

The Cat Who Swam the English Channel

By Keith Waddington 1991-2007

For Yumee

The Cat Trick

Toby was a trumpet-playing cat. He played the trumpet better than any cat in the whole up and down world. He practised every single day, sometimes tooting the toot from early morning until late at night. And all over England, Toby was famous for his marvellous toot-tootings.

Toby lived in a large wooden box just outside a small seaside town. It was afternoon and he decided to go down to the beach and play his trumpet. The holiday season had just begun, and there were hundreds of kids making sand castles, splashing about in the waves and laughing like mad. Toby walked by, tut-tutting quiet cat tuttings, and shaking his head in disapproval.

You see, Toby wasn't fond of children. When he was a little kitten, he'd lived with four boys and three girls and their mother and their father. The kids always wanted him to play with balls of wool. And they always wanted to pick him up and stroke him. And they always wanted him to be awake—even in the middle of the afternoon. Toby hated that kind of stuff. So, one night, even though he was still very young, he climbed out of an open window and ran away.

Now, Toby walked along the beach until he came to a nice quiet corner. He sat himself down, took his trumpet and played a tune with lots of twiddle notes. He didn't know it, but all the fish swimming in the sea were listening, and they danced a fishy dance. And every time they heard one of those famous twiddle notes, they jumped out of the water and looped the loop.

After a while, Toby sat looking out to sea. It was a clear day, and Toby could *just* see France on the other side of the English Channel, like a faint pencil line.

Just then his best friend, Cod Eye, arrived.

"Hello," Toby meowed. They both gave each other a quick lickety-lick, which is a cat's way of asking, "How do you do?"

"You look bored," Cod Eye meowed.

"No, I'm not bored. I was just wondering what it's like over in France."

"Well, I know one thing: all the cats meow French," Cod Eye meowed.

"Don't they meow *English*?"

"Nope. Not a single word."

"That's strange," Toby meowed.

"And any way, you might not be bored, but *I* am," Cod Eye meowed with a big smile. Cod Eye was a cat who *always* smiled—though he never meant it.

"Well, why don't we go into town and do the fire truck trick?" Toby meowed. Cod Eye's cod eyes lit up.

"We haven't done the fire truck trick for ages," Cod Eye meowed excitedly. "It's a great idea!"

"I know it is," Toby meowed back.

The fire truck trick is a trick all cats know, but only the trickiest cats dare to try. There's nothing a cat likes more than to see a fire truck, flying down the street, its siren screeching, with all the firemen on the back with their bright firemen costumes.

"Who's going to climb the tree?" Cod Eye meowed.

"You can, if you want."

"Yahoo," Cod Eye meowed.

And so they walked into town and chose the highest tree in the park. And while Cod Eye climbed up, Toby went to a nearby telephone box. He jumped up onto the shelf, and, leaning over, he managed to lift up the receiver and called 999.

"Police, ambulance, or fire service?" the operator asked.

"Fire service," Toby meowed. The line went click, click, clickety-click, and then a voice said:

"Fire service. Can I help you?"

Now Toby tried to sound like an old lady and meowed, "I hope so. My poor little cat, Twinkles, is stuck up a tree in the park. He's been there all night, and I'm worried to death he might fall. The tree's so high. Please come and rescue him. He's my *only* friend in *all the world*."

"Very well," the voice said, "we'll be there soon. Don't worry, Madame."

When Toby got back to the park, he saw Cod Eye sitting on a branch in the middle of the tree. He was meowing, "Meeeeeow, meeeeeeow," as if he really was a cat called Twinkles and as if he really was stuck and scared of falling.

"They're coming," Toby meowed to him, and sat on a bench to watch the show.

After a few minutes they heard the fire truck siren going:

"Yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa."

It was a wonderful sound that cats absolutely love. And then they saw the fire truck, speeding down the street.

"Yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa."

All the cars pulled in to the side of the road. The fire truck ran through all the red traffic lights.

"Yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa."

Next, it was in the park.

"Yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa, yheee-yhaaa."

Finally, it stopped beside the big tree and all the firemen jumped out and looked up for the cat. Cod Eye meowed a twinkly, "Meeeeeow, meeeeeeow."

