

Whimbit

by Marilyn Scott-Waters



CHAPTER 1

I am sure that you have heard the story of how Prince Yowler met his lovely bride Princess Whimbit but there are a few details that need to be made clear, especially the part about the magic fish, which wasn't really a magic fish at all and so I will retell it for you now....

In the city of Catsburg, which is the capital of Catlandia, there was quite a bustle going on, on account of there being a coronation being planned. Lord Spoo the High Chamberlain had just brought in the royal robes of ermine to show the young prince and to try once more to encourage him to do his princely duty, pick a bride and settle down to a life of court functions, regal banquets and the day to day challenge of governing a large principality of cats.

"I just don't see why I have to be king! I mean I love Catlandia as much as the next mouser but honestly Spoo, wouldn't anyone be better for this job than me? I mean I don't know anything about being a good ruler!" Yowler grouched as he looked out the castle window and down into the town. "I was a good soldier and happy to lead the Knights of Purr into battle but this is asking too much... even for the love of King Mousebane. Why do I have to be King?" He scratched behind his ear and looked out the window again as if sizing up his chances of jumping out and landing on his feet.

"Now, now, milord, we all have duties to perform in this life and probably the next, but His Highness, rest his souls would not have picked you to be king if he didn't think that you were the chosen one. You passed all the tests with such ease and grace that I am sure you will be a wonderful ruler once you've had some practice and as soon as you've picked your queen."

"That's another thing that puzzles me! Why do I have to get married? I like being single. I was perfectly happy being a soldier. I need wide-open spaces, my freedom, the

life on the road! I don't want some crabby, naggy furball telling me what to eat and wear and 'get those annoying friends' out of here."

"Every King in Catlandia has always picked a Queen before the coronation. There are hundreds of beautiful, intelligent maidens who all would make wonderful Queens. You only need to ask. You've never had trouble talking to the ladies before." Lord Spoo ran a sleek white tipped paw over his glistening black fur. "Why that little Lady- in- waiting... what was her name.... Mousette, she was enchanting! Surely she would be an asset to your reign."

"NO! I would be bored to tears in days. I am sure that she will make some lucky Tom very happy but I want more! I want someone..." His voice faded off as he looked out past the town and down the valley. Lord Spoo coughed discreetly and smoothed the ermine collar with his paw. Suddenly Prince Yowler's eyes flashed green and closed to slits. He sprang up on the windowsill and then twirled around three times chasing his tail like a whirlwind. The sun shining through his dark brown fur made him almost look golden as he looked down on the rather shocked older cat.

"I have a plan!" he said slyly, "a plan that will help me find my mate!" (And buy me a bit of freedom at that) he thought to himself. "Spoo! Write a letter for me... hurry! There are pens and papers on the desk... come on! Ahem..."

To the ladies of Catlandia...

Prince Yowler desires a queen who can tell

what's left from what's right

and is clever as well

to answer a riddle, a true paradox

of what all good kittens should find in this box."

Ha, Ha, Yowlha! By the great Dipper of Cream! If you, dear old friend can find me a lady cat that can answer my riddle than I will surely have met someone interesting

enough to send some time with.... So post my challenge and as the day is still young and so am I, you will find me in the royal gardens taking a nap in the sun."



CHAPTER 2

"The weather is changing fast, Sasha," said Whimbit, watching the breath from the little pony turn to clouds of steam in the cold morning air, "It should be winter soon with you and I on a nice holiday jaunt down to the southern beaches." Sasha's head bobbed up and down as if in agreement as he pulled the brightly painted fish cart down the road to Catsburg. "Who knows? Maybe we will visit the King of Persia again or walk the green gardens of Mistgard. I'm ready for a change of pace. This farmer life is tough for a ladycat who is accustomed to more excitement."

Whimbit's cart pulled into the Town Square and Sasha headed for their usual spot under a shady oak tree. Whimbit jumped down and began setting up the shelves of fish and produce that she raised on her farm during the warm summer months. As she was setting up the black and green striped awning over the cart she noticed a large carved wooden box on a pedestal sitting in the middle of the square.

