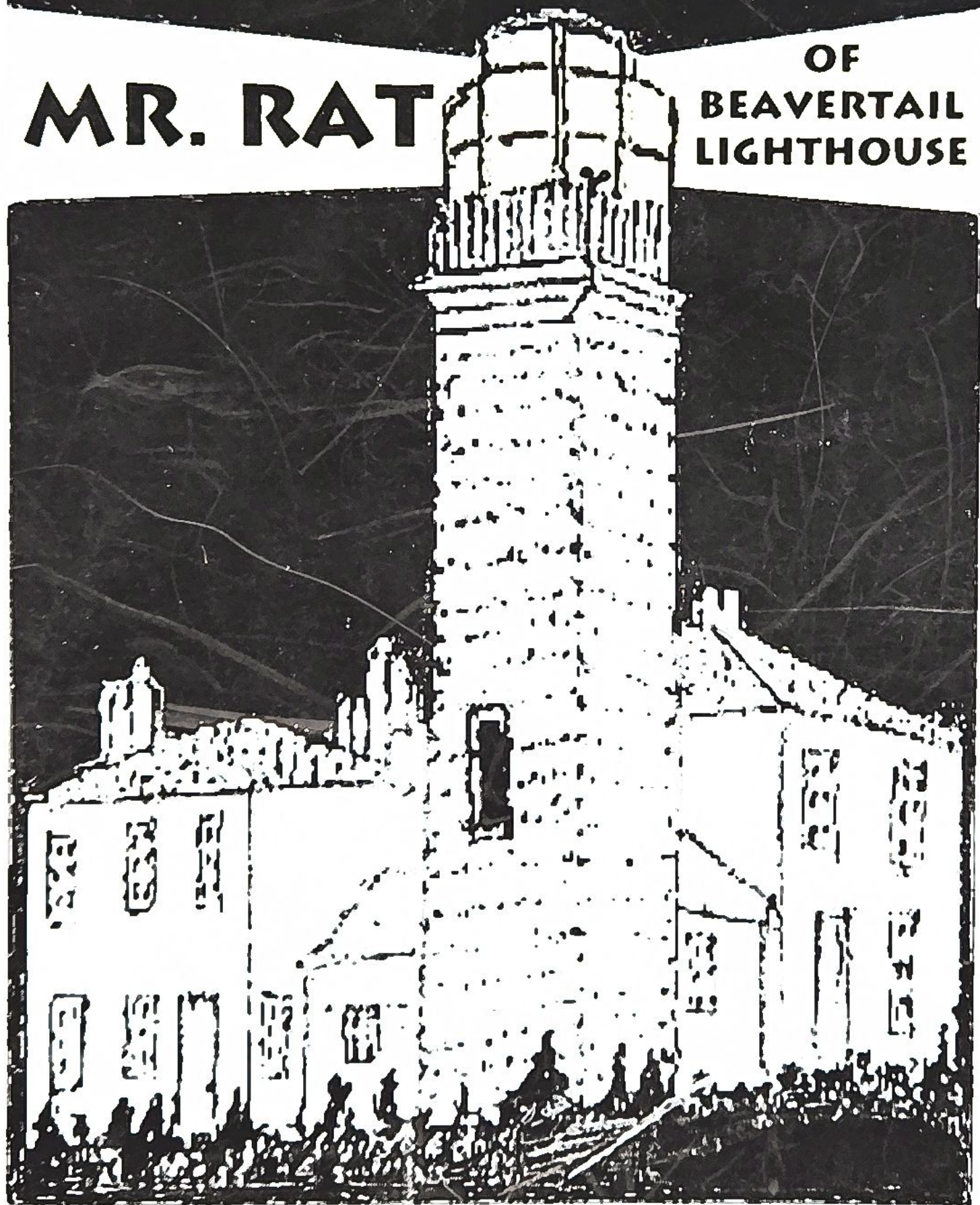


MR. RAT

**OF
BEAVERTAIL
LIGHTHOUSE**



Historical Fantasy for Children

by Peter Frazier

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BEAVERTAIL LIGHTHOUSE

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Peter Frazer

For my grandchildren

For more information

There once was a rat named Rat. This smallish brown rodent was born in the Beavertail Lighthouse, the third oldest in our country. Built in 1749, Rat's home was located in a colony named Rhode Island.