One of the firemen pointed and called out, "There he is, poor little thing."

Toby laughed.

"We'd better get the ladder up," the captain of the firemen said. One of the firemen pushed a red button, and the magic fire truck ladder grew and grew, up into the sky like a beanstalk. Toby loved this part, and began to clap his paws. The magic ladder kept growing until it reached the middle of the tree and then stopped just beside Cod Eye.

This was an important job, and the captain of the firemen himself began to climb the enormous magic ladder.

"Meow, meow," Cod Eye meowed, still pretending to be scared.

Higher and higher the captain climbed. A crowd of people began to gather, and they all strained their necks watching the treetop show.

"Don't worry, little cat," the captain said. "We'll soon have you down, safe and sound."

At last the captain reached the top of the magic ladder. He was right beside Cod Eye.

"There you are," he said, reaching out to grab the poor helpless cat.

But Cod Eye meowed, turned around, and climbed *higher* up the tree.

The crowd began to giggle.

"Take me up higher!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder grew.

"Stop!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder stopped.

"Meow, meow," Cod Eye meowed, still pretending to be scared.

"Now then, you silly cat, stay still this time," he said, reaching out to grab the poor helpless cat.

But Cod Eye meowed, turned around, and climbed *even higher* up the tree.

The crowd began to chuckle.

"Take me up higher!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder grew.

"Stop!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder stopped.

"Meow, meow," Cod Eye meowed, still pretending to be scared.

"Now then, you stupid-silly cat, stay still this time." The captain was getting angry. He reached out to grab the poor helpless cat.

But Cod Eye meowed, turned around, and climbed *even even higher* up the tree.

Now Cod Eye was at the very top of the tree.

The crowd began to laugh.

"Take me up higher!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder grew.

"Stop!" the captain ordered, and the magic ladder stopped.

"Now then, you simply-stupid-silly cat, stay still this time." He was mad. He was madder than mad. He was *crazy*. His face was as red as the fire truck! This time, reaching out to grab the poor helpless cat, Cod Eye turned around, meowed another meow and climbed *down* the tree, hopping expertly from branch to branch like a famous circus performer. In just a few seconds, Cod Eye was at the very bottom.

The crowd laughed like it was the funniest show they'd ever seen. And they cheered, "Encore! Encore! Encore!" Meanwhile, the captain was still at the top of the magic ladder, looking down and feeling like a fool.

Cod Eye ran over to Toby, and they both rolled around on the grass, laughing so hard their bellies began to ache.

"After all that fun, I think it's time for a snooze," Toby meowed.

"That's a good idea," Cod Eye meowed.

"I know it is," Toby meowed back.

They went to Cod Eye's home. It was an old wooden barrel on the flat roof of a near-by pub. The pub was called, "The Cat and Dog."

Soon they were snoring loud cat snores.

The Giant Bathtub

When Toby opened his eyes, he noticed two things. First, that he was awake. Second, that he was alone. Cod Eye had completely disappeared.

Cod Eye was back down on the beach looking for something tasty to eat. He walked along, leaving a trail of paw prints in the wet sand, and then seemed to spy something very interesting.

"I spy something very interesting," Cod Eye meowed to himself.

Now Cod Eye was called Cod Eye for a very good reason: he had an eye for cod. Cod Eye thought cod was the most delicious, *easy-to-see* fish in the world. And that was exactly what he'd seen. Far away, at the very end of the beach, a cod fish was laying on the sand. Cod Eye began to run towards the fish, and soon he could smell the fishy fish smell, and licked his lips. And then, for some reason, Cod Eye suddenly stopped and began to look around, this way and that way—and just about every other way. There was a small rowboat just behind the fish, but the beach was completely deserted. Everyone had gone home.

"Meeoow," Cod Eye meowed, looking at the fish, but still not moving any closer. It seemed too good to be true. There was something not right about that tasty cod fish lying on the sand waiting to be eaten. There was something fishy about that fish. But Cod Eye couldn't resist any longer, and he began to take the last few cautious cat steps.