"Well, well, well... what do we have here, my friends?" She jumped down and walked over to the crowd that was forming around the box. It was the size of a large treasure chest and had wonderful carvings of mighty cats in battle and angel cats playing trumpets and golden harps. It also had a large silver padlock encrusted with carnelian and onyx. She read the engraved inscription on the front panel,

"Prince Yowler desires a queen who can tell

what's left from what's right

and is clever as well

to answer a riddle, a true paradox

of what all good kittens should find in this box."

"Ha! So my old friend Yowler is up to his mischief making ways again. I knew the good life at the palace wouldn't keep him occupied very long." She scratched the top of her ear where she had lost the tip of it fighting alongside Yowler in the Badger Wars.

It had healed up with white along the scar giving her an exotic appearance in contrast to her grey and charcoal fur. She smiled and went back to packing her fish in ice and getting ready for the bustle of market day.

"I know exactly what's in that box ... but I am ready for amusement! I will wait and see what tricks the day unfolds."

It was hours till lunch and the sun was far from reaching her highest point but Whimbit had sold her last fish and most of the vegetables, except for a few Brussels sprouts which cats don't really like anyway. "I don't know why I bother growing these," she grumbled feeding the last bits to Sasha, " unless it's because ponies like them, my faithful steed." She patted him behind the ears and pulled a little packet from a secret drawer in the back of the cart.

"This is food that cats like! Dried salmon and cream cakes, a snack fit for a King... or a Queen for that matter." She laughed to herself and sat down on a nearby bench to watch the townspeople pass by. After she finished the last few crumbs she neatly folded the wrapper and put it in her apron pocket. "Now for a drink of clear water and home we go..." She walked over to the public fountain which was a statue of King Mousebane wrestling Feoder the Fish King, with all the frogs of Mistgard shooting water out of their mouths which is an interesting story but not one that I am going to tell you now. Across the square she could see the crowd of lookseers swarming around Prince Yowler's box. A large group of finely dressed young cat maidens had started to line up. They were dressed to their nine lives in satin, silk and cascades of imported Siamese lace. Some even had the tips of their whiskers gilded and they glittered in the morning sun. Whimbit looked down at her patched mud splattered skirt and work stained apron and picked a few fish scales off the front.

"Hmf! It's not clothes that make a lady cat. I bet they have never seen Mistress Sun rise over the catnip fields of Ramadan. Still I wonder what I would look like all fine and

clean like that, dressed in lace and gold brocade. There is a picture for you, Mistress Whimbit, at some great ball dressed like a giant dandelion."

The sound of the fountain was like the rush of the ocean in cold grey pools of salty fish and Whimbit closed her eyes dreaming of her adventures in strange and faraway places. She could almost hear the clear bell-like tones of mercats singing softly of time gone by, luring unsuspecting travelers to their magic water gardens. Whimbit shook herself awake. That was the sound of bells! She could hear the sharp clanging that put fear and fascination into every breathing cat. Cats are both repelled and drawn to the sound of bells and she could hear them getting closer.

Around the corner and into the square came His Royal Meowness Prince Yowler carried on a palanquin carried by four tawny wildcats. He was preceded by the castle bell ringers all dressed in pale blue satin and white gloves. All twenty cats were carrying two silver bells apiece and playing a stirring march. They marched around the square twice and finally set Prince Yowler, who was looking very pleased with himself, I can tell you, down in front of the mysterious box.

"Ladies and gentlecats, especially ladies," said Yowler with a twirl of his tail, "I greet you with great honor and curiosity. Who knows what is within this box? Who can tell the mysteries within? I would so like to meet the lovely maid who is clever enough to divine the truths within this box that you see before you here! Who will be the first to try?" Prince Yowler grinned his most winning smile and the sun glinting off of his shiny white fangs had several young cat maids fainting in the morning sun. Even Whimbit had to admit he looked very dashing and handsome in his cream colored silk shirt, tight blue wool breeches and black eel skin riding boots.

Whimbit looked across the square and ran both paws across her whiskers. Each contestant looked more beautiful than the next. Each guess seemed more ludicrous.

"Is it golden treasure?" one sleek Manx asked. "Oh no! Something much more precious than that my sweet." replied Yowler. "Is it diamond and pearls?" another asked.

"Oh no!" said the Prince, "Even something even more rare!" this went on for a bit of time, I cannot tell you how long it was because I was so busy listening to the questions. Suddenly Whimbit sprang up and leaped up to the top of the fountain until she was sitting on the golden nose of King Feoder the Fish King himself. She yelled good-naturedly across the square.

