

# Peanut Butter and Cheese

A Children's Story by Rick Reil

## Chapter 1 - The Marble

Elli turned as soon as she heard the noise. It came from under the kitchen table. As she looked down a marble rolled out from under the table and stopped when it hit her shoe. It startled her, especially since there was no one anywhere near the table. She stooped down and picked it up, it look new, like the ones her cousin Violet had brought over the week before when she came to play. Since Ellie didn't have any marbles she was sure it belonged to her cousin.

Elli was four and a half. Her grandmother tended her while her mother worked at a local construction company. Her grandparents lived in an old farm house built by her grandfather long before her mother was born. Her mother was the youngest of 15 children so in Elli's mind the house was very old. It was full of nooks and crannies and suffered from the rough and tumble activities of numerous children and grandchildren over a period on nearly 40 years.

A marble couldn't just roll out of nowhere, something had to have been in the kitchen to make it move. Elli looked under the table but the only thing she saw were legs, table and chair legs to be exact, and they weren't the kind of legs that moved. Where, she thought, could this marble have come from? She remembered that Violet and her had been playing in the kitchen. That seemed to be the best place

to get the marbles to roll since it had a hardwood floor.

Elli stooped down and sat on her haunches. Her eyes wandered around the lower parts of the base cabinets. There it was, between two of the cabinets was a little gap in the toe-kick, just big enough for a marble to roll in... and out. In that space were two little tiny spheres. The kitchen ceiling light reflecting in them, making little catch lights. She rose and walked over to the space, knelt down and lowered her head to see better, but the little spheres were gone.

## Chapter 2 - Paws

Elli still held the marble in her little hand. Violet told her it was called a "cat eye marble" because it looked like a real cat's eye. Though the marble looked new, it was old. The marbles belonged to her dad who had them since he was a boy. He had shown Violet how to "shoot" them and also some of the games he played with his friends when he was in grade school.

Elli wrapped her index finger around the marble and placed her thumb behind it and aimed for the opening in the toe-kick of the cabinet and snapped her thumb forward. Her aim was good and the marble shot into the opening. She heard it bounce off the wood at the back of the cabinet and roll around. A few moments later it rolled back out of the opening. It startled her and she jumped back a few feet, turned around ,and picked the marble up.

She looked in the opening but saw nothing. She shot the marble in again and after a few moments it rolled back out. This time when she looked into the hole she saw the two little spheres and also a little black nose at the end of a brown snout. She gently rolled the marble to the opening and as it entered two tiny little paws reached up and caught it. The little paws gently pushed it forward and as Elli picked it up a little brown face appeared out the opening.

### Chapter 3 - Grandma

It was a mouse. A little brown mouse. Elli slowly rolled the marble back and the little critter caught it with its paws and held it. Elli jumped up and ran to tell her grandmother what she had been up to.

Grandmother was in her sewing room working on a quilt for a new grand-baby. Elli rushed in and said, "Grandma, come to the kitchen quick!" She turned and ran back as fast as her little legs would take her. Grandma, being an old lady wasn't quite as fast, but she arrive shortly after Elli.

The mouse was gone when Grandma arrived and Elli was holding the marble. "What do you want to show me?" She asked Elli.

"Watch this Grandma," Elli rolled the marble into the opening. A moment later it rolled back out. She rolled it again and two little paws caught it and a little mouse head appeared in the opening.

Grandma laughed and said, "Looks like you've got a new friend. Why don't

you give it something to eat?" The mouse stood in the opening, holding the marble and looked up at the pair of smiling, laughing people. It appeared curious but unafraid.

Elli looked up and giggled. "What could I give it?"

"How about a piece of one of Grandpa's cheese sticks?" she answered. Elli opened the refrigerator and took one of her grandfathers sharp cheddar cheese sticks from the bottom drawer. She handed it to her grandmother who cut off a small piece and handed it to Elli. She spoke softly to the little mouse as she placed the cheese in front of the marble. The mouse set the marble down, picked up the cheese and began to eat.

