

Sample Translation

Watson

(Watson)

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CHAPTER 1

In which I explain who I am and the sorts of things that I make, and that someone's furious with me

My name's Carl. I'm ten, and I'm an inventor. I invent things for everyone.

My mum always wants to do everything at the same time: reading and working on the computer and phoning and eating sweets. So I designed a bookstand for her with an automatic page-turner. It runs on batteries. It's not quite right just yet, because it sometimes goes a bit haywire. My mum can't read that quickly!

My dad and I make the dinner twice a week. My dad's pretty good at cooking. But he hates the rest of the kitchen work, stuff like tidying up as you go along. So I made a tidy-upper for him, using the arm of a broken desk lamp. It's got one of those window-cleaning blades on it that pushes all of the peelings into the rubbish bin in one go. I've still got to do some work on its aim, and my dad thinks that the motor's a bit too big as well. But he actually helped me make that part.

I invent all kinds of things for myself too. This is my design for an alarm. I'm not keen on waking up, you see. And I'm even less keen on my mum's voice screaming "Are you still not up yet?!" So I've got this old Meccano crane that used to belong to my granddad. I'm going to make it into an electric duvet-grabber, with a timer on it. It's designed to pull the covers off me at half seven. If I don't wake up then, it's supposed to wait ten minutes, then throw a wet flannel in my face. I'm not quite sure yet how that bit's going to work.

"You're just like a snake," my mum always says. "Shedding your old skin and leaving it behind!" She means the way I take my clothes off and leave them lying all over the floor. So I've devised a clothes-picker-upper, one that'll even pick up stinky socks – because that's something my mum won't do. Look, I've already done a couple of sketches of the design.

This photo doesn't belong here, of course. It got mixed up with my stuff because it just happened to be lying around on my desk, completely by accident. I mean, it's not like my room's full of photos of girls or anything. And anyway, I'm in the picture too. With Veerke. Veerke lives next door. She's the same age as me and we're always together. Well, I suppose I should say "were". We *were* always together. I'll explain that in a moment.

There's someone else in the photo too: Watson. You can see me and Veerke, but you can't see Watson. Well, maybe you can with a magnifying glass, but I'm not quite sure where mine is right now. Watson's sitting in Veerke's hand. That's because he's a mouse. Was, I mean. *Was* a mouse. And that's because... oh, I'll tell you in a bit.

You can't see Veerke properly in this picture either. Veerke has lots and lots of long, long hair. It's a weird shade of brown, sort of a rust colour. She's got greeny-blue eyes. When she looks at you, you think: they're just like pools of water.

But Veerke doesn't look at me anymore. She hasn't looked at me for twenty-three days now. Veerke's angry. She's furious. And that's because I... because Watson... erm... I'll tell you soon. Like I already said. I really can explain everything! Absolutely everything.

CHAPTER 2

In which I explain how it all started: I come up with three ways of saving Granddad from the noisy vermin, and Watson makes his appearance

I'm going to tell you the story of Watson. I'll explain all about Veerke too.

I don't miss Watson, because he wasn't my mouse. I don't miss Veerke either, because I still see her every day. She lives in the house next door – I already mentioned that – and she sits only one metre away from me at school. The problem is that she won't speak to me anymore, or even look at me.

This is how it started: Veerke's granddad had mice, not for fun, but by accident. His wife had died and so had the cat and then you get mice.

Veerke's granddad thought the mice were a real nuisance. They gave him the creeps, they nibbled away at everything, and they made a racket behind the walls and above the ceiling. And that was what he really couldn't stand.

"Who do they think they are?" Veerke's granddad kept grumbling. "They act as though the house belongs to them!"

Veerke liked it though; Veerke loves all kinds of animals. But her granddad wanted to get rid of the mice. He thought that if the house was nice and clean, the cheeky pests would clear off. Because mice aren't keen on clean.

So Veerke started going round to clean her granddad's house every week. She said that her granddad was too sad to clean for himself, but if you ask me he just didn't feel like doing it. Men don't like cleaning. Take me and my dad, for instance.

So I invented a housekeeping robot for Veerke's granddad. One afternoon I went round to show him the sketches. The two of us made a list of everything we needed. But then Veerke's granddad started laughing.

"Carl, lad," he said. "That thing's going to be far taller and wider and heavier than me! And more expensive!"

That set me off laughing as well, so I put the sketches away.

And that's how it was. Veerke made sure the house was kept clean. And I always went along with her to keep her granddad company. He let me call him Granddad too, and we used to play draughts together or invent things while Veerke did the cleaning.