But the feeling that something bad was going to happen grew with every step. And then, just as he was finally about to take a bite, three big men jumped out from behind the rowboat.

"Attrapez-le!" one of them shouted, which is French, and means, "Catch him!" Cod Eye, the cat who always smiled—though he never meant it, was so scared he couldn't even move a whisker. One of the men was on him in a flash and threw a sack over his head. Another of the men kicked him inside. All at once Cod Eye seemed to realise what was happening and began fighting for his freedom. He kicked with his paws, pushed out his sharp claws, and began scritch-scratching and tearing at the sack. But it was no good. He was well and truly trapped.

Toby, the trumpet-playing cat, suddenly appeared on the sand. He'd been walking on the promenade beside the beach, looking for his

best friend, and had seen the whole thing. He ran towards the catnappers, meowing a terrible meow, bearing his sharp pointed teeth. An ordinary cat might have thought twice about fighting with three big catnappers, but Toby was no ordinary cat. Toby was a trumpet-playing cat. One of the men was busy tying a knot in the top of the sack. The other two were pushing the rowboat out into the sea. Toby was leaping giant leaps towards the man with the sack. Just as he was about to bite a bite out of his leg, the man jumped into the rowboat and the other two quickly followed. They began to row row row the boat away, leaving Toby alone on the beach. He meowed a great sad meow that was heard all through the town, and then stood in silence, watching the catnappers rowing out into the English Channel. And every now and then he heard the distant sound of Cod Eye, inside the sack inside the rowboat, meow for help.

"They must be going over to France," Toby meowed to himself. But France was nowhere to be seen now. The sky had clouded over, and the sea seemed to go on and on for ever and ever.

"What can I do?" he meowed.

But Toby knew there was only one thing he *could* do: swim after them. Now Toby was an extremely brave cat. Everyone knew that. But there was *one* thing that scared him. Toby decided to test the water. He put his right front paw into the sea, and then pulled it out quicker than you can say:

"Rapskaggledinkledomplegigglegagglemenosmellybum."

The one thing that scared Toby was water. Seawater, river water, bath water, he hated every kind of water. He looked out to sea, watched the rowboat rowing further and further away, and the English Channel seemed like a giant and terribly terrible bathtub.

Just then a wave crashed, and cold spray splashed all over him. Toby ran back on the beach and stopped at a safe distance. The rowboat was now even further away, and he stood watching and thinking of his friend Cod Eye, the cat who always smiled—though he never meant it. Toby knew he had no choice. He had to rescue his friend. But the sea was so **wet**. But he had to rescue his friend. But the sea was so **wet**. Toby meowed a strange meow. Then, all at once, he dashed forward, leaping more of those giant leaps across the sand towards the crashing waves. And then, one two three, he dived into the sea.

The Catty-Paddle

It was wet. It was cold. It was splashy. All the things Toby didn't like. He lifted his head and looked for the rowboat. There it was. He began to swim. Maybe it looked like he was doing the doggy-paddle, but of course he wasn't. He was doing the catty-paddle. Slowly, he began to leave the beach behind, disappearing out into the English Channel. And as he swam, Toby thought of his best friend, Cod Eye, otherwise the cold wet water would drown him with fear.

Toby paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled and paddled. But no matter how hard or how fast he paddled, he couldn't catch up to the rowboat. And slowly, ever so slowly, it sneaked away.

The sky was growing dark. The rowboat was gone. Toby turned over onto his back and looked towards England. It was a good thing Toby wasn't wearing any socks, because what he saw would have scared them off. Toby saw that England was gone as well.

With the rowboat gone, and with England gone, Toby wasn't sure which way to swim. He turned around and around in the cold water, and every direction seemed to be forward.

"Meow," he meowed a tiny meow, and the tiny meow lost itself in the emptiness of the open sea. Toby began to swim in the direction he hoped was *really* forward.

The waves were growing bigger and stronger and Toby was growing weaker. He was scared one of those big black monster waves would swallow him in a single gulp.

Now it really was dark. It was darker than dark. It was so dark the moon and stars were afraid to come out.