Ellie and her grandmother smiled and laughed as the mouse stood up on its hind legs, held the cheese with its front paws and nibbled away. With the cheese finished, the little creature wiped the crumbs off its face, laid down on its tummy in the opening, set its head on its paws, and looked up at its two new friends.

Just then the front door opened. It was Elli's mom, there to pick her up and take her home. As she walked into the kitchen the mouse disappeared. "Mom, you'll never guess in a million, million years what happened today, huh Grandma?"

"I bet I won't but I can try on the drive home," her mom answered. With that, Elli hugged her grandmother goodbye, took her mom's hand, and as they walked out the door Elli began her account of the afternoon's events.

## Chapter 4 - Wheels

It was early evening and Elli's grandfather, Ed Carr, was in his pickup truck on his way home from town. There was a small car driving in front of him. As the car passed a farmhouse a cat ran out in the road and was hit by the car. The cat was thrown to the side of the road and the car just kept on going. Ed pulled his truck over and ran to check on the cat. It was alive but badly hurt. It appeared that its back legs were broken and it was in great pain.

He took off his coat and wrapped the cat it and placed it on the seat of the truck. Fortunately there was a veterinarian about a mile ahead. Ed hurried to the vets, grabbed his coat with the cat and took it inside. Doctor Hansen met him at the door. "Hi Ed, looks like you brought me a surprise," he said.

"Yup, she just got hit by a car by that brown house at the bottom of the hill, I think her back legs are broken. " Ed handed the cat to Doctor Hansen.

The doctor took the cat to his exam room and set her on the table. He felt her legs, looked up at Ed and said, "You're right, they're both broken. I'll have to take an x-ray. While I do that will you call the MacIntoshes, they're the people that live in that house. Ask them if it's their cat, if it is hand me the phone.

Ed made the call, Don McIntosh told him they didn't have a cat, he said his wife was allergic to them. Ed thanked him and relayed the information to the Doctor.

"It's a young cat, about a year old, probably a stray," he said, "I'll just put it to sleep unless you want to pay the bill and keep the cat."

"How much are we looking at doc?"

"About two hundred dollars, that's less than half my normal fee, you want a cat?"

"My wife will kill me if I spend two hundred dollars and bring home an injured cat." he said. The cat had quieted down. As Ed finished talking she looked up at him and let out a meow that sounded a lot like a question. She was a very pretty cat. "Go ahead but don't let my wife know what this cost me."

Ed sat on a stool in the exam room while the doctor prepared the cat's legs for the casts. "Ed, it's going to be hard for this cat to get around with two broken legs. If you want I can make it a little easier on both of you."

"Go ahead, anything to make my wife a little happier."

Ed watched as the doctor formed the casts around the cat's legs. Doc Hansen took a little rod about six inches long from the shelf and molded some of the casting material at the bottom of the legs around it. After the casts were hardened he grabbed a box from the shelf and pulled two little wheels from it. He attached the wheels to the rod. "It will take her a few days to get use to the wheels but it will help her get around. Bring her back in a month and I'll remove the casts.

Here's some pills for pain, give her one every twelve hours until they're gone."

Ed thanked the doctor and paid him. He picked the cat up and wrapped her in his coat. The doctor had sedated her before he x-rayed her and she was now awake. She was calm and seemed grateful for being taken care of so well. As Ed turned to leave, the doctor asked him what he was going to name her.

"Scooter," he said.

## Chapter 5 - Surprise

The drive home seemed very long as Ed sat behind the wheel, with his new cat beside him, even though it was only a half mile. He had rolled the sleeve of his coat up and rested Scooter's front paws on it so she'd be a little more comfortable. Comfort was going to be a challenge for sure, since her back legs wouldn't be able to move for at least a month. He was a little apprehensive about his reception when he got home. He decided to leave the cat in the truck, go in and break the news to his wife, Paula, and then retrieve Scooter.