"Do your very best," he said to Veerke, "and make sure those wretched mice don't find a single crumb!"

Veerke always nodded. But I knew that she used to put down crusts of bread and bits of cheese out of sight in a corner when she'd finished vacuuming. My robot would never have done that.

“Can you hear that noise?” said Granddad one afternoon when we were playing draughts. He was staring up at the ceiling with a look of indignation on his face.

“They’re having a party,” I said.

“When the cat’s away...” said Veerke.

Granddad wasn’t thinking about the dead cat, though. He was thinking about the dead grandma. I could see it in his face.

“It’s your move,” I quickly said.

It was a draw. I could tell that Granddad wasn’t really trying very hard. I think he was distracted by Veerke and by all that scampering above the ceiling and behind the walls.

I decided that it really was time to do something about those mice. So I took a notepad and a pencil. And just a short while later, I handed Granddad a pile of paper covered in designs.

“Which one do you want?” I asked. I was talking very quietly, because I didn’t want Veerke to get involved.

Granddad just kept staring at my sketches. He looked a bit confused. I went over and sat beside him. Above our heads, the pandemonium broke out again.

“Oh!” cried Granddad. “Now I get it! You want to...”

“Ssh!” I said.

“...save me from the noisy vermin!” whispered Granddad.

I gave him a meaningful nod. I could hear Veerke out in the corridor, scrubbing the loo. Veerke loves every living thing, even woodlice. Everything except bacteria. She was scrubbing away at Granddad’s loo and singing a song in French – made-up French, if you ask me. Girls can really drive you up the wall sometimes.

“So how does this one work then?” asked Granddad. He was pointing at my first drawing.

I started to explain my mousetraps to him. I had designed three contraptions. In the first one, the greedy pests would fall into a pan of oil. They couldn’t climb

back out again because it was so slippery. And while they were trying to get out, the pan would be heating up...

Granddad looked at me for a moment. “Erm... Carl, I’d like it to be a little more... friendly.”

“OK, Granddad.”

“And that hot pan could go up in flames, just like that,” said Granddad. “I don’t want to get fried as well!”

“How about this one then?” I picked up the next sketch.

“My goodness!” said Granddad.

“Look,” I said. “The first mouse carefully approaches the bacon. The next mouse comes running after him because he wants some bacon too. He’s not looking where he’s going and he runs into this wire. Then this thing here comes slicing down, right where the first one’s nibbling away at the bacon and then...”

“Yes, I see,” said Granddad. “Chop! The one mouse beheads the other...
Hmm.”

“Not friendly enough?”

“A self-service guillotine for mice...” Granddad looked at me and shook his head. He probably thought I was a bit disturbed.

Hey, maybe he was right. But I thought the design was a really good one.

“I bet it’d work really well,” I said.

“So you think the little beasts are all going to queue up nicely?” asked Granddad.

“Erm... no... No, perhaps not, eh?”

“And then imagine that the first one doesn’t have his head where you thought he would and then...”

“Hmm, that’s a point,” I said. “Well, what about this one?”

Granddad studied my third invention. That one had the mice being tempted into a mouse tube, a long pipe that wound its way all around the house. The end of the tube came out through a hole in the outside wall, where there was a flap that opened in only one direction.

“This one will do the job, Carl,” said Granddad. “It’s very friendly. Almost mouse-loving. The pests are carefully guided out of my house and they end up in the garden. Then they can go and live with the neighbours. But hey, what if one of the mice at the back holds up the flap with his nose, so that the others can come in again? Those creatures are a lot brighter than you think!”

“I’ve already thought of that,” I said proudly. “If the flap stays open for longer than two seconds, an electric shock goes through it, down this wire. You see, Granddad? And then...”

Granddad gave a sigh. I could hear another sound above his sigh: someone gasping, or sobbing, or both at the same time. Veerke was standing beside the table.

We looked at her, but didn’t say anything. Veerke looked as though she was about to say a rude word. Her hands were cupped together to make a little nest. She let both of us take a look.

“This is Watson,” she growled. “And if you two do anything to hurt him, then...”

I’d never seen a black-and-white mouse before.

CHAPTER 3

In which I explain why Veerke thinks that I’m sick and that Watson’s just as special as she is

We went home, Veerke and I. She walked about two metres away from me, kicking up the leaves because she was so angry. She was angry with everyone.

She was angry with her granddad because he’d listened to me when I explained my mousetraps.

