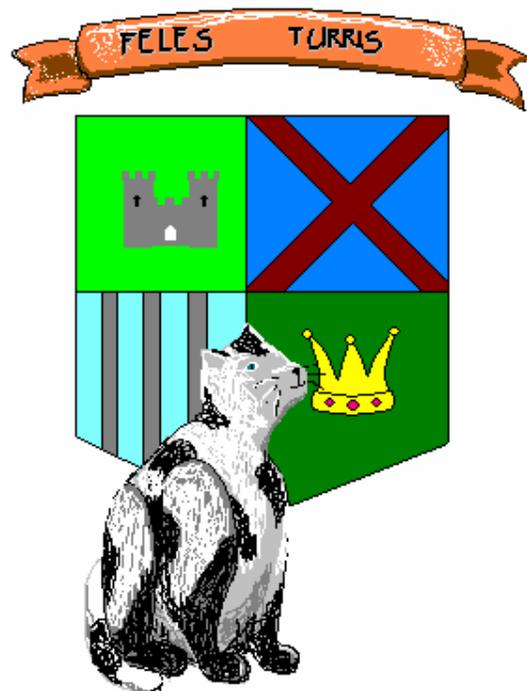


Have you ever noticed....

that for every castle there is a....

# Castle cat



Sometimes they are snaking through the long grass and the bushes at the foot of the tower, like a commando on a reconnaissance mission (because that is exactly what they are doing). At other times, they will be observing from a window or high vantage point, keeping a careful eye over their Catdom (that is like a Kingdom but ruled over by a cat).

Boots (not a particularly noble name for a direct descendant of Eldred, King Arthur's cat, or so he claims) was in, by far, his own favourite role, keeping surveillance over the tourists, by sunbathing on the path between the Gatehouse and the Keep. An arduous task indeed.

"Oh oh", thought Boots, "Here comes trouble". It wasn't the dog coming towards him that concerned him, after all, not only was the dog on a lead, but dogs are so much beneath cats, due to their stupidity (as exemplified by the lead), that they could be tolerated in the Catdom.

No, it was the audacity of two pigeons, who had decided it was quite alright for them to land on HIS Gatehouse ramparts. "What a nerve"? he thought. He was just about to stir himself and see them off when, a seagull flew by and scared them away.

The gull had the good manners to keep on flying, into someone else's jurisdiction. Problem over!

Boots Let the dog go by and properly ignored it and it's ridiculous ranting and flapping about. He took the opportunity offered by a quiet spell and settled down for a nap.

Some people might assume that he was sleeping on the job, but what else is one to do, when you are in a twenty-four hour a day occupation. Yes it is a dirty job but some cats got to do it.

Boots' title is, '65th Cat of Lewes', although no one refers to him by it. It is indeed a great honour bestowed upon him, certainly the greatest in the town and possibly the greatest in the country, after all, who can say which is the most important castle in the land. He had heard of a possible contender, in a place called ' Windsor ', but apparently the cat there spent all his time looking after a whole bunch of idiotic little dogs.



The second greatest title went to Charlotte, ' The Feeder of The Cat of Lewes '.

She obviously cherished her position and carried out her duties with diligence. Boots appreciated her dedication and in return would allow her the occasional stroke and on cold days, would even grace her with the privilege of having him sleep on her lap. He had to be careful not to let this become anticipated, as one could spoil a feeder.

He hardly seemed to have closed his eyes when, he was awoken by a noise, a noise not unlike a tin of food being opened. Of course this would have to be investigated.

The Kitchen being the natural place to start, Boots made it his first port of call.

He was disappointed to find no food, just Charlotte on the phone.

"Hello, Pest-away Ltd."?

(Pause)

"Do you deal with mice"?

What was going on? What was she saying? There couldn't be mice in the castle, could there? NO! Surely not. He would have been the first to know about them.

He could sense a mouse, through a solid stone wall, a full ten leaps away.

It had been a major part of his training, very thoroughly covered by his predecessor, his MOTHER!

Certain creatures could be tolerated in the Catdom. People, obviously, they had their uses, Dogs, as previously stated and Rabbits too, because, they left very little mess and they helped keep the grass tidy and Boots had decided he liked the grass tidy.

MICE, on the other hand, could not, under any circumstances.

They, along with all types of birds, are the enemy. This is an undeniable and inescapable fact!

There had been no great detail in the phone call, only that he had until Thursday to sort the problem out.

This meant very little to Boots, as cats don't count days for two very good reasons. The first is: - every day is just as important to a cat as any other; they are always at their post.

The second: - cats can't count; they have never seen any need to. As

far as a cat is concerned, there is either enough, not enough or more than enough and that is as simple as that. Who needs complicated numbers?

He did see this matter as a cause for his urgent attention, as it was not permissible for a person to perform a task, so obviously, under a cat's domain. Eldred would be turning in his grave!