As he pulled the truck into the driveway he could see Paula in the kitchen through the window. It appeared she was making dinner. She was on the far side of the kitchen at the counter with her back to him. As he walked into the house she quickly turned but kept her place.

"Hi Paula."

Something's up she thought, maybe he knows about the mouse. He never called her Paula, it was always Polly. "Hi Ed,"

she said, "how was your day?"

"Fine, how was yours?"

"Good Ed, mostly... you're over two hours late. I was getting a little worried. Is everything okay?"

"Yes, okay... mostly." He was worried, after raising 15 kids she always called him "Dad." She also hadn't come and given him a hug and a kiss. She always did that when he came home. Had Doc Hansen called her? "What are you doing, making dinner?"

"No, I'm just working on a project for Elli, why don't you go relax in your chair and watch the news while I fix dinner?"

"Well, before I do that I've got a little surprise for you in the truck."

"What kind of surprise?" she asked.

"Oh one that you might not like, but I'm hoping you will." he answered.

"Did you buy another gun?" she asked. He already had about fifty and he hardly ever shot them anymore. He just showed them to his friends when they came by. They were mostly his hunting buddies, but due to their age they hadn't been hunting for over five years.

"No, it's not a gun, it's more of a companion to keep Elli company. I kind of got us... a cat."

"Ed you hate having animals in the house, why now, and why a cat?"

“Well I didn’t exactly get it, it got me. A car hit her down by the brown house at the bottom of the hill. It broke both her back legs. I took her to Doc Hansen and he patched her up. It was either I get a cat or Doc was going to put her down. She’s young, very pretty, and seems to be very smart... kind of like you were when we first met.

They both laughed and then she said, “Well before you do that I need to tell you something. I kind of have a surprise too... Elli has a pet mouse.” She moved away from the counter and there was an old hamster cage with a little brown mouse standing in it holding a marble.

## Chapter 6 - Dinner

Ed looked at the mouse and smiled. Most of the mice he was familiar with were the ones he pulled from the mouse traps in the barn where he kept the chicken feed. Sometimes they’d get in the house and he’d have to set traps there too. “It’s a good thing this little feller is the first mouse we’ve had in the house for some time. I don’t have any traps set right now but it looks like I might have to put some out.”

Paula replied, “Well, first of all, this little feller is a girl, her name is Molly. If you’re going to put any traps out they’ll have to be the ones that catch them alive. I don’t want Molly getting hurt or killed.”

“Okay, I can do that. I need to get the cat, I’ll be right back.” Ed left and returned with the cat still wrapped in his

coat. “Her name’s Scooter.”

Scooter’s head was sticking out of the coat. She looked up and meowed at Paula as she unwrapped her. Paula laughed as she examined Doc Hansen’s work. The cat’s hind quarters and legs were encased in a cast. Her hind paws sat on a little steel axel with a wheel on each end, just past her paws. The wheels were about two inches in diameter. The cast was applied in a way that left an opening that would allow her to go to the bathroom. Paula decided it would be best to wait until the next day to let her try to get around with her “trolley.”

“Dad, you run to the store and get some cat food, litter, litter box, and one of those slotted scoops to clean up the litter. Get some baby wipes too, I think she’ll need some help cleaning herself up. I’ll get a box and make her a bed in the laundry room.”

The laundry room was next to the kitchen. Paula placed some old bath towels in a cardboard box and laid Scooter on her side. She placed some more towels around her body to help support her front paws and head. As she stood and turned to get a bowl of water, there was Molly sitting on the edge of the counter watching what was going on.

Paula was afraid that if Molly got too close to the cat she might become her dinner. She picked the mouse up and placed her in her cage and closed the door. She used her mobile phone to call Ed. She asked him to bring some hamster food home too.

Ed arrived soon with his list of goods. The mouse and cat were fed. The litter box was filled, and Ed helped Scooter use it. Paula fixed dinner and while they were eating she looked at Ed and said, "Dad, how'd we get in this mess. Until three o'clock this afternoon our lives were pretty simple. Now we've got a wild mouse with a marble in a hamster cage, and a pet cat with two broken legs that probably has been eating mice since it was a kitten. We're both 72, it's winter, and we should be on a cruise somewhere warm."