Rat came from a long line of lighthouse rodents. They were proud of their trade even though they couldn't polish the brass or haul whale oil up the stairs. For that matter, they couldn't even dust the soot from the glass. These duties were left for the Keeper. What they could do well was trim the wicks in the lantern high in the lighthouse tower.

Rat's father taught him how to use his sharp teeth to nip off the burnt edges so the wicks were perfectly shaped to burn brightly and warn the ships of dangerous rocks.

One morning Rat was down by the shore munching on a strand of seaweed when



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suddenly through the blowing winds and crashing waves appeared a bird's shadow on that lonely spit of land called Beavertail.

Rat knew without looking who it was.

Seconds later, in swooped a greater black-backed gull. Folding her graceful wings, she settled next to Rat and squawked, "Hi, pal, how can you eat that stuff?"

"Gully, my Mama told me to always eat my greens," squeaked Rat.

Gully, peering closely at her friend, squawked, "What's wrong, Rat? You look sadder than usual."

"Spending my days hiding in dark corners and under rocks has me down to skin and bones," complained Rat.

Gully looked puzzled.

"Everyone hates me!!" cried Rat.

"Hey, you still have me," squawked Gully.

"You're all I have," said Rat remembering his entire family who were lost in the fire that destroyed the first wooden lighthouse.

"What about the Keeper?" asked Gully, looking up at the new stone lighthouse on the ledge of rock.

"Can't stand the sight of me," sighed Rat. "Just missed me with a carrot when he caught me at the garbage pit."

"You're one quick rodent," admired the bird.

"And his animals are just as nasty," continued Rat. "The chickens chase me. Horsey tries to nip my tail when I get in his oat bag. And listen to this... Hog nearly rolled on me when he discovered me at his slop bowl."

"Now that's scary. Instead of plain ol' Rat we might be calling you, Flatrat," chuckled Gully.

"It's not funny!" squeaked Rat, propping his whiskered nose on his little paws and staring out to sea. "You're a smart old bird. What can I do to get the Keeper's animals to like me?"

Gully thought for a moment and said, "First, we're going to work on your smile."

"Okay," said Rat.

"Second, we'll change your name," said Gully.

"I'm for that," said Rat. "It's strange how the animals laugh at 'Rat' but think 'Cat' is so cool."

Gully continued, "And last, we'll deal with your major problem."

"What's that?" asked Rat.

"It's that skinny hairless thing you pull behind you," squawked Gully.

"My tail? You're teasing again!" squeaked Rat.

"Nope, the Keeper's animals are very uncomfortable around you." Gully paused to let it sink in, then continued. "For you to get friends, there's going to be a new Rat...a smiling Rat with a twist."

* * *

For weeks, when his chores were done, Rat practiced in front of a mirror. He worked on wee smiles, half smiles and of course full smiles with his two front teeth glistening brightly.

Rat practiced long and hard on his new smiles but not once did he laugh. He'd forgotten how.

One morning after his usual breakfast of seaweed and garbage, Rat set forth across the field to the pigpen. He was ready to try



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out his new image. "Hi Hog!" he squeaked, flashing his best full smile at the snoozing pig.

"Oh, it's just you, Rat," grunted Hog.

"Excuse me. Now you may call me, Rog," squeaked the excited rodent.

Rubbing his sleepy eyes, Hog squealed, "Rog is it? Hey, I like it. By the way, what have you done with your tail?"

"I've had it rolled up all night. Now it's just like yours," squeaked Rat, spinning proudly.

"Wow! Very nice. Why don't you hop in for a cup of slop?" oinked Hog.

As the happy rodent bounded in, the worst thing that could happen happened. He tripped on Hog's outstretched toe. Like a coiled spring the tail released, slapping Hog across his tender snout.



“I’ve had it rolled up all night. Now it’s just like yours,” squeaked Rat, spinning proudly.



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“Get out!” squealed the pained porker. “And take that hunka rope you call a tail with you.

No one messed with Hog when he was mad. The frightened Rat leaped over his fat back and scampered for home. In the distance he could hear Hog ranting, “You’re just a sad **Rat, Rat, Rat,** Rat, Rat...” Like a drumbeat, the words faded in the distance.

Discouraged but not defeated, Rat planned his next visit to see the chickens. When he was done with his latest taildo there were few feathers left in the Keeper’s duster. With the first rays of sun Rat darted to the chicken yard, careful not to disturb his latest feathery creation.