"Hey! Yowler, I know exactly what's in the box, you old dog breath!"

"Oh really, Whimbit? How would a squinty eyed, lop eared, beak face like you even begin to know what's in this box?" he laughed back.

"Oh yeah! Mangy tail! I've forgotten more than you'll ever know, you old saggy bag of fleas!"

The crowd looked puzzled. They were not used to their ruler carrying on this kind of conversation. Maybe it was the heat or perhaps the comment about Prince Yowler's tail but several more young girl cats fainted in their tracks.

"OK Smarty puss... what's in the box?" Prince Yowler was standing on top of the chest by this time, his paws on his hips, his tail lashing in the mid morning sun.

"There is nothing in that box, Yowler," cried Whimbit over the roar of the fountain, "nothing perhaps but your freedom, and a lot of hot air." Her tail was puffed up to twice its normal size and slowly moved from side to side.

"Hmm well... I mean, but..." Yowler thought fast and furiously, "No! That's not what all good kittens should find!"

Whimbit rolled her eyes and shouted back,

"I'll be back three days before Whitsunday and I will personally show you what all good kittens should find in that box!" With that she leaped over the heads of the crowd and on to Sasha's back and was gone before you could say "Oh my Ears and Whiskers!"

CHAPTER 3

Down the road, out of the town, and into the forest the little pony was running so fast that the fish cart barely touched the ground behind them. Sasha loved to run and they were halfway home before Whimbit finally reined him in to a brisk trot.

"Whoa there, friend! I almost lost a furball on that last turn! We need to go riding more often." Whimbit let out a deep breath and pulled her claws out of the horse collar. "Sasha, my companion, we are in for adventurous times ahead, mind my words, we shall not see ordinary days for many weeks to come!" Sasha let out a whinny that almost sounded like a laugh and turned off the main road to the path towards home.

Whimbit's fish farm was called Sunpatch. The white farmhouse, dappled with sunlight shining through the maple trees that surrounded the front garden, had been built her grandmother many years before. The fishponds, however, had been built by Whimbit, herself, dredging up adobe clay from the river bottom and baking the bricks in the sun. She made raised ponds, some square, some round, and piped water in from the river to make fountains and waterfalls to keep the water fresh for the fish and water lilies she grew. The falling water made all kinds of lovely music. It is really a beautiful place and I hope that you can see it some day.

"Come on Carrotbreath, How about a bit of rest and relaxation after a hard days work?" Whimbit removed Sasha's harness and brushed him down with a good, stiff badger bristle brush. Then she let him out into the pasture by the river for a roll in the grass and a drink of cold water.

"That's done," she said, "and now a some clean up for me to clear my mind so I can plan a little mischief." She took a dip in the bathing pool, some cats actually do like to swim, you know, and lay on a large rock in the sun drying her fur, as pure and clean as the first cat on the first day of the world. She talked to herself as she groomed the back of her ears,

"What to do, what to do? What is the answer to that riddle? Rassal-frassel, durn, darn, gum." She thought and thought and finally decided to do what all cats do when they are pondering a large problem; she took a nap. Lying in the sun looking like a small grey tiger carved from the rock she roamed far and wide in dream fields until she found the key to her question.

"Ah ha! This will be fun!" Whimbit thought as she slowly stretched and then sprang into action. Running into the house, she dressed herself in her fishing clothes, blue trousers and smock with a pair of rubber hip-wader boots. Then she went downstairs to the kitchen and opened the little cupboard under the stairs.

"It's in here somewhere." she mumbled rummaging through all the brooms and brushes. There in the back, hanging on a hook by a leather strap was a large wooden spatula. It was carved with symbols of wheels, suns and hearts, ancient writing and had three copper bands around the handle. The flat part of spatula was copper plated too, all engraved with vines and a picture of her grandmother with little fish swimming in a circle around her. This curious tool was almost as tall as Whimbit and she had a bit of trouble getting it through the cupboard doorway and out into the kitchen. After it was polished and oiled and the cobwebs brushed away she took the spatula and a large fishing creel down to the river and stood on a rock in the middle of the cold rushing current. She held it high over her head and said the words that were engraved on the handle.

