hauled boxes and suitcases from the van and the truck into the house. The door to this bedroom opened, and the little girl came bursting in. She ran to the window and looked out at the yard. It had a lovely view of the apple tree by the house.

“Dibs on this one,” she yelled.

“Cheater!” The older boy followed her into the room and dropped a suitcase and a paper grocery bag. “Lucy, the only reason you got to pick first was that you left your stuff downstairs so you could run faster!”

“Mom,” Lucy yelled, “Charlie’s picking on me!” She sidled over to the bed and sat down on it. A cloud of dust rose from the quilt.

We couldn’t see Charlie’s face, but we

could hear the smile in his voice.

“Hah,” he said. “You’ve got the dustiest room in the house. *I’m* going to find something better!” And then he left, stomping loudly down the hallway to the next room where he dropped his bags with a thump. We could hear him walk around, pulling dresser drawers open and opening the window of his room.

Leroy looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. I knew what he meant. The whole *house* was covered with dust. Old Man Farnsworth hadn’t been big on cleaning anything but the kitchen and the living room for years, seeing that he usually skipped the stairs to the bedrooms and most of the time just slept on the sofa.

Chapter Three



BOOMER

By the time the sun went down and the moon started to rise on that first day, Leroy and I figured out that things had the potential to be pretty good from here on in.

We left Lucy and Charlie upstairs and sneaked between the walls on down to the kitchen, picking a spot next to the pantry to sit back and watch. The dad—Fred—kept bringing in boxes and suitcases from the car and truck. The mom—Shirley—kept an eye on the little guy as he wobbled around the kitchen. Every so often he'd lose his balance and fall—plop!!—on his bottom, But there seemed to be a lot of padding in his pants and so the only thing that got bruised was his dignity.

After the fifth “whomp” to the floor, however, he finally started to cry. Shirley picked him up and hugged him.

“Donovan,” she said, “we are just going to have to find you someplace where you won't get into trouble!” She stuffed him

into a high chair, and wiped his face and hands with a wet cloth.

“Oh, look at you!” she said as a coating of dirt and dust wiped right off. “I knew there was a little boy in there somewhere.” She poured some dry cereal into a bowl for him and gave him a little box with a straw to play with. Then she turned her attention back to cleaning out the refrigerator.

The dog’s name was Boomer. He suddenly pushed through the doorway by the pantry, and sat down next to the high chair. Donovan decided that dropping his cereal on the floor for Boomer to get was more fun than eating it, and Boomer played right along, snapping up the pieces on the first bounce, and sometimes before they even hit the floor.

While Boomer's eyes were fixed on the cereal bowl, Donovan was looking all around the kitchen. I don't know how he did it, but I knew that he saw us. I pulled Leroy closer and tried to push us both further under the edge of the cabinet.

"Hide, you big lummo!" I said in a whisper.

"I *am* hiding," Leroy said. "You don't have to push!"

But still, Donovan kept staring at us. Then he took his pudgy little hand and pointed straight at the pantry!

"Mmmmm....." he said and grunted a little. Oh no, the jig was up!

Shirley looked up from the refrigerator. "Mama?" She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. Donovan frowned. No, that wasn't it at all. I looked down and saw

that Leroy's tail, his pride and joy, hadn't followed the rest of him into hiding but lay out like a piece of string next to the pantry door.

"Mmmmmmm...." Donovan said again, grunting louder and pointing at the pantry again.

"More?" Shirley looked at the empty cereal bowl. "What an appetite!" She crossed the kitchen in our direction and grabbed the cereal box that sat right above us. She refilled the bowl and glanced down at the dog. "Boomer, I don't suppose you know anything about this."

She started to clean the kitchen sink. Boomer, who evidently had a better sense of reading Donovan's mind, wasn't so easily misdirected and he walked straight over to us and lay down. He took in a

deep sniff with that wet nose. It was close enough for us to touch it. The dog didn't say anything. Leroy turned to me. "Maybe he's friendly?" he shrugged, and put a tiny paw on Boomer's nose. Boomer sneezed. Donovan went wild with laughing, and pointed toward us again. "Daaaaaaahhhhh..." he giggled.

Shirley looked up. "Dog?" she said. "Yes, Boomer is a dog! That's very good!" Then she looked at Boomer. "Hey buddy, get out of there. The pantry is off limits for you." Boomer didn't say anything, just returned to his place by the high chair and waited for some more food to fall his way. I noticed that he kept an eye on us now, and so did Donovan. But as long as Shirley didn't catch on, it seemed like we were in the clear for the moment. Leroy and I snuck back outside.

“That was close,” I said. “How could you leave your tail just lying out like that?”

“Well, it just kind of followed me,” he said. “It’s not like it’s an arm or a leg that I can move.”

I thought some on that. “Okay, so how about the next time, you just kind of drape it over your arm. Like a purse. Or a towel. Or a cape.”

“I like the cape idea,” he replied, nodding. I looked back at the house.

“So what do you think?” I asked him. Not like I’d plan to build a space station with his advice, but still, you’ve got to have somebody to talk to.

“I dunno,” he said. “But I think that maybe the dog is friendly. He sure doesn’t seem to say much.”

I thought on that for a while. I personally am not a very trusting sort. I figure we're too small to take many chances before we figure out who's a friend or foe. Still, the fact that Boomer hadn't tried to eat us or chase us or even bark at us seemed to be a good start.

“Well,” I said, “he could certainly help us out with Hector and Godfrey.”



Mary T. Wagner is an award-winning author and essayist in Wisconsin.

She first started to imagine the story about Finnigan the Circus Cat after her younger son and his wife brought home the smallest kitten she had ever seen from an animal shelter. The wee little Finnigan thrived with large doses of cuddles and cream, and is still the source of limitless laughs for Mary and her family. Finnigan now has a “little brother” named Linus, who is ALSO a rescue kitten.

Coming soon...!!

FINNIGAN

and

THE LOST CIRCUS WAGON

When the Farnsworths acquire a broken-down old circus wagon for the family circus museum, nobody knows that it really comes with a valuable secret.

Nobody in Beechville, that is. But when two shady characters come to town with plans to steal it away, it's up to Finnigan, Max and Leroy to send them packing!