“Whom do we have here?” clucked a chicken looking up from her pecking. “My, that’s a handsome tail. Haven’t seen anything like that since the Rooster. Poor

fellow didn't last long crowing the way he did."

Slyly calling upon his half smile, the hopeful Rat squeaked, "Good morning, chicks, the name is Rick!"

With the entire flock crowding around, he started strutting in a wide circle.

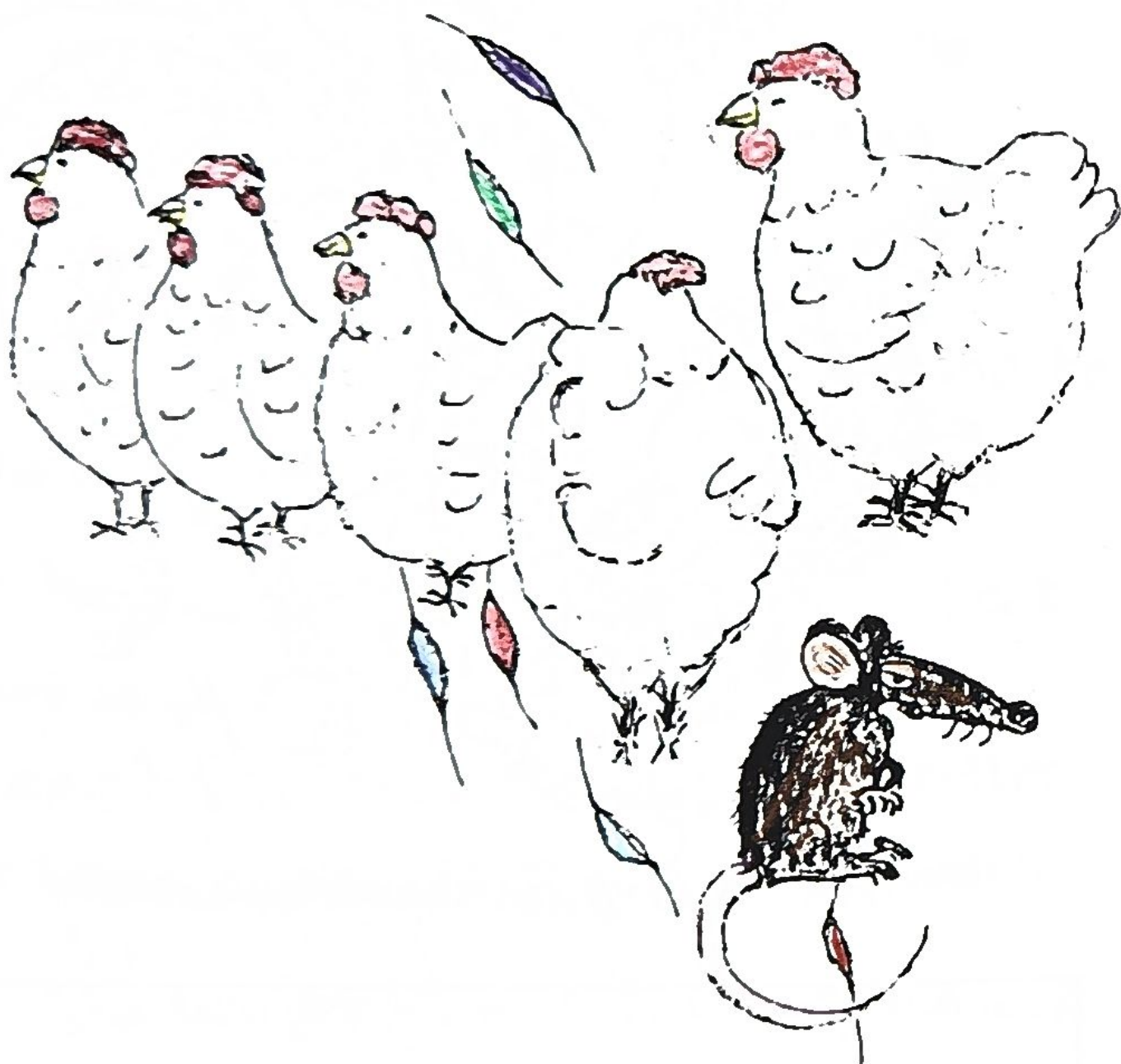
Excited by the show, the chickens beat their wings and stomped their yellow feet. The rodent looked just like a banty rooster as his circles became smaller and smaller.

