

THE IMPROBABLE IMAGINATION OF
MICHELA MOUSE

shorts proposal

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WARNER BROTHERS ANIMATION INC.

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MICHELA MOUSE is a sweet hearted, dreamy-eyed little mouse. She's twelve years old, in mouse years, on the verge of growing up, but not quite there yet. Michela's naive. Romantic. Ready to believe in the good in others. She's exactly like Peggy Ann Garner's character Francie Nolan in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. She escapes from the world's harsher side into the far more romantic world of her own imagination. "Blissful, fleeting moment of contentment," she'll say as she dreams her lovely little daydreams. "Heavy sigh of depression," she'll mumble as one of her exploits fails.

Michela lives in a tin can in a dank, dingy allyway. Right over the alleyway fence is a small, but scrupulously clean house into which Michela must foray for food on lonely, rainy nights. It's a dreary life. Meager. A downright rotten life, even for a mouse. It's been said that the real world's made of cement. For Michela, it's not very friendly cement either.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER...

Like many of us, Michela's most alive, most daring, most happy in her own imagination. And as with Francie Nolan, the key that unlocks Michela's imagination is reading.

To Michela, the house is wonderful. Not only does it provide warmth and food--it's full of things to read. Old newspapers, letterheads, store receipts--Michela's a voracious reader of any scraps of left lying around by her human host. Clothing tags, candy bar wrappers, cereal boxes, labels on tin cans, anything can be grist for her imagination mill.

Admittedly Michela's reading isn't exactly Leo Tolstoy. But from this humble rodent-eye view of the Human world springs forth the stuff that her dreams are made of.

Inspired by the latest label she reads, Michela imagines herself the adventurous heroine of a whole series of trials and tribulations. She'll read about Riboflavin, Niacin, and Iron, and imagine herself Michela Mouse, slayer of the evil dragons Riboflavin, Niacin, and Iron. She'll read "Close cover before striking," and dream of an invincible suit of armor that you close up before you charge into battle. Pieces of a phrase might work as well. eg. Every little phrase on every label can trigger Michela into an adventure in her mind.

The house then, isn't just food to her--it's food for thought. Mouse thoughts. For some mice, like Men, do not live by bread alone.

Michela's little fantasies always have a dark side to them. There might be a horrible monster that eventually becomes a vacuum cleaner. Or the human lady who owns the house might go at Michela with a rolled up newspaper. Michela might get caught in a good old fashioned, hard to ignore mousetrap. Her fantasies start with words... but they always end with the real, black and white world intruding back into her life. Her most important real life intrusion is...

WHISKAS

Every Don Quixote has his windmill. For Michela, that windmill is Whiskas, a befuddled, mangy cat who earns his keep keeping mice out of the house. Or one mouse, rather, since the house is so clean there's no food to be had. Michela's the only mouse for miles hopeful enough to stick around.

Whiskas is an old cat. A crotchety cat. Cynical, tired of his meaningless life--sort of a feline Walter Matthau with whiskers. He's too jaded to understand Michela's fantasies. He's tired of this cat and mouse racket. He sees no purpose to life. He just lives it, tomorrow after tomorrow after tomorrow. He keeps Michela around to keep himself employed. "Kid...I dunno why you bother with this fantasy thing... Life is simple... I catch you. I earn my keep. I let you go so I can catch you again tomorrow. It's work. Why make it so complicated?"

THE CHASE IS ON

Michela has a deal with Whiskas. He gives her things to read. In exchange, Michela lets Whiskas chase her in front of the human lady who owns him. This is his job; catching those filthy rotten mice infesting her nice clean house.

"Come on, kid," Whiskas will say. "The human's home. We gotta do the chase thing."

Michela holds out her hands. "We need the story first, Whiskas."

Whiskas will give her whatever's handy. He'll tear the label off a cashmere sweater or a tag off a nearby piece of furniture--acts which usually get him in tons of trouble at the story's end.

"Cold wash separately. This is a wonderful one," Michela says, enthused.

"Yeah, yeah. Make with the chase thing, kid."

Like Don Quixote, Michela imagines Whiskas as the foil of all her adventures. One day he's a catdragon to slay. Another day he's great white catwhale Moby Whiskas. He's the soul of her adventures as the writing he brings her is the inspiration.

Whiskas of course never bothered to learn to read, indeed never bothers to think of anything past tomorrow's cat chow, so he certainly doesn't hold truck with Michela's silly little rodent dreams. He puts up with her to please the Human, and keep himself employed.

