

RATS ARE SMART

By ROBERT WALLACE

Mike the Mouse Didn't Even Like Cheese!



DOWN on his knees, hidden in the dark parlor of the old house, Mike Dawson grinned. The gang wouldn't be calling him "Mike the Mouse" when they heard about *this* job he'd pulled all by himself. Those guys thought he

didn't have brains.

"I'll show 'em," he muttered. "Once I get my hands on all the stuff old Dan'l Hardley's hid in this house I'll be settin' pretty."

He heard heavy footsteps in the room over his head. The old man was getting ready for bed. That was fine! He didn't want to tangle with Hardley, if he could help it.

"And there's nobody else in the house with the old miser," he thought with satisfaction. "Mmm—call *me* Mike the Mouse, will they? And I don't even like cheese."

The window blind was up, and he could see the street. There was nobody in sight.

Restless, waiting, he lighted a cigarette, very careful to keep the glow screened.

Upstairs, he heard some clicks, and a rumbling voice.

What was old Hardley doing? Mumbling his prayers?

Mike Dawson grinned again, pleased with himself. It took a smart guy to catch on like he had.

And all he'd had to go on was that grocer talking to a customer about the old man.

"Yeah, guards it with his life," the grocer had said. "Yes, sir, old Dan Hardley sure has his own way of doing things. Always been like that—doesn't believe in banks, either."

That had been three days ago. Since then Mike Dawson had trailed Hardley and watched until he had learned all he could

about the old man. Peering through the windows he had seen how careful Hardley was always to keep a certain closet in the dining room securely locked.

That would be the place—sure! That was where the old guy hid his dough. But tonight Mike the Mouse was going to get that money.

MIKE punched out his cigarette. No longer did he hear footsteps upstairs. Time to go!

Maybe he didn't like his nickname, but he stole into the dining room as softly as any mouse. He drew out a flashlight and slipped to the closet door. It was locked, but he opened it with a skeleton key.

Inside the closet, curtains hid some shelves.

Mike Dawson reached beneath the curtains—and yelped sharply. The heavy steel spring of a rat-trap had clamped down on his fingers. Trying to shake free of the pinching spring, he pushed the curtains aside with the flashlight, and cursed roundly. All that was on those shelves were boxes and packages of cheese.

Suddenly Mike was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps.

"There he is, Officer!" shouted a cracked old voice behind him. "I knew somebody was in the house when I smelled cigarette smoke! That's why I phoned the police. I never smoke myself."

Old Daniel Hardley's voice rose angrily. "And he was trying to steal my cheese that I used up every one of my red points from week to week to get and keep! The rat!"

"Mouse," Mike Dawson said bleakly, as the officer strode toward him. "Rats are smart."