This was great sport, but sadly his luck ran out again. The whirlwind from all the commotion scattered feathers like dry leaves on an autumn breeze. As Rat stood in front of a bunch of staring birds, he felt his tail blush with embarrassment.

Catching their breaths, they chorused, "Go home to your lighthouse, silly Rat, and take that ugly tail with you!" Turning



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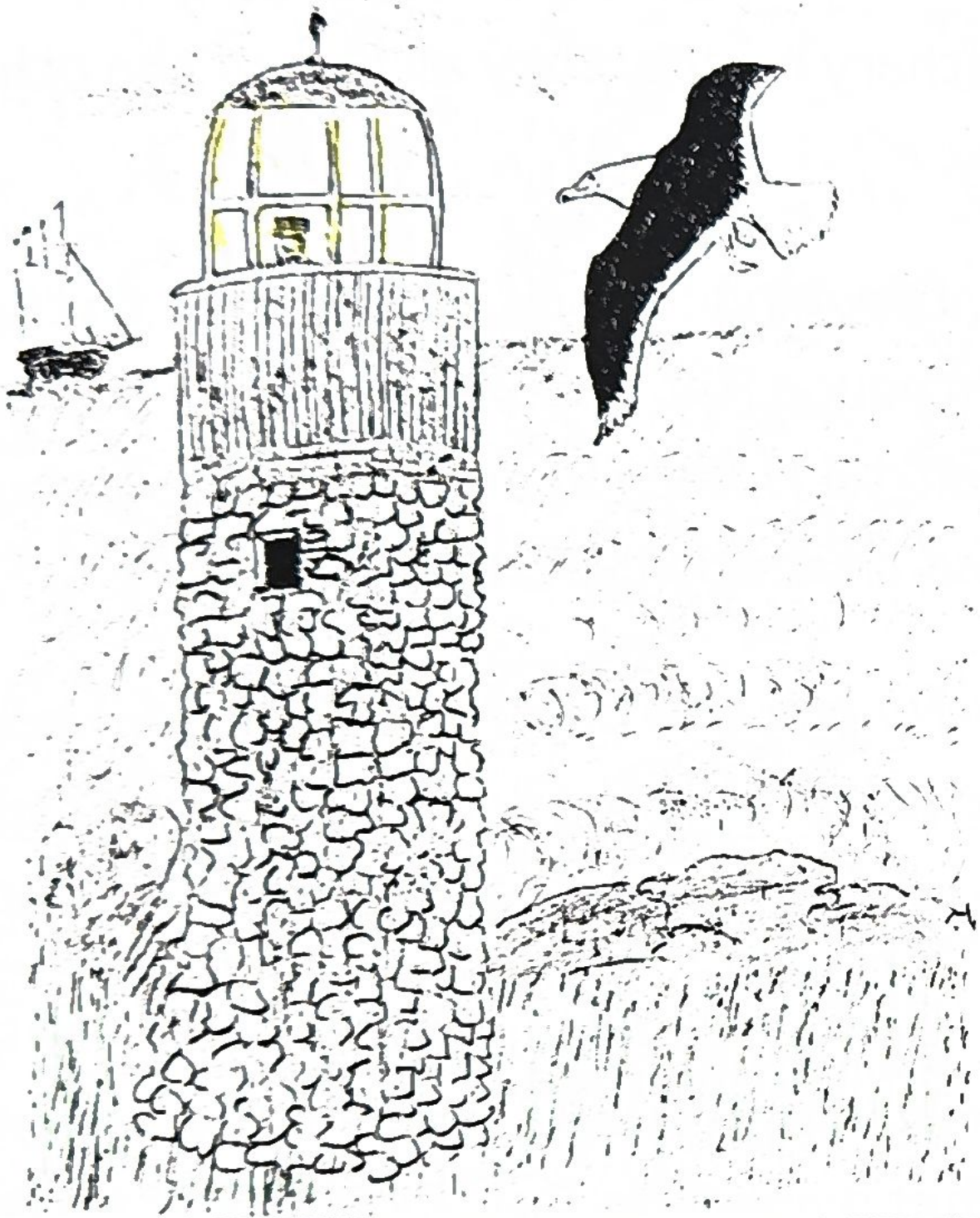
Dragging himself wearily back to the lighthouse Rat heard one hateful bird cluck, "Wait till Horsey hears about this! Who does that uppity Rat think he is?"