Ed swallowed his mouthful of tuna fish casserole, looked at her for a minute, and answered, "Polly, I always wanted a pet mouse with a marble."

"And I always wanted a pet cat with two broken legs in a trolley." she answered. They both looked at each other and laughed hysterically.

Molly was standing on the floor of her cage holding her marble, looking at them.

## Chapter 7 - Friends

Morning came and with it the arrival of Elli and her mother. "Where's the mouse?" Elli asked excitedly. She ran to the kitchen and found her in the hamster cage eating her breakfast. She turned towards the laundry room when she heard a "meow."

She was surprised, "Grandma, did we get a cat? What's that on her back legs?"

Elli turned, and there was her mother next to her grandmother. He mother said, "Well, I've got to get to work mom, you can fill me in tonight when I get back." She gave Elli a hug and left.

"Grandma, where did we get the cat?"

Paula filled her in on the everything that had happened since she'd left the evening before.

"Have you let Scooter try out her trolley?" she asked.

"No, how about if we do it now?"

"Okay." she squealed.

Paula gently reached down and stoked the cat's fur and scratched her ears. She then gently picked her up and sat her on the floor. Scooter stood for a few moments, and then with some coaxing she took a few steps forward. Elli sat some pieces of cat food down on the floor, making a trail to the kitchen. Scooter ate the food as she followed the trail, pulling her hind legs along on her trolley. Both Elli and her grandmother were thrilled as they saw the spunky little cat move along.

Paula said, "We'll we might as well introduce her to Molly as long as we're all here." She picked the cat up, and while supporting her hindquarters and cast, sat her on the counter and introduced the two. Elli watched as the two came eye to eye.

Elli's eyes grew big as she looked from Molly to Scooter and then back again. "Grandma, look at Scooter's eyes and then look at Molly's marble."

Paula looked and then said, "That's amazing, they're the same. The cat eye marble looks exactly the same as Scooter's eyes."

Molly must have noticed it too. She dropped her marble, leaned forward, grabbed the cage bars and pulled her head as close to Scooter as she could. Scooter made no attempt to hurt Molly. Molly showed no fear of Scooter.

Paula said, "Let's put scooter back on the floor. You hold her and I'll take Molly out of her cage. I'll put her in my hand and you hold Scooter. We'll slowly put them closer together and see what happens."

Elli held the cat, and Paula held the mouse, and the mouse held the marble. Elli and her grandmother moved them closer together and both animals remained calm. There was no attempt by Scooter to harm Molly and no attempt by Molly to flee. Scooter sniffed the marble and Molly just looked in her eyes.

Paula said, "Let's put Molly back and let Scooter get use to the house. She'll probably tire soon and need a rest. Over the next few days we'll slowly let them get use to each other and to us."

"Sounds like a good Idea grandma."

Over the next few days Scooter grew stronger. She mastered getting around with her trolley. Molly grew used to her cage and both animals were given supervised play time together. As any cat lover will tell you, cats love to play with marbles. Molly would roll her marble around the kitchen floor and Scooter would chase it, batting it with her paws. Molly learned to stand on Scooter's

trolley's axel and hold on to her cast with her paws as the two traveled throughout the house. Soon the two were sleeping together in Scooter's bed with Molly curled up in the warmth of Scooter's belly fur, holding her marble.

For treats, Ed would share his cheese and the peanut butter he used as bait in his "live catch" mouse traps with Molly. Molly would share the treats with Scooter.

By the time Doc Hansen removed Scooters cast, the cat had totally bonded to Ed and the rest of the family.

"Well, tell me Ed, was it worth the two hundred dollars?" he asked.

"You bet it was, and a lot cheaper than a cruise." he answered.

"Huh?"

"Never mind," he answered, I've got to get home, Molly's missing Scooter. I can't wait to see their reaction now that Scooter can walk on all fours."

The End