She was angry with her mum because she wasn’t allowed to take the stupid mouse home with her, even though she’d phoned her three times to ask.

She was angry with the stupid mouse because he'd meekly let her granddad put him in a rusty old hamster cage.

But most of all she was angry with me. She was double angry with me. She was quadruple triple double angry with me.

But I still tried to explain to her why she couldn't call the stupid mouse Watson. She'd called him that because he had a pointed nose, a twitchy little nose for sniffing out mysteries, she said.

"Then you should call him Sherlock Holmes," I said. "It's a ridiculously long name for such a spotty little mouse, but hey, whatever. Sherlock Holmes is the one with the nose for mysteries, and Watson is just his stupid friend. You never listen properly when I tell you anything."

"His name is Watson," insisted Veerke.

"You'd be better off calling him Spots-On, with all those patches he's got."

"Why do you care what I call him? You just want to kill him. Filthy mouse murderer."

"I want to help your granddad! Mice give you diseases. They stink. They make everything filthy and they make a racket. They give your granddad the creeps. They nibble away at everything. They bite. And you're secretly encouraging them!"

"Boiling oil!" yelled Veerke. "And electric shocks! And chopping their heads off! You know what? I think you're just sick. Sick!"

"Sick? Sick?! You know who really is sick? Your granddad! He's sick and tired of those stupid mice!"

"You're not really going to make one of those traps, are you?"

"Your granddad wants to get rid of the mice. He pays you to clean the house. If he realises that you're putting down crusts for them, you'll be out of a job."

Veerke didn't say anything for a whole minute.

I continued: "I promised your granddad that I'd save him from the vermin. In a friendly way. A mouse-friendly way."

Veerke still didn't say anything. Then she looked straight at me with those eyes like pools that you could drown in. It was almost as though I'd said something romantic!

"I am positive that Watson is a wondermouse," she sighed.

"What a load of girly nonsense!" I said. "So why do you think he's a wondermouse? Because he lets you pick him up? Or because of his patches? I reckon he's just a cross between a house mouse and a runaway pet white mouse, and that's all!"

"His patches are a sign," said Veerke. "It's just like when a person has an unusual hair colour."

I looked at her head. "Rust colour," I said. "So what does the sign mean then?"

"That he's different."

"Oh," I said. "Different. Then I'm sure he won't be harmed by anything, not electric shocks, not an axe..."

We'd arrived back home. Veerke thumped me hard in the arm. Then she walked round to her own house with her nose in the air and didn't say another word.

I just ignored her and went straight up to my bedroom to make an invention. Nothing to do with mice; I'd had enough of them for the moment. My mum had been complaining recently that the wheels on her desk chair were squeaking. I was going to invent a chair for her with soft, silent feet.

CHAPTER 4

In which Granddad and the mastermind install the brilliant mouse tube and I do a Really Good Thing

The next Saturday, I phoned Veerke's granddad.

"I still think my third invention is the best one," I said. "I've got a completely new design for it. It's even better. Shall I come round and make it now?"

“Eh?” said Granddad.

I realised he didn’t know what I was talking about.

“The mice,” I began hesitantly. “The vermin. In a friendly way... erm... you do remember, don’t you?”

“Of course,” cried Granddad. “Come round. Those mice need sorting out! Urgently! Is Veerke coming too?”

“She’s at her recorder class or dance lessons or something. I thought this would be a good time.”

“Hm, yes, you could be right, eh?” said Granddad conspiratorially.

I put the new drawings in my folder. To be on the safe side, I packed up all of my other mouse designs as well.

Then I left for Granddad’s house, and the two of us collected all the stuff we needed. We took torches and crawled behind the wooden panelling in the attic room. That’s where they had their headquarters, according to Granddad. You can’t stand up under the slanting roof there, so we had to stay on our knees.

“Can you manage?” I asked him. “Aren’t you a bit old for this kind of thing?”

“If I drop dead, I’m sure you’ll notice,” he growled.

We made a big cage out of pieces of wood and wire and mesh. It had a cunning trapdoor: the mice could go in, but they couldn’t come back out.

“You don’t think that a mouse who was coming in could hold the door open for the others, do you?” I said. “So that they could get back out?”

“That’s not impossible,” said Granddad, “but it’d have to be some sort of supermouse! That door’s pretty heavy. And anyway, what would you do, eh, if you could see a huge mountain of cheese lying there in the distance?”

“I’d be out of there,” I grinned. That’s because I don’t like cheese.