No one saw anything of Rat for weeks. The gull circled the lighthouse tower night and day, but only the Keeper was on duty.

One day the gull spied her friend outside the lighthouse. Gliding down, she squawked, "What's going on, Rat, Rick, Rog or whatever you name is? I've lost a lot of sleep worrying about you."

Looking very sad, Rat whined, "If only I hadn't tripped on Hog's toe...and if only the wind hadn't blown the feathers away, I'd have new friends today."

"Hold on! Start from the beginning!"



The gull circled the lighthouse tower night and day, but only the Keeper was on duty.

suggested Gully. Glad to have someone to talk to, Rat told his whole unhappy adventure. When he was done, Gully whispered sweetly, "Not to worry."

"What!!" squeaked Rat, rearing up. "Have you heard anything I've said?"

"Of course, and I have an idea!" said Gully.

"Oh, no! Not again!" said Rat.

Gully, with a wink, croaked, "If you were to glue some long grass on your tail and change your name to Ratsey, I bet Horsey would think you're mighty cute."

There was silence until the explosion came. Come it did in a ratty blast.

"ENOUGH," screamed the enraged rodent.

Gully tried to turn serious. Gathering Rat in close, she said, "Now listen here. I've never won any popularity contests either.

Face it, it's been you and me against all of them. But you know something? I've never let it bother me. They can all go jump in that big pond," she chortled, pointing out to sea. "And by the way, it's time for you to knock off all the woulda, coulda, shoulda nonsense. Just go home and stay busy!"

And that's exactly what Rat did. He went back to the lighthouse determined to become the best wick trimmer he could be. Night after night he shaped and reshaped the charred cottony fabric just the way his father had taught him.

The days slipped leisurely by, the seasons changed, and Rat was content with his work.

* * *

Then one glorious October afternoon in the year 1779, a fateful event happened that would change the lives of those living

near the lighthouse. Rat and Gully were out and about enjoying the warmth of Indian summer when without warning the peaceful spell was broken by the sound of marching soldiers. The dull thud of heavy boots was accompanied by the distant call, **"Hut, hut, hut, two, three, four."**

Turning to Gully, Rat asked, "What's up with the crazy humans?"

"Not sure," squawked the bird, as they stood and stared at the advancing platoon of red-coated soldiers. "I've been hearing about a war for freedom."

"What's war?" squeaked Rat.

"It's when humans gang up and hurt each other," answered Gully.

"I never heard anything so stupid," replied Rat, eyes rolling in disgust. "And what about freedom?"