*"Fish, I wish,
when this you see,
please come to me.
I need a scale
from your bright tail!"*

"I hope this works, grandmother. I've always wanted to try this thing out but never had a good reason." She dipped the copper end down into the green torrent of icy

water and waved it back and forth watching the little currents and eddies that it made in the flow. Nothing happened for a while, just water flowing by, dancing and bubbling, cold and clear, dark and deep. Then the water became lighter; sparkles of sun played on the surface and it looked as if the whole river bottom was floating towards the top. Then Whimbit saw that it was hundreds of fish swimming and churning the water into a froth of droplets and sunshine. Finally the fish stopped their frenzied motion and settled down into a carpet of gold, orange, silver and black. All color and kinds of river fish were there, all sizes too, big, little, plain and spotted. A large silver carp with black spots slowly moved his way to the front of the rock where the rather amazed fisher cat was standing.

"Mistress Cat, we answer your call, serve us that we may serve you." His voice was breathy and thin as if he had not spoken for a long time. "My name is Errol and I serve Auric the Golden. We need your help." Whimbit's eyes narrowed as she stared into the unblinking gaze of the fish at her feet.

"Why do you need my help? I mean, I eat fish. I'm a cat."

"Yes, we know. We all eat something. Some of us eat smaller brethren, some of us eat eggs, and some of us eat plants. It is the way of the world." His voice had a peculiar flat quality to it, like water over reeds, smooth and cold.

"But our leader has been trapped in a mountain pool and we seek your help to right this wrong. We will gladly pay you whatever you ask."

"Do I look like fish rescue to you?" asked Whimbit suspiciously. "How do I know you will keep your word?" The fish looked as confused as a creature with no eyelids can. They all submerged and appeared to be communicating with each other. Finally Errol rose to the surface and said,

"We are simple folk with no reason to lie. We come to you because you called us. You are clever and can help us. Please help our King. We promise to bring you back to here safe as we are able."

"Oh great," thought Whimbit, "Just what I need, talking dinner promising to take me on a journey to Cats know where. Still, I wonder what I might find...." An overwhelming curiosity filled her with such wanderlust until she knew that if she did not help the fish that she would wonder the rest of her nine lives what might have happened.

"OK Fishface, let's go!"

Two of the largest carp brought a long piece of river grass up from the bottom in their mouths. Whimbit looped the leather strap from the spatula over her paw, wrapped both sides of the river grass around her wrists like reins and stepped on the bobbing fish waiting in front of her. They soon were moving up the river at an alarming pace. It was only Whimbit's reluctance at having two water bathes in one day that kept her balanced on the two swimming mounts. As it was the spray from the splash of their fins left her damp and cold. They passed through rock cliffs and fern gullies, dark forests of trees and rolling green hills. It was late in the afternoon when they finally arrived at a silent pool surround by willows that hung low over the water. There was a smaller pool off to the side separated from the river by a beaver dam made of logs and mud.

"Our King came to this pool to rest for the night and when he awoke this wall was here. We can hear him and speak to him but see him we cannot. Oh, help us, best of all cats." pleaded one of the fish.

Whimbit jumped off her mounts onto the mud wall, relieved to be on dry land at last. She paced up and down trying to think of a plan. She could see the great golden Fish King slowly circling in the murky depths of the pool. He was twice the size of any fish she had ever seen, twice the size of a large otter.

"So much for just flipping him out into the river." she thought. "What to do.... what to do?" She tried moving some of the logs in the dam but the beavers had done good work and the logs were cemented like stone. She threw a rock into the pool,

"Hey King!" she cried, peering into the depths. The Giant Fish slowly rose to the surface and said,

"Thank you for coming, Queen of Cats. I am indebted to you and your cleverness at rescuing me."

"Well I haven't gotten you out of this yet, and I am not a Queen. I am a lady farmer, ex soldier, adventure seeker... just not a Queen, at least not today I'm not." she grinned and looked at the size of the fish and the size of the wall.

"Hmm, have you tried jumping over the wall?"

