



A mysterious scrabbler

It was a dark autumn night in the forest.
An eerie wind howled through the trees.
An owl hooted in reply.

At the edge of the woods was a small police station where the lights were always on.
A small haven of light in the darkness. A place where you could ask for help at any time.

If you went inside—the door was always unlocked—you found yourself at once in the large police room.

On the left was a hat stand with two stylish police hats. To the right was a glass cupboard with a black pistol inside it and a terrifying baton. The cupboard was always locked. In front of it was a great big desk with an old-fashioned stamp on it.

A little further in was the old prison, still with its barred door. But for now this was where the police chief slept.

If you crept in there you'd see the chief still snuggled up in bed. Mouth open, snoring lightly with soft little sighs. The bed was large and Police Chief Buffy was small, like a cinnamon bun beneath the cover.



Buffy was a mouse, zero years old. She was the one looking after the police station while old Police Chief Gordon was away. Taking a break—a very long break actually...

Suddenly the stillness of the night was broken. Someone was scrabbling at the windowpane. Scrabble, scrabble. As if a hungry animal were trying to get inside.

Buffy woke at once and sat up in bed.

Outside the window, a large shapeless thing was scrambling around in the garden. Grunts and sighs could be heard. Still in her pink nightdress, Buffy ran on tiptoe to the door.

Now, through the other window, she glimpsed the large dark head of the terrible thing. Or was it two things?

She gathered her courage, opened the door, and asked into the night:

“What have we here then?”

No one answered. It was quiet. Far away, the owl hooted.

“In the name of the law!” said Buffy.

Complete silence. She sniffed to catch a scent, a clue.

Nothing—although she could detect a hint of her old friend Gordon. All his old things still smelled of him,



of course. Or she might have been imagining it. Because at that moment Buffy was missing Gordon.

She was suddenly frightened. A small mouse alone in the big forest. The wind howled and her tail was ice-cold. Her whiskers trembled. Maybe she should call the police. Then she remembered: she *was* the police.

Buffy stared out into the darkness. She was afraid. But she was a police officer who always did what she had to do. In that regard she was very brave.

She called out: “Welcome to the police station. We’re here to help you...”

Her voice was a little shaky.

Then she went back inside. She put on her fine police hat and sat down at the large desk. A little mouse in a pink nightie. A big hat with a gold badge. A big stamp in her hand.

She bravely hummed a song she was meaning to write. A marching song for police on parade.

She wrote a note about what had happened:

*A mysterious scabbler scabbling.
Gordon must be called in.*

Buffy had been working on her writing all summer. She could do it very well now. But “scabbler” was a word she’d never written before.

She took out the stamp. Placed it on the paper. Moved it a little to the right. Moved it a little to the left. Pushed it with all her might. Kla-dunk.

When morning came and the sun shone in through the window, she was still sitting at the desk. She hadn’t had much sleep that night!



Buffy made a cup of tea and ate her morning cake, a walnut ball, which tasted wonderful. She took an extra walnut too. Eating nuts made her full of energy.



Then she washed her face, dipping the tips of her fingers in a little water and polishing her nose. She took off her nightie and put on her everyday clothes. She put the police hat back on the hat stand. Then she set off walking briskly through the forest.

These days, Gordon was living in a little house by the lake. A wisp of smoke curled from the chimney. It looked very peaceful. On the veranda was a stripy deck chair. Gordon's black raincoat was hanging from a hook. Buffy knocked on the door and opened it.

Gordon wasn't home. The gigantic bed took up most of the room. It was nicely made. The woodstove glowed with the remains of a fire. A teapot, a cup, and a book lay open on the bedside table. There were a lot of cake crumbs. Buffy sniffed them. Hmm, Gordon had also eaten walnut balls for breakfast. The cup was empty. The teapot was a little warm. He'd eaten breakfast a short while ago then gone out on an errand.

I'll wait for him, Buffy decided.

She looked at the book: *Funny Stories about Mice and Toads*. Gordon had just finished a story that went like this:

There was a baby mouse who caught sight of a bat.

"Look, Mother, an angel!"

She giggled. A bat is a mouse with wings that can fly. A flying mouse! She could picture Gordon roaring with laughter, making his big belly wobble as he lay there reading and eating walnut balls.



She missed him. It's not good for police to be alone, she thought gloomily. Two police think twice as well as one. Two police are twice as brave.

Then she sat down in the deck chair on the veranda. She heard a cheerful song.

*Bomba bomba, on a walk
In kindergarten we sing and talk.
Bomba bomba BOMBA!*

It was all the forest children from the kindergarten on an expedition. Buffy saluted the teacher mouse at the front of the line. The children all wore flowery tops and backpacks. They walked in a long line and jabbered. She couldn't help hearing what they said:

A baby toad: I'm going to slide in the mud, I'm going to...

A baby mole: Teacher, I've lost my backpack.

Teacher: I've got it!

A baby rabbit: Then we can build a house to live in.

A baby squirrel: We can be farmers and grow nuts...

Baby rabbit: Nuts, yuck. Carrots are better.

And we should plant cakes!



How they chattered! Buffy leaned back and waited. And waited. Eventually she had to go back to work at the police station.

She thought: Why would anyone scrabble at the police station windows late at night? And then just disappear?

And where was Gordon?