Granddad and I made a small opening with a flap at the back of the cage. Once a mouse had gone through the flap, he couldn’t get back into the cage. So he had to go into the mouse tube.

Granddad and I made the mouse tube out of sections of plastic drainpipe. The pipe wound and twisted its way through the whole house, all the way downstairs.

It was easier than you might think, because there were holes all over Granddad's house from the old heating pipes. Everything was a perfect fit.

Veerke's granddad was really starting to enjoy himself. "Carl, lad, you're the mastermind, and I'm just providing the material! This trap is going to be brilliant. D'you see now how useful it is to hang on to old things?"

I nodded proudly. A brilliant trap! And I was the mastermind!

The pipe finally went outside through a broken wall ventilator and then came out into the garden. At the end I made another cunning flap, but without the electric shock system. Granddad didn't think that was necessary.

So it really was a friendly trap. Particularly because I filled the cage with all the things that mice really love: not just cheese, but chocolate and biscuits and muesli too.

Granddad said: "What a couple of sneaky rats we are, eh?" But I didn't think we were sneaky at all. I felt as though I'd done a Really Good Thing. Almost a mouse-loving thing.

CHAPTER 5

In which the mice are driven out of Granddad's house and Watson is startled by a flash

A few days later I went round with Veerke to play draughts with her granddad again. He was staring vacantly at the draughtsboard. He looked a bit drowsy; it was because the house was so quiet. And of course the house was so quiet because the mice weren't there anymore. The mouse tube had worked really well. The pesky noisemakers had been carefully guided outside – and chased out of Granddad's house in a very friendly way.

It was warm and quiet inside, and cold and quiet outside. Winter had suddenly arrived: Granddad's outdoor thermometer said it was minus seven.

Veerke had finished cleaning and she was sitting with us at the table, holding a book. Granddad never lets her watch TV. He says it's bad for her brain, but if you ask me her brain's already too far gone to save.

Veerke wasn't reading, though; she was feeding crumbs of her chocolate biscuit to Watson. As far as she was concerned, Watson was all that existed. She talked to that beast more than she did to me. And the things she called him! Ickle-wickle mousy-wousy. Watsly-mouse. And she just kept on feeding him! Veerke was becoming a bore and the beast was becoming a ball.

Granddad made a move. I was intending to thrash him at draughts, but how was I supposed to concentrate with that noise? Veerke was munching away and Watson was crunching even more loudly than she was, so I spent the entire time thinking up extra-mean traps, ones specially designed for fat, rude mice. Granddad didn't seem to be bothered by their noise, but I'd rather have had all that scampering and scrabbling gang of mice above the ceiling and behind the walls.

I looked outside; everything was white and frozen solid.

"I don't like winter." Veerke's granddad gave a gloomy sigh. "It makes me think too much about my own winter."

I just nodded. He must mean that he was old and alone. I thought about Veerke's grandma. What did she look like again? I couldn't really remember.

My hand hovered over the draughtsboard; what move should I make? I couldn't decide, because I kept thinking about the mice. I wondered how they'd got on in Granddad's freezing garden. Had they taken shelter in the warm house next door?

I made my move. To my left, biscuits were still being pulverised.

"Gotcha! I've won!" said Granddad.

That's what you get for not paying attention. It was all the fault of Veerke and that spotty mouse and their stupid munching.

"Can't you teach that beast some manners?" I snapped.

Veerke and the mouse just stared at me, and started munching their umpteenth biscuit.

“Put him back in his cage, lass, or he’ll run away,” Granddad warned Veerke.

“Yes, Granddad.” Veerke held Watson in her hand. They sniffed at each other’s noses.

“Wondermouse!” I snorted.

“Wait a second,” said Granddad, picking up his camera. “Just stay sitting there like that. And you, Carl, go and sit next to Veerke. Yes, there. Lean in towards her a little bit or I’ll only get half of you in the picture. Put your arm around her shoulders.”

I did it, because Veerke’s granddad said I had to. I moved really slowly and casually, but Veerke just leaned straight back against my arm. Her long rust-brown hair tickled my hand.

But, of course, Veerke wasn’t thinking about me at all. She was only thinking about the stupid mouse she was holding in her hand. She turned him round.

“His nose has to be in the picture,” she said. “Are you going to use the flash, Granddad?”

And Granddad used the flash. There were three of us in the photo. But after the flash there were only two of us, because Watson was so startled that he dived right out of Veerke’s hand and disappeared.