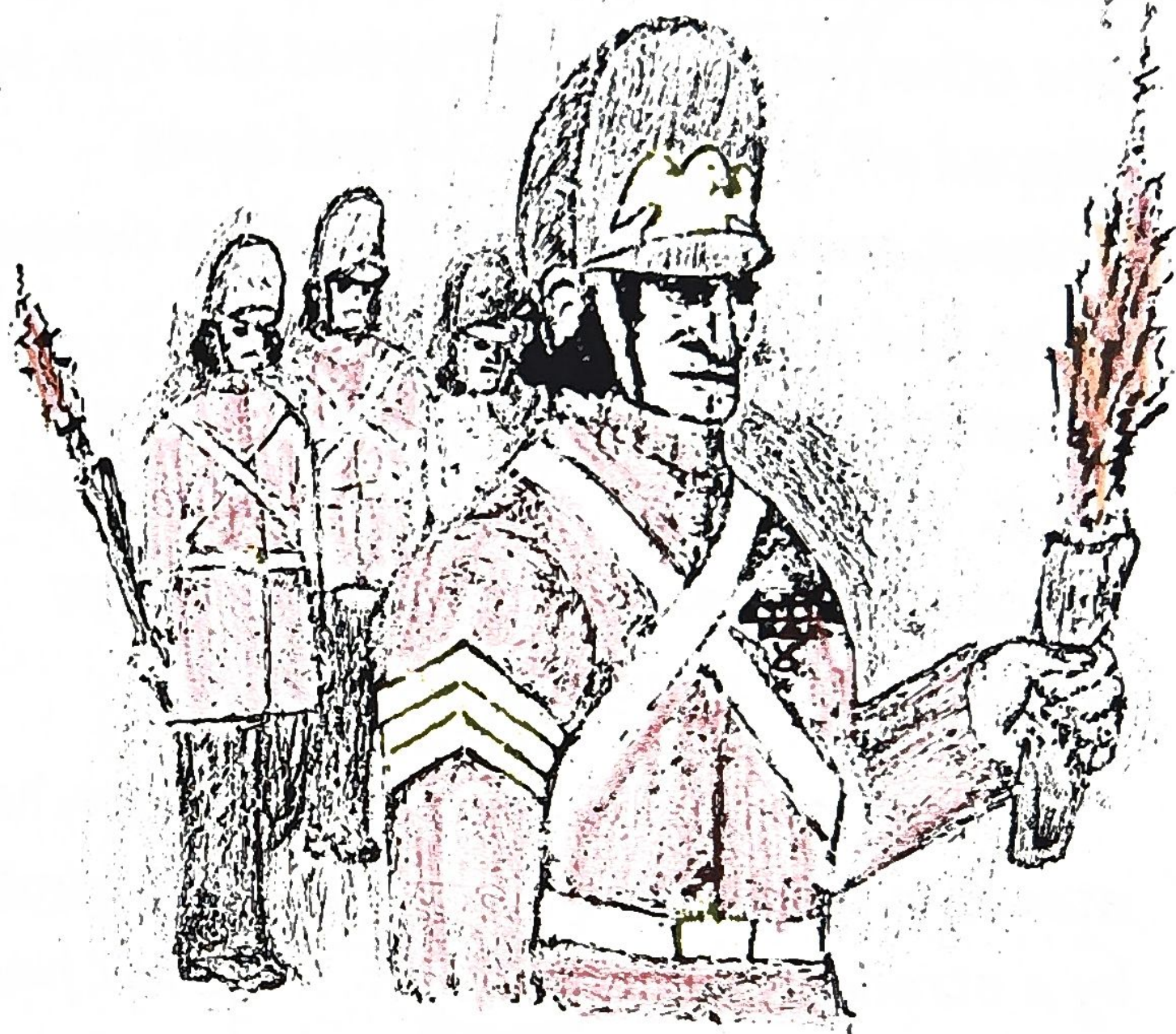
“That’s easy,” said Gully. “You know when the robins leave in the fall...that’s freedom.”

Closer came the menacing sound, “**Hut, hut, hut, two, three, four.**” And seeing the soldiers carrying lighted torches, the gull screeched, “You’re free to climb on and I’ll fly us out of here to freedom before it’s too late.”

Rat shook his head no. The gull lifted slightly then settled back down. “I can’t just leave you here alone to face that angry mob!”

“You have no choice. Think of all your brothers and sisters. They need you. I have no one to look after except myself. Now get going!” They searched each other’s eyes then touched paw to wing tip.

As the gull zoomed skyward, she called back, “Always remember, we’re pals to the end.”



“And seeing the
soldiers carrying
lighted torches, the
gull screeched....”

Rat went into action. He scampered up the rocky slope to the huge fog bell to warn the other animals. He grabbed the rope, but slipped off. He tried again and again without success. With the soldiers closing in, he had a flash of inspiration. He remembered how he'd curled his tail on a stick. Using the same grip, he jumped into space. It worked. Each swing of the rope brought forth a mighty, **"BONG!"**

When Rat finally dared open his eyes, he stared in disbelief at his tail and was struck by a strangely funny thought... his tail, his ugly "hunka rope", was about to save all the animals on Beavertail.

Just then a chuckle sprang out of his mouth. Surprise! Surprise! Could it be his long lost laughter had found reason to escape? When Rat realized it truly was laughter, he let loose a volley that joined the bell noise, as tears of joy cascaded down his little cheeks.



... as tears of joy
cascaded down his
little cheeks.

All the noise woke the snoozing Hog.

The chickens stopped their incessant pecking.

Horsey whinnied, "Here comes the Keeper. Now we can get out of here!"

The escape was truly a memorable sight. There was Horsey in full gallop with the Keeper on his back. Hog was slipping and sliding, trying to catch a ride on the flowing tail. The chickens, not to be left behind, had also climbed aboard. There was one chicken on each shoulder, and the one brazen bird perched on his hat went up and down with every stride.