The King thought for a moment and said, "No, I don't believe I have." He swam around in a circle to build up speed and in a mighty spray of water and foam leapt over the wall and into the rolling green river beyond. The splash he made hitting the other side was taller than a young sapling tree and soaked Whimbit to the skin. She shook herself off but still looked fairly miserable and wet. The Fish King swam up and said,

"Thank you so much for saving my life, you are very clever. We thank you." With that he started to submerge.

"Hey! Get back here! How am I supposed to get home? And where is my reward?" Whimbit was losing patience at this point.

"Oh, sorry, I forgot that you do not swim. I will take you where you want to go myself. Climb upon my back."

"OK, your fishiness, but be careful, I'm already too wet as it is." The Fish King paused for a moment to ponder the meaning of her words. "Ah, Yes, Too wet, very funny." His mouth opened in almost what would be a laugh if fish did that sort of thing. Flash! They were off, and in two heartbeats they were by the shore of Sunpatch just as the twilight was beginning to set in.

"Here you are, Oh Queen of the Cats, we will give you what you asked for and talk to you no more." The water churned and boiled with a thousand bright fish thrashing about and Whimbit was covered with a shower of scales, hundreds and hundreds until

they lay in piles up to her knees. The noise of the splashing water was deafening and Whimbit thought she might drown in the brightly colored rain of glittering gold and orange. But suddenly as it had started all was quiet and as the first star appeared in the evening sky, she was alone in a sea of huge fish scales, as big as your thumb, cold and glittering in the last of setting sun.

She shoveled them into bags and dragged them into the barn, thirteen large bags in all. Then she went into the house; lit a fire to dry out by and after a nice warm supper of lizard stew and catnip tea she went to sleep.

CHAPTER 4

Now Prince Yowler was having a different kind of day altogether. After he had taken a few more guesses as to what was in the mystery box, which somehow after his meeting with Whimbit had lost its amusement for him, he went back with his retinue to the castle for lunch. All through the wondrous meal of specially prepared delicacies he felt a small storm of ideas and questions begin to brew in the back of his mind.

"Just what did she mean by that? Whitsunday is not till next Spring... What is she going to do? If I know Whimbit it might be anything and everything." He fidgeted on his golden chair, pushed the food around on the plate, folded and unfolded his fine linen napkin. He tapped his fork against his shiny white fangs and stared hard out the window. Finally he could sit no more and that curiosity that effects all cats and pulls them to their fate like rain to the ground swept over Yowler.

"I must find out what she is up to, saddle up Puddlejumper, No wait! I'll do it myself!" With that he leapt up and ran all the way down the banquet table and out the door, leaving behind a table of courtiers staring with their tongues out.

Down to the castle stables he ran, grabbed a bridle and saddle blanket from rack and down to the very last stall. There were many fine ponies in the royal livery, shiny blacks and pure white Arabians, but none was so special to Prince Yowler as Puddlejumper. You see, that particular pony was not shiny and fine like the other mounts. Oh no! She was scraggly and patchy, all orange and brown spots, big boney knees and long yellow teeth. But Puddlejumper was the fastest pony in the land when she put her mind to running. Today she was just tucking into a nice lunch of corn and oat mash when Yowler burst in.

"Come on, scruffy butt, we are going for a ride." he said. The homely mount looked up through a shaggy hank of mane and went back to eating.

"Please?" pleaded Yowler, "I need to find something out! It's important!" The sound of oatcrunching filled the air. "It's a lovely day! Come on... I'm in a hurry!" Puddlejumper paused long enough to shake her head and then resumed eating.

"That's it! You stubborn, moth-eaten mule, I'll ride some other pony, I mean, I thought I'd ask you first because we go back a long way together, but whatever..." The munching stopped for just a moment at the word 'mule' and then resumed again.

"Now, how far is it to Sunpatch Farm anyway?" wondered the Prince as he fumbled with the latch on the next stall over.

Puddlejumper's ears stood straight up. "Humpf!?" she snorted, sticking her head out the door.

"Oh, so now you want to go? I just don't understand you sometimes." She reached over and grabbed the bit of the bridle in her mouth. Yowler fitted the bridle up over her ears, threw the blanket and saddle over her and cinched it up. He barely had time to jump on her back before she was out the door and galloping toward the castle gate. Soon they were thundering down the road passing riders and wagons, left and right, and into the open fields of the countryside. Puddlejumper leapt over the garden gate and into the main pasture before Yowler could stop her. She whinnied and Sasha came trotting up. They rubbed noses and immediately started grazing as if that had been their pastime for the last few hours. Yowler jumped down, scratched behind his ear and said, "Some faithful steed you are, I thought you just wanted to go riding with me, fine then... be that way." He laughed and loosened her saddle cinch.