"I'm going to die," he meowed. "I'm going to die." He knew it. There was no doubt about it. He was lost in the middle of the English Channel. He was exhausted in the middle of the English Channel. He was freezing cold in the middle of the English Channel. Toby could smell death in the sea breeze. A big black monster wave crashed over his head and he sank under the water. He scrimbled and he scrambled towards the surface, but Toby was in such a panic, he didn't know which way was up. He

scrimbled and he scrambled. Soon he had no breath left and his lungs were ready to burst. He scrimbled and he scrambled. "I *have* to breathe," he thought. Toby was about to drown, which means he was about to take a big breath of cold water.

Just as the first few bubbles left his mouth, his head suddenly splashed above the surface and he gulped the air as if it were fresh cream.

Once again he began to paddle forward, but now he was more tired than ever. And, as if things weren't bad enough, he knew he'd just used up one of his nine cat lives.

Every second now seemed to last a million minutes. Everything was in slow motion. It took him two hours just to blink his eyes, and nearly a year to paddle one paddle.

A long time passed. His cold legs were hardly moving, and his cold body was sinking lower and lower in the water. Toby was just about to give up, when he seemed to glimpse a small light ahead. He stretched his cold neck, trying to see over the tops of the waves, but it was gone. Then he saw the light again. Then it was gone again. Then he saw it again. Then it was gone again.

"I'm going mad!" he meowed. Then he saw the light again. Then it was gone again. Then he saw it again. Then it was gone again.

"Just one terrible minute," Toby meowed. "I'm *not* going mad!" He was talking to the light that was there one second but not the next. "I know what you are, you naughty little light. You're a lighthouse! You thought you could trick me, didn't you?" Now Toby didn't normally talk to lighthouses, especially when they were too far away to hear, but right now he was so happy he couldn't stop himself. Now he *knew* he was swimming the right way. Now he could see how much further there was to swim. The flickering light was like a flickering of hope. Some small strength came back to his cold legs, and he began to do the catty-paddle in style.

Time seemed to return to its normal speed, and quite soon Toby could see the shadowy coast of France, stretching out to his left and right. And then, at last, the moon came out to say hello and showed him a silvery beach just ahead.

Finally, Toby crawled out of the crashing waves onto the sand. He'd done it. He was the first cat ever to swim the English Channel. But he was too exhausted to think of that, and, with the last of his strength, he crawled to the back of the beach and tumbled down in the sand dunes and fell fast asleep.

Bonjour

"Bonjour." Toby heard someone meow. He opened his eyes. It was morning and a beautiful lady cat was looking down at him.

"Bonjour," she meowed again.

"Ah?" Toby meowed back.

"Bonjour. Comment tu t'appelles?"

"I'm sorry," Toby began. "I don't meow French. Do you meow English?"

"Oui. I mean, yes, a leetle bit," she meowed. "What is you name?"

"Toby."

"I am calling myself Minou. Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm just tired. Last night I swam the English Channel."

"Pardon?"

"I meowed, last night I swam the English Channel."

"You is swimming across ze sea? From England? Why, zat is impossible. You are pulling my legs!"

"No, it's true." And then Toby meowed the whole story about Cod Eye and the catnappers. "So you see," he concluded, "now I have to try and find my friend, Cod Eye, and rescue him."

"I am sorry, but I tink he is—how you meow?—dead."

"Dead?! How?"

"In ze village near here, ze peoples is eating ze cats. Zey is tinkin zat cat taste—how you meow?—diddleicious."

"*Delicious?*" Toby was shocked. "That's terrible. You think my friend has already been gobbled up for breakfast?"

"Yes, and in France ze peoples break very fast. But now we must leave zis place. It is not safe. Ze peoples in zis village is crazy for eating ze cat."

"But do you know where they might have taken my friend? After swimming all that way, I have to be sure . . ."

"Yes, I am knowing," Minou meowed. "Follow me."

It was twelve o'clock, and most of the people in that strange French village were busy buying food for lunch. Toby and Minou sneaked through all the back streets, hiding whenever they saw any of the cat eating people. Soon they arrived at a small restaurant. They crouched behind

a bush, underneath an open window, and listened to some very greedy slip-sloppy sounds.