Among the other critters, large and small, who fled for the safety of the woods, Squirrel scurried, Snake slithered, Rabbit hopped, and Cricket jumped. When all the scurrying, slithering, hopping, and jumping was over, poor Rat found himself all alone,



The escape was
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dangling from the end of the bell rope.

“Hut, hut, hut, two, three, four. PLATOON HALT!”

A moment later as Rat faced the charging Red-Coats, he knew without question the real meaning of war. He could read it in their troubled eyes, and tears continued to pour down his cheeks ... this time from fear!

“BONG, BONG, BO.....”

Then silence...eerie silence.

*** * ***

At long last the smoke cleared, and the animals cautiously came out of hiding. They couldn't believe their eyes. Nothing remained of the lighthouse, just a loose pile of stones and smoking boards. The fields around were scorched black. The bell was gone!

“Where will we sleep?” clucked the worried

chickens.

Hog snorted, "Has anyone seen Rat?"

So began the great search. Hog, chickens, Horsey, all the critters, even the Keeper, joined in. When they were tired, they looked some more. Every rock was turned, then turned again, while the day turned to darkness.

The next day the weary group was forced to admit defeat. With heavy hearts, they called off their search believing they'd lost a true friend.

All the while the winds blew, the waves crashed, and from high in the sky a bird cast her shadow on a lonely spit of land called Beavertail. Gully hadn't quit. She missed her pal and besides this wasn't anything new. It seemed she had spent half her life looking for him.

With mighty wings spread wide, she

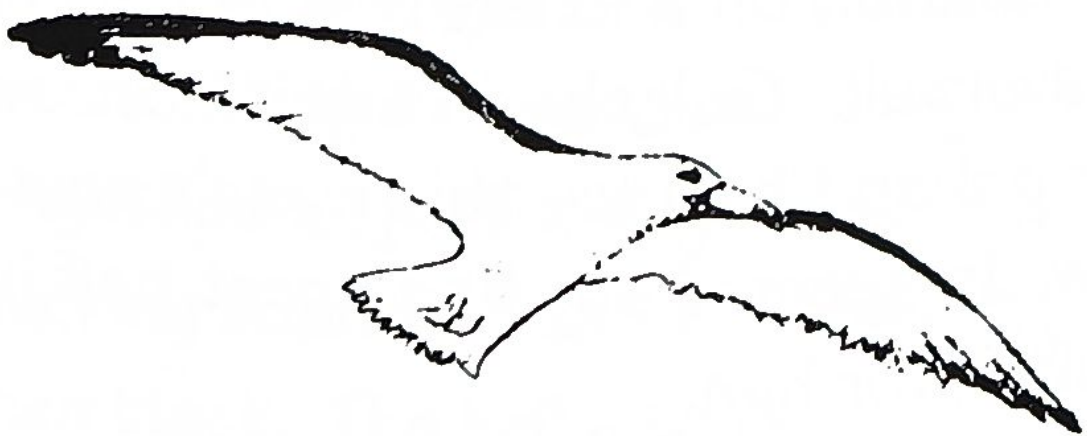
swept back and forth over his favorite hiding places. Her sharp eyes finally picked out a splash in the tidal pool. Down she dove, shrieking, "Rat, Rat is that really you?"

"Yep," responded the relaxed rodent, stretching out on his back and kicking his paws like he was taking a Saturday night bubble bath.

"I can't believe it," Gully kept repeating. "And what's all that laughing about?"

Rat, just chuckling away, chirped, "Self respect! Gully, self respect!"

Gully, with a sigh of relief, whispered, "Gotcha, Mr. Rat, gotcha!"



THE END

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This little story is about some animals who had trouble accepting each other's differences. It also is about history because there really was a fire in the first wooden Beavertail Lighthouse. And there really was a rebuilt stone lighthouse that was destroyed by British forces during the Revolution. Should you ever travel to Jamestown, Rhode Island, all the way out to Beavertail, you will be pleased to find a lighthouse still standing as a great protector for all the ships that pass.

Take time to observe the gulls in flight. It has been said that through the hundreds of years since the destruction of the Beavertail Lighthouse ancestors of Gully continue to glide on the wind currents.

Acknowledgments

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P.F.