"I'll just go and find out what Mistress Whimbit is up to." He walked to the farmhouse only to find it empty, everything in order, clean and tidy but no sign of the owner. All around the house, barn and surrounding fields he searched. Her armor was stored neatly in the storeroom; her sword hung over the fireplace as always. Her little rowboat was still tied to the dock.

"Where could she have gone? If she were traveling anywhere at all she would have at least taken Sasha. The nearest farm is too far for her to go on foot. I hope she is all right. We haven't had any bandits in this area in years. Still, I think I will take a look around the forest just to check." He saddled up a reluctant Puddlejumper and rode off into the dark woods. It was late that night when he made his way back to Sunpatch. Seeing the firelight glowing in the window he crept up to steal a look and was relieved to see Whimbit sound asleep by the fire.

"Well, I wonder what she has been up to, but my curiosity will wait till tomorrow. Right now I'm tired and hungry so off to home we go." Puddlejumper snorted a farewell to her friend, Sasha and carried Yowler home as fast as she could to a warm bed and lots of dinner.

The next day Prince Yowler had to spend the day with affairs of state with a visiting delegation of Burmese cats. But in the back of his mind he promised himself that he would steal away as soon as possible and spy on Whimbit to see what she was up to. If he had known what plan she had dreamed up his whiskers would have curled in sheer admiration at the brilliance of it.

Whimbit woke up very early that morning and raced through her chores, fed her stock, cleaned the fishponds, and ran back to her workshop with the first bushel of scales. She sorted them by color and sang a magic cat song as she worked at her loom weaving the scales into a fine fabric. A pattern began to develop the more she worked with intricate scrollwork all around the edges. Because it was magic she had finished by noon a cloak that would take even a very skillful weaver years and years to make. She laughed and swung it over her head, pleased with her creation because although she had used all thirteen bags of scales it was light as a pair of mittens. She was fairly pleased with herself too, because all those years of magic lessons and hard work had paid off. She even had woven a tiny satchel, the size of envelope, to put it in. So with one flick of her paw she hid the cape into the little pocket and slung the strap over her

shoulder. She packed a light lunch of chicken wings and catgrass salad and went to fetch Sasha for a bit of adventure.

They rode through the forest and towards the mountains to the rookeries of the Crow folk. Whimbit left Sasha in a hidden grotto where he couldn't be seen by the circling birds, and told him, "I'll be back soon, my friend, wait here and stay quiet."

Sasha didn't have to be told twice because the cries of the crows overhead were unnerving to the bravest creatures. They were known for their sharp talons and strong beaks, which were fierce in battle and in peacetime as well.

Whimbit crept out until she came to a little clearing between the tall pine trees. She spread the golden cloak out like a picnic blanket and hid inside a dense thicket to watch and to wait. Before long a gang of crows had descended upon the clearing and the air rang with their taunts and screams.

"It's be mine!" "No! I sawr it furst and wurst." Argh! Not gotten rotten misey licey." They shrieked and circled diving close and then flapping their greasy feathers soared upwards again.

"Cawl the King, dirty burty, this rotten gotten be not for thee, slutty gutty, Bummscum! Aww! Aww!" A pair of screeching crows flew off to the rookeries leaving the rest to fight, peck and scream at each other.

"That's it, my little feathersnacks, go get your King and show him this prize." Whimbit thought to herself as she watched the crows through narrow eyes. "They don't call it a murder of crows for nothing, you smelly bunch of bullies."

A hush fell over the birds as a large dark shadow passed over the clearing. A huge crow, as big as Whimbit herself landed on the grass and walked up to the glittering cloak. His yellow eyes bulged with great avarice as he stared at the shiny bright gold before him.