He would now have to use all his guile to gain the full details.

The easiest thing to do, of course, would be to ask Charlotte but that option was not open to him. Don't imagine for a second that, mere English Language would be too difficult for such an advanced species as cats, they obviously understand every word. However they have spent centuries developing a much more subtle means of communicating with and controlling feeders. By a simple body movement or change of facial expression, they can give exactly the right message e.g.

it's Dinner Time.

If a cat were simply to walk up to a person and ask, "Have you a spare chop or two"? All that work would be undone.

Boots knew his trade, at lunchtime he had positioned himself in the perfect location for gaining information, under the kitchen table. All he had to do was wait for the herd to gather.

Charlotte laid out some plates of sandwiches and switched on the kettle. She set out three cups and proceeded to fill each one with milk, and sugar where required. Then she took down a big, green, china teapot from the shelf.

Some people would then put tea or teabags in but Charlotte had been trained by her mother too, very thoroughly!

She always waited for the kettle to boil and then used a little of the water to warm the pot. The tea clearly tasted ten times better for following this small ritual.

The door creaked open.

"I bet you smelt the kettle"?

"I certainly did, give us a kiss".

"I 'll tell my husband".

"I am your husband".

"Oh so you are, it's hard to tell under all that grime,  
I hope you washed your hands"?

"Course I did, now give us that kiss".

"Go on with you, you fool, Billy will be here any second".

And as if by magic, he was.

"Afternoon Charlotte".

"Sit down Billy lunch is ready".

"Thick cut bread, mature cheese and sweet pickle, you  
certainly know the way to a man's heart".

"Oh not you as well, it must be something in the water around  
here".

"Pardon"?

Charlotte and Richard laughed, Billy sat bemused, Boots lay silently  
under the table getting agitated but within a few minutes he was  
surrounded by feet and the feast had begun.

"I've rung the pest people".

"What did they say"?

"They can help and they'll be here on Thursday"

"I knew that already", thought Boots, getting impatient, "Get on with  
it". He extended his claws and drummed them on the floor.

"Wiggy get your nose out of that box", shouted Daniel, "They're only  
books and you can't read". "Haven't you heard that curiosity killed the  
cat"? He asked, shooing Wiggy away.

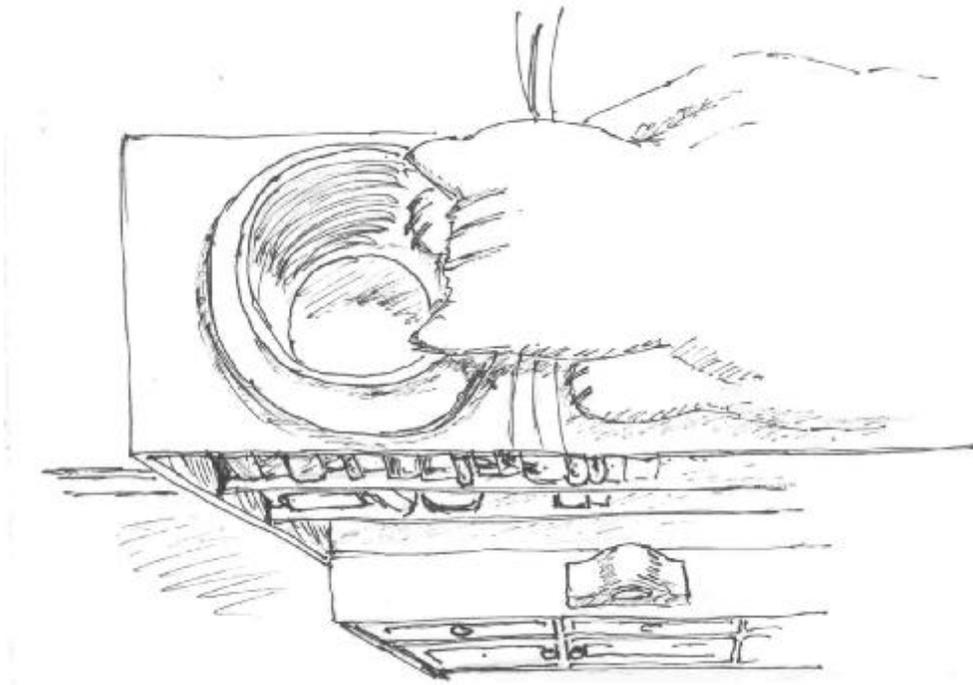
Daniel Jameson was the new vicar of St. Michaels. So new in fact,  
that he hadn't finished unpacking his belongings yet, although the  
study was the last room on the list.

He was right about one thing, cats can't read, their approach to  
reading very much resembles their approach to counting.

A strong sense of smell is a big help here.

On the other matter though, he was quite wrong. Cats are not curious,  
they are vigilant. They just have to check