MICHELA'S MIND'S EYE

But the chase never goes short and sweet as Whiskas plans. That's because Michela's imagination takes over. We see the chase from her mind's eye. Cold wash separately would suggest a whole fantasy, which she narrates, authorlike, as she acts out her spellbinding adventures:

"Prisoner 91426, alias whistle blower Michela Mouse--So feared by her own tyrannical government she's placed in solitary confinement on false charges, finds herself forced to wash separately from the rest of her fellow prisoners. But her loneliness turns to her advantage as she gnaws a bar of soap into a reasonable facsimile of the warden's ID badge... She flashes her way past the dimwitted guards... but little did she count on the relentless pursuit of Willakers G. Whiskas, Catwarden!"

In the ensuing action, Whiskas may think he's chasing a mouse around the house of a human lady. Little does he know he's pursuing Michela Mouse, heroine of whatever story she's concocted in her little brain.

As she scurries into cupboards and behind portmanteaus, as she dodges flying brooms and slashing catpaws, Michela translates house, lady and cat into the action of her story. The lady's screams become the wail of sirens, a rolled up newspaper turns to a billyclub, the slamming doors turn to prison gates slamming shut. Always Whiskas is confounded by Michela's inventive attempts to elude him--actions that always come out of left field to Whiskas, because he never cares enough to be following along with the story.

Sometimes Whiskas tires of the chase and he'll snatch her up to show to the human lady.

"Whiskas," she'll say, gently slapping his nose, "you're the irrepressible warden Willakers G. Whiskas. You're supposed relentlessly confront me at the Bessamer Furnace Room Number Three of the Bethlehem Steel Company."

THE REAL WORLD. REALLY.

In the ensuing confrontation at the Bessamer Furnace Room Number Three of the Bethlehem Steel Company, Whiskas and Michela would end up preventing the Old Lady's chicken noodle soup from boiling over, saving her from an embarrassing moment with the Lady's Home Social Club. Michela's fantasies always end up with Whiskas appearing to prevent some household disaster, in addition to catching a mouse. All this gets him in good with the old lady.

When Whiskas finally catches Michela, he earns some cat chow, or a fish dinner. This food he grudgingly shares with his little mouse accomplice.

GOTTA GET A MEAL TICKET

Whiskas isn't sure how he feels about his pesky little mouse. But he knows one thing--no mice, no mouser! So while he might often make a show out of chasing Michela, he wouldn't dare let her come to harm. Michela is his meal ticket, after all. Every time he does save her from final destruction, Michela gives him a disarming kiss.

"Whiskas," she needles him, "you do care." To which Whiskas will generally grumble a sour denial.

"OL' WHAT'S HER NAME? THE HUMAN LADY."

Whiskas's owner is a fastidious, cantankerous, mah-jong playing old lady who we only see from the legs down. He doesn't even know her name. In true cat fashion, Whiskas doesn't really give a damn what she's called, referring to her only as "the human." It would be an unexplainable rush of sentiment if Whiskas went even so far as to call her "the old lady."

CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO... ODDLINESS

The old lady who owns Whiskas is clean. Obsessively clean. She's always inviting lady friends over for tea or mah-jong, society meetings or gossip. And she would die, just die, if any of her snooty friends noticed a speck of dust, a spot of water, or a picture a little crooked. She's obsessive. White gloves, antiseptic spray, she's kookily fastidious about her house and her house's appearance.

And the thought of vermin! An ant or a cockroach would send the old lady to the pearly gates in utter disgrace! Rats of course are the worst of all. The old lady hates rats. They're filthy, plague ridden, flea-carrying, garbage nibbling beast-infested beasts. Possums are nothing more than giant rats. And mice are nothing more than mini rats before they grow up to be possums. This even goes for Michela, who's always neat and clean as a whistle. As far as the human lady's concerned, she's a rat, and that's that.

Cats on the other hand are nice. Clean. My goodness, aren't they always cleaning themselves? Of course the old lady never notices that Whiskas doesn't quite share this trait with his fellow cats. He's a bit too lazy and careless to bother how he looks. But she knows cats are clean. Ipso Facto, Whiskas is clean too, by definition.