"Mine! This be mine, mangy rangy and not yours, hear ye me awl! Aww! Ye wormy germy scum! Understand ye my wurd!" He turned to scan the watching trees

for any protest. In a flash, Whimbit pounced upon him, like a streak of pure light and wrapped him in the cloak and stuffed him in her little satchel. She held it high over her head and yelled,

"Hear me Crow folk and mark my words, I have your king and if you wish to see him alive again you will keep silent! I will return him to you in less than three days time. Do not follow me or the world will laugh at how a she-cat ate the King of the Crows for a lark!" She dangled the little pouch over her grinning mouth to show them her intent and dashed off before they could speak.

Sasha needed no urging to run like the rivers in spring back to the safety of the forest. Once under the cover of the trees overhead, and after Whimbit made sure that they were not being followed, they slowed down to a trot. Soon they were safe at home and Whimbit got ready for the second part of her plan. She took a nice long nap and as soon as it was dark rode into town. She waited in the shadows until the town square was deserted and crept out to where the Prince Yowler's box was sitting on the platform, then silently climbed up and quickly picked the lock with one sharp claw. In one quick motion she whipped the cloak and the Crow King out of the pouch and into the box and locked it behind him.

"Sleep pretty birdie, don't say a word until a she-cat knocks on the box thrice times three." With that she crept back to her tired mount and they walked home in the moonlight to a well-deserved night's sleep.

CHAPTER 5

Yowler, on the other paw, could not sleep. He lay in bed staring at the beams in the ceiling above him trying not to think about what trick Whimbit was going to play on him. There had been many pranks over the years; some from him and some from her, but none puzzled him like this. Finally he decided that since it was months until Whitsunday that he had plenty of time to figure it out, so he turned over and tried to nap.

The Luna was still in the night sky when Whimbit got up. She did her chores and loaded up her fish cart with all kinds of delicacies and lovely edibles. Then she put on her best skirt and waistcoat that she had brought from a trading trip in Persia. Finally she went to her larder and brought out a whole sack of sweet guppy gum and loaded it in the cart. She told a rather grumpy Sasha as she hitched up his harness, "Just one more trip, my friend and I promise that you can roll in the fields and laze in the sun for the rest of the week." The bleary eyed pony just snorted and started off on the familiar path towards town.

It was a busy market day and the square was crowded. Whimbit's cart was surrounded by crowds of kittens clamoring for guppy gum that she passed out by the pawful and the whisper, "You know the King of the Crow's is sleeping in Prince Yowler's box! And if I knocked on the box nine times he would wake up and you could hear him." Soon the word was all over town and even in the Royal Chambers.

"What! She said what?!!!" shouted Prince Yowler. "This is really too much... although I wouldn't put it past her. I mean once just because I put the Enchanted Snake of Moridore in her hunter's pack she hid the entire Royal Mouse guards in my hunting lodge. They ate all my stores and wall hangings before I got them out. However, I must see for myself what is and what isn't. "

Soon the entire town was packed into the square with Whimbit sitting on top of the box waiting. Yowler had to run across the heads of the crowd to get to her. When he got there he said,

"I didn't expect to see you so soon, what a pleasant surprise! Now, what's this piffle about The King of the Crows being here? I don't hear anything." Whimbit smiled the most satisfied grin and rapped on the box thrice times three. Loud and harsh the cries of the angry bird rang out,

"Let me free! Out I say Aww! Yargh! Mff! Rnff!" And other words too nasty to repeat.

"So what say you, good Kittens of Catsburg? What should be in this box?" Whimbit asked the litter of kits down in front.

"Oh the Crow King is in there, yes he is! Open it and let us see! Please, yes, oh please!" they mewed. She gave a little bow and turned to Prince Yowler with her eyes glittering like sun on snow. Yowler was laughing pretty hard by this time and opened the lock with a big silver key. The lid flew open and a furious Crow King flew up and out in a shower of thousands of glimmering scales.

"Fish! Icky sticky, smelly jelly! Awh! aw! cawhh!" he swore as he flew up and away. The crowd was still laughing when he was but a black pinprick in the blue morning sky.

"Well, I guess that answers any questions I might have about what's right and what's left... So pick your prize, lady fair, what will you choose?" asked Prince Yowler.

"Oh, I don't know," she laughed, "How about we start with lunch for me and my noble steed? And then, who knows? Maybe you will get lucky and I'll let you tell me a good story."

They all went back to the castle and had the best meal of the year, and what happened then I am too full to tell.