“Schlip, scrosh, smosh. Gobble gobble. Slock, mlock. Gobble gobble. Burp, burpety-burp. Burp hick. Burp hick. Hick hick hick. Ssshhlloooppp.”

“I’m sorry,” Minou meowed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Zis is ze cat food restaurant.”

“The people eat *cat food* in there?”

“Mais no no no—zey eat *cats*. I tink zey is eating your friend right now.”

Toby looked at Minou, and then up at the restaurant window, and then back at Minou, and tears filled his eyes.

“Come,” Minou meowed, “we must go, before we are—how you meow?—dotted.”

“*Spotted*,” Toby meowed sadly.

As they sneaked off, back down the street, Toby left a trail of big tears, like puddles after a shower of rain.

Soon they were out of the village and heading back towards the beach.

“Where are we going?” Toby asked, though he didn’t really care. Toby was too sad to care about anything.

“Zere is a big cave in ze cliffs. When ze cat food restaurant first opened, all ze cats in ze village must had to run away. Now we is all living in zat cave.”

They walked along the beach. After a while, steep cliffs began to rise into the sky. The two cats clambered over some rocks until they came to a hidden trail.

“We must for to be careful now,” Minou meowed. “Zis trail is doing zig, and doing zag, and taking us high up ze cliff. Ze safe way is *never* to be looking down.”

“All right,” Toby answered, and with Minou leading the way, they began to follow the narrow zig-zag trail. And of course, Toby, the brave trumpet playing cat, *always* looked down. Higher and higher they climbed up the cliff face, until at last they arrived at the cave.

A Sad Tune

Before Toby noticed that there were twenty-seven cats in the cave, he noticed that there was *one* trumpet. It was standing in a corner, leaning against the wall. And as the cats came up, one by one, to give him a lickety-lick, he kept glancing at the trumpet and wondering how it would sound.

After all the greetings were over, Toby asked Minou, "Who does that trumpet belong to?"

"It is belonging to no cat body. Ze cat who was doing ze puffing and ze blowing, and making ze music was my friend. But now he is gobled up by ze peoples."

"Oh. I'm sorry," Toby said. And then, after a few moments silence, "Can I try it?"

"You is knowing ze puffing and ze blowing? You is knowing ze music?"

"Yes," Toby meowed.

Minou got the trumpet and gave it to Toby.

Toby was thinking about his best friend Cod Eye all dead and gone forever. He played a very sad tune. And it was so sad, all the cats in the cave sat silently and cried silent cries.

The Demonstration

Later, Toby and Minou were sitting at the mouth of the cave, looking out to sea.

"I wish there was something we could do to stop those people eating cats," Toby meowed.

"I am wishing zat too. Most of zese cats is house cats. Zey is not used to a life like zis."

"Were you a house cat—before?" Toby asked.

"Moi? No no no. I am not *licking* ze children much. I am definitely not *licking* ze children much. Zey always make for to play wit' ze balls of wool, and ze stroking, and ze staying awake—even in ze afternoon."

"Ha," Toby laughed his first laugh since the fire truck trick. "I know what you mean," he meowed.

"Is it like zat is ze England?"

"Yes."

"Do zey eat cats in England?" Minou asked.

"Eat cats? Of course not." Toby shook his head. "English people only eat fish and chips. They'd *never* eat cats."

"But what would you be doing if zey tried?"

"I suppose all the cats would demonstrate."

"*Demonstrate?* Mais, what is zat?"

"Well, you march in the main street and make lots of noise and carry big signs to show everyone what you think. So, all the people would watch us and then realise it's wrong to eat cats."

"Mais, would it work?"

"It might. People are always doing that kind of thing in England."

"Oh. It is sounding like a funny country."

"It is. And I just had a funny idea. Why don't we try it? Maybe it could work here as well."

"But ze peoples might be catching us, and making us for to be their supper," Minou meowed.

"Not if we all stick together!" Toby meowed. "*That's* what we have to do. Stick together."

Minou meowed to all the other cats, who couldn't meow English, what Toby had meowed.

“Oui, c'est une bonne idée!” they all meowed, excitedly.

“Zey is meowing zat it is ze good idea,” Minou translated.