NO LOVE'S LOST

But that doesn't mean Whiskas gets a free ride. His life is something more like a raw deal: whenever the Human comes home, she growls at Whiskas: "Ooo! Those filthy little rats! Crawling, crawling all over my nice clean house. Earn your keep, Whiskas! Catch it, or it's the cat pound for you!" She's not kidding either. She knows mice are all over her house, and Whiskas better damned well catch them.

HONESTY IS THE WORST POLICY

Michela is honest. Naive. She would never think of deceiving anyone, not even the old lady who owns Whiskas. She doesn't really understand the way Whiskas uses her in his scam to make himself seem necessary to house. If she knew the truth she'd probably up and go somewhere else--somewhere she could do some good.

Whiskas knows Michela is too honest for his own good. So he deceives her. He calls their little cat and mouse chase "putting on The Story."

"Come on, kid," he'll say. "We gotta put on The Story for the human." At the end of such performances, Michela might innocently ask Whiskas whether the human liked the show or not.

Michela and Whiskas settle down to the plate of fish the old lady has given him.

MICHELA

Did she like The Story, Whiskas?

Whiskas lovingly smells the fish.

WHISKAS

Sure. Sure she did.

MICHELA

(swooning)

I think it was our best yet.

WHISKAS

She did too, kid.

MICHELA

Really?

WHISKAS

Sure, sure. Best story ever. Excitin' she said. Somethin' like that.

MICHELA

The molten metal, the showers of sparks symbolizing the battle for freedom...

As Michela talks, she whips herself into a frenzy. The lighting turns red like the ruddy glow of Bessamer Furnace Room Number Three of the Bethlehem Steel Company as if the fantasy were beginning all over again.

MICHELA (CONT)

...the clang of the steel girders, the roar of railcars, the clashing of irresistible will of Freedom against immovable force of Tyranny--did she feel like that, Whiskas?

WHISKAS

Shuddap an' eat, will ya?

Whiskas never admits how much spice Michela adds to his life. And she never realizes the pipe dream that she's living.

THE WORLD IS BLACK AND WHITE

As in *The Wizard of Oz*, Michela's real world is black and white. Michela enters her dreams, the cartoons turn to a splash of color! As in *The Wizard of Oz*, as Michela re-enters reality, all turns back to black and white.

THE RAY OF HOPE

At the end of every adventure, Michela takes some little memory of color with her that she keeps in her little scrapbook of memories. Yes, her world is gray. But inside her scrapbook is the same splash of color she carries in her dreams. This then is the larger quest Michela has--the memories she carries with her, occasionally to share with other mice.. and make their lives just a little more colorful.

MOUSE TALES

EVERYTHING MUST GO--

ONE DAY ONLY!

--one day till the end of the world, that is! And Michela Mouse is the Cassandra-like prophet trying to spur the evacuation--hard to do in the face of the "Chicken Little" cynicism of the other alley-mice. But when a real, live exterminator comes to spray the home, Michela's fears become all too real.

RENTALS DUE BACK BEFORE MIDNIGHT

Especially if you're a Cinderella-looking mouse named Michela, and you're going to the ball in a gown rented from your FairyGodcat, Whiskas.

BEST EATEN BEFORE DATE SEpT 95

On the prowl for some crumbs, Michela finds a entire box of stale animal crackers in the trash. She imagines herself with these animals, caged and doomed to be eaten by the promised date of SEpT 95. They're resigned to their fate till they're led to freedom by Michela Mouse, Animal Rights Activist.

or...

USE ON OR BEFORE DATE

Finding this inscription on an old sardine tin, Michela goes on the date of her dreams armed an aphrodesiac scent given to her by those fateful mouse witches, Chit and Chat. Her dream dream date turns out to be none other than Whiskas, who's rather non-plussed to find out he dating a mouse. When nothing goes right, Michela resorts to her magic charm oil. But reality intrudes on Michela's little fantasy as she discovers that Whiskas, enticed by her sardine smell, is more interested in a mouse meal than in her girlish charms.

HARMFUL OR FATAL IF SWALLOWED

...Especially if you're swallowed by a big, Whiskas-looking Catwhale! But that's exactly what happens to Ahab Michela, as she pursues the elusive white catwhale across the bounding main of the house's flooded basement. Michela unplugs the stormdrain at the climax of her pursuit, catching Moby-Whiskas and fixing the Old Lady's plumbing problem as well.

MONSTER SALE!

They're real live Monsters, all of them looking like Whiskas, for sale at an auction. Horror of horrors, the beasts get loose! Good thing Michela is there as monster tamer extraordinaire.

PULL RING TO RELEASE

When Michela finds a discharged fire extinguisher in the trash, she imagines the pull ring to confine an evil Cloud Monster collected from a far off alien world, manifested by none other than Whiskas. Good thing for us, we have Michela the stalwart Space explorer on our side.

ACTIVE INGREDIANTS

Michela imagines that the active ingrediants in a bottle of shampoo become active indeed. They escape and threaten to stand the world's hair on end. And they would too, were it not for the heroic efforts of Michela Mouse, Chemical Engineer.

DO NOT OPEN OR SHOCK MAY RESULT

Especially when you're opening the front door to a Haunted House! But that's a job for Michela, ghost debunker par excellance. She'll deal with that haunted house, even if it means evicting the resident spectre, Whiskas.

IMPACT RESISTANT-WATERPROOF

Underwater adventure as Michela imagines a watch into a diving bell. There's high adventure, deep down in the ocean--but in the dark fathoms of Michela's imagination lies something ominous--Whiskas, the mighty and mysterious catfish.

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

...and Michela's a proud as punch decathlon competitor. Trouble is she's going for the gold against the redoubtable Whiskas.

TEAR ACROSS DOTTED LINE--

--before Michela Mouse, Highway Patrolmouse stops you! But she'll have her law-abiding paws full as she tangles with a feline road-warriorlike Whiskas.

CAUTION: FLAMMABLE!

Michela's the world's first astromouse, ready to rocket to Mars on her hairspray rocketship. Let's hope she can thwart the sabotage attempts of Whiskas, the evil archspy from spacerace rival Catsylvania.

YOU WILL MEET A TALL, DARK, HANDSOME STRANGER...

...says a fortune cookie fortune. And Michela's ready and waiting for that tall, dark, handsome stranger, reluctantly played by Whiskas.

FREE INSIDE THIS BOX

That's what a friendly looking alien cat named Whiskas offers Michela and her family; perfect freedom if they'll step right inside the package.

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN

Especially if you're a squeezable little mouse named Michela, and you're the new pet of an overly hands-on child.

STORE AWAY FROM HEAT OR CONTENTS MAY EXPLODE

Especially when you're hauling dynamite like Michela Mouse, gold prospecting engineer. Let's hope she strikes a vein before she's blown up by her precious metals prospecting archrival, Whiskas.

MAKES FOUR SERVINGS

What four wishes would you ask your friendly neighborhood genie? That's the question Michela tries to answer as she runs afoul of a Monkey's Paw style jinn who looks suspiciously like Whiskas.

COLD WASH SEPARATELY

As explained, Michela imagines herself a unjustly made a prisoner in solitary confinement, with Whiskas as her Javert-like Catwarden.

ACCEPTED BY THE AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION...

...but not by his patients! Michela shows us the terrors of a kid's view of a trip to the dentist, especially when the dentist is a mad mean cat named Whiskas!

NOTICE TO APPEAR

And appear, and appear and appear! Magic abounds as Michela finds herself on the receiving end of an endless wish list as she plays tooth fairy to an ever hungry tooth dangling Whiskas.

SETTLING MAY OCCUR DURING SHIPPING

Especially if you're on a wagon master Michela, trying to settle your family before you're overwhelmed by the maurauding outlaw, Whiskas.

SEAL OF APPROVAL

Doing something right can be impossible, when you have to answer to a sour, Whiskas-looking seal who's been given the power to approve or disapprove of everything Michela does.

INSPECTED BY 17

Seventeen mice are after Whiskas...

Loose bits

WEATHER: 80% CHANCE OF RAIN

noah's ark.

JUST ADD WATER gremilins

100% ALL NATURALIndians

FORTUNATE FRANCIE could be the same series idea, with fortune cookies fortunes, instead of trademark slogans. I don't like it as much, because no one knows what the fortune cookies say. But it could open things up a lot better.

SATISFACTION GUARENTEED

SOLD BY WEIGHT, NOT VOLUME

SHAKE WELL Dancing for a cat audience.

FOR AGES 3 AND UNDER

LIFETIME GUARENTEE

OUR PLEDGE TO YOU

TAX INCLUDED

LATE FEE FOR EARLY WITHDRAWL

FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

RSVP

REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

SERVES THE WHOLE FAMILY

USE WITH ADEQUATE VENTILATION

PACKED IN WATER

99% FAT FREE