“I know it is,” Toby meowed back.

And so, every cat was soon busy, preparing for the big demonstration.

It was five o' clock, and most of the people in the village were busy buying food for supper. Suddenly, twenty-nine cats appeared at the top of the street. Toby was standing at the front, playing the trumpet. He was playing marching music with all kinds of marching notes. Behind Toby, two cats were banging drums. The other cats were all carrying big signs and marching in rows of three. This is what they'd written on the signs:

“EAT DOGS—NOT CATS”

“GIVE YOUR CAT A BREAK—EAT A KIT-KAT INSTEAD”

“CATS ARE PEOPLE TOO”

“PEOPLE ARE CATS TOO”

“A CAT INDEED IS A FRIEND IN NEED”

“A CAT IS A WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND”

One cat, who wasn't very good at writing, had written:

“CATS NOT IS GOB-GOB NO”

All the people in the street stopped and stood staring in shock with their mouths wide open as if they were at the dentists. One lady was so surprised, she dropped a packet of eggs she'd just bought, and they all went crack crack crackety crack on the ground. Another lady was so surprised, she gasped a giant gasp and her knickers fell down to her ankles and tripped her up. A small greedy boy, eating a cornet, was so surprised, he missed his mouth and stuck the ice cream up his nose.

Down the street the cats marched, trying not to look as scared as they felt. One, two, three, they marched, with the drums drumming, the trumpet trumpeting. And then they began to chant:

“Cats can sing and

Cats can dance.

Cats can jump and

Cats can prance.

Cats can even be your mate

So do not put one on your plate.”

All the people watched. Quite a few were reading the big signs and nodding their heads. And it really seemed that they were starting to understand that cats were people too, and that it wasn't right to gobble them up. And then, suddenly, the village butcher jumped out of his butcher's shop. He was holding a big butcher's knife. He was licking his lips, and spit was dripping down his fat chin.

"Cat steaks!" he cried in French. "Walking talking cat steaks!" The butcher was too fat to run. But the thought of all that fresh cat steak made him the fastest butcher alive. He rushed towards the demonstrating cats, the ground trembling beneath his fat stomping feet, and in the time it takes you to say: "Rapskaggledinkledomplegigglegagglemenosmellybum," he'd covered half the distance. The cats all came to a dead stop. They were so scared they couldn't think what to do and were waiting for someone to tell them. The butcher stomped closer, the knife held high and flashing in the sun. Suddenly, Toby meowed:

"Run for it! Run for your lives!" All at once the other cats seemed to understand English. They ran in all directions, and they ran as fast as they could, and maybe even faster. Toby was halfway down the street when he realised the butcher was coming after him. He ran and he ran, but the butcher was catching up fast. Toby glanced over his cat shoulder and saw him swinging the knife. And then the knife swished past his ear with a swish. Toby was so busy looking over his shoulder trying to dodge the knife that he accidentally ran into an alley with no way out. There was a high brick wall straight ahead, and when he saw it, he knew he was caught. Toby stopped running. He turned to face the butcher. The butcher stopped running as well—and started smiling.

Trapped

“Now I have you, you tasty English cat,” he said, in tasty English. Toby glanced at the high wall behind him, hoping to see some way to climb over. There was no way. Toby knew that this was the end. There was no escape. Quite soon, people would be eating him for supper. They’d be chewing him up and saying, “Yum yum, this cat is delicious. English cat and French wine is a perfect combination. Yum yum.” The butcher was still smiling. He loved killing cats, and wanted to take his time and make the most of it. Toby looked around the alley to see if there was something he could use to defend himself. There was nothing. He was well and truly trapped. But then he realised he was still holding the trumpet, and suddenly had a crazy idea.

“If you’re going to kill me,” he meowed to the smiling butcher, “can I have one last request?”

“What is it?” the butcher asked.

“Let me play one final piece of music on this trumpet.”

“All right, but make it quick. I want to chop off your head.”

And so Toby, the trumpet-playing cat, put the trumpet to his lips and blew the first note. And what a lovely note it was. It was about the finest first note he’d ever played. He blew a very lively tune, and the butcher, though he was impatient for it to be over so he could get on with his butchering, soon began to enjoy the music. First he tapped his foot in time to the rhythm. Next he clicked his fingers. Next he tried to whistle the melody. Finally, he was loving it so much, he started to dance. Toby, the trumpet playing cat, was, after all, the *best* trumpet playing cat in the whole up and down world. The butcher was really going crazy for the music. He was spinning and hopping and shaking it all over. He was jiggling and jaggling and rocking and rolling. Toby knew that this was his chance. The butcher was doing a fat belly dance and jumping up and down when Toby ran out, between his legs, down the alley and into the street. The butcher was so busy dancing, he didn’t notice anything had happened until ages later, when a crowd of people arrived, saw him there, dancing all alone, and started laughing.

Another Plan

Back safe in the cave, Toby meowed, "It wasn't such a good idea, after all."

"Ze idea was good, but ze butcher was bad," Minou meowed to him. "And anyway, we all got away."

"Yes, but I'm sure I used up *another* cat life."

"Zat is what ze lives is for. Zey is for using," Minou meowed.

It was dark out and time for bed. Toby and Minou snuggled down for a tossing and turning night's sleep.

The next morning, just as dawn was breaking, Toby woke up with a start. "Why of course!" he meowed to himself. "Of course! That's it!"

Minou was already awake, and she was watching him with a puzzled look. "Zat is what?" she meowed.

"I had a wonderful dream," Toby began. "I dreamed a *dream* of a dream."

"What was it being about?"

"About how we can stop the people from eating cats."

"How?" Minou meowed. But Toby didn't hear. He was thinking about the dream, and the more he thought about it, the more he thought about it.

"Yes! Yes!" he meowed to himself, growing excited. "I think it could *really* work." Toby was soon so excited there was only one thing to do. He picked up the trumpet and played a tune with lots and lots of little jumping up and down notes. Then, abruptly, he stopped and stood silent for a moment. "There's only one problem," he meowed.

"What?" Minou meowed. Toby had completely forgotten about Minou during the trumpet playing, and looked at her as if he was surprised she was there.

"I'm not sure the other cats will listen to me—after what happened yesterday."

"But will ze plan work?" Minou meowed.

"Yes, I'm sure. I'm sure I'm sure."

"Well, please to tell me what it is zen," Minou meowed.

Toby meowed the plan, and then Minou meowed in French to all the other cats.

"Oui, c'est une bonne idée!" they all meowed, excitedly.

"Zey is meowing zat it is ze good idea," Minou translated.

"I know it is," Toby meowed back. "Let's do it then."

It was eight o'clock, and most of the people in the village were buying food for breakfast. A certain lady had just bought another packet of eggs, but she suddenly saw something that gave her such a shock, she dropped them and they all went crack crack crackety crack on the ground. Another certain lady was so surprised, she gasped a giant gasp and her knickers fell down to her ankles and tripped her up. And a certain small and greedy boy, eating a cornet, was so surprised, he missed his mouth and stuck the ice cream up his nose. And then everyone in the street stopped and stared.

A moment later, ladies were screaming, men were running indoors, and big kids were sucking their thumbs like cry-babies. Everyone was as scared as scared can be.

Coming down the street, like a raging brown river, were 27,342 mice and rats. Mean mice. Rotten rats. The cats had been busy in the fields, sniffing them out and making them run for their lives, straight into the village. Soon the mice and rats were every where: in the shops, scuttling through houses, running up men's trouser legs, nibbling on ladies toes, making nests in childrens' hair. Everyone was shouting and screaming and crying and going berserk with terror. The fat butcher, who had a special fear of mice, was standing on a chair and calling, "Mummy, mummy. I want my mummy."

Toby was standing in the high street with all the other cats, who were laughing big meow laughs.

"Now zis plan really is a plan," Minou meowed. Toby smiled.

A single solitary man appeared in the middle of the street. He was wearing a top hat, and a rat was sitting on top of the top of the top hat. The man looked very worried and very serious.

"Zat's ze Lord Mayor," Minou meowed. The Lord Mayor is like the boss of a village or town, and when things go wrong, the people blame

him, call him bad names, and sometime pour cold rice pudding over his head.

“Monsieur Cat,” he said in English, stopping just in front of Toby. “I am the Lord Mayor of this village, and I am asking you to please make go away all the little beasties. Please, I do beg of you, on behalf of *all the people*.” The Lord Mayor was really thinking about all the cold rice pudding *all the people* would pour over his head if he didn't sort things out. He hated cold rice pudding being poured over his head.

“We'll make the mice and rats go away, but only if you promise there'll be no more cat eating,” Toby meowed.

“I promise,” he said in a sad voice.

“And that from now on, every cat in the village will have fresh fish for breakfast.”

“I promise,” he said in a sadder sad voice.

“And all the dogs in the village will go to obedience school, and learn to chase their tails instead of cats.”

“I promise,” he said in a sadder sadder sad voice.

“Cross your heart and hope to die?”

“I cross my heart and hope to cry.” The Lord Mayor crossed his heart and hoped to cry.

“Very well then,” Toby meowed.

“You'll make the beasties go away?” The Lord Mayor suddenly perked up.

“Yes.”

“Yoody-hoody-ha,” he said—in a serious kind of way.

Minou meowed to the other cats all the promises the Lord Mayor had made. They all meowed for joy, and then began to round up all the mice and rats and chase them back into the fields where they belonged.

The Smile

“And now, about your friend . . .” the Lord Mayor began. Toby and Minou looked at each other.

“Yes?” Minou meowed.

“No, I don't mean Madame Minou,” the Lord Mayor said, turning to Toby. “Your *English* friend. The one who was catnapped.”

“Oh,” Toby meowed, remembering how Cod Eye had died. Suddenly the glory of victory seemed like the sound of a broken trumpet.

“I will take you to him,” the Lord Mayor said.

“Ah?” Toby meowed.

“I will take you to him. He will be happy to see you.”

“You mean he's still alive?” Toby could hardly believe his ears.

“Mais oui. The butcher was keeping him for a special occasion. Follow me.”

Toby and Minou went with the Lord Mayor, down the street to the butcher's shop. The butcher was still standing on a chair, trying to keep a single miniscule mouse from running up his trouser leg and crying like a baby. At the back of the shop, there was a big basket. The Lord Mayor unfastened a strap and opened the top. Sitting in the corner, looking very afraid, was Cod Eye, the cat who always smiled—though he never meant it. When he saw Toby, he jumped out and they began to hug each other and dance around for joy. Cod Eye, the cat who always smiled—though he never meant it, was smiling now—only this time he *really did* mean it.

That night, in the cave, all the cats had a big party. They shouted, “Three cheers for Toby,” and meowed he was the best bravest brightest cat they'd ever met. He played some music on the trumpet, and everyone danced and drank too much milk.

The Cat Kiss

The next day, all the mice and rats were out of the village, and most of the cats had gone back to their old homes. The Lord Mayor was so happy to see everything in order again, he hired a big ship to take Toby and Cod Eye back to England.

Minou walked with them down to the dock. Just before going on board the ship, Toby turned to Minou, who was looking very sad, and meowed, "I suppose this is goodbye."

"Yes," Minou meowed.

"Unless . . ." Toby began.

"Unless what?" Minou meowed.

"Well . . ."

"Well what?"

"Unless you want to come back to England with me," Toby finally meowed.

"Yes, yes," Minou meowed. "I am loving ze idea." And then she gave Toby a big cat kiss. "It is—how you meow?—an instanding idea."

"Not *instanding*. *Outstanding*," Toby meowed.

"Yes, zat as well."

During the voyage over the English Channel, Toby and Minou were married by the captain of the ship. Cod Eye was best cat.

After the ceremony, the three cats went up on deck.

"You know what we should do, as soon as we get to England?" Toby meowed, looking out to sea.

"What?" Cod Eye meowed.

"What?" Minou meowed.

"Have a nice snooze," Toby meowed and yawned at the same time—which, of course, is something not many cats can do.

"That's a good idea," Cod Eye meowed.

"Is being ze good idea," Minou meowed.

"I know it is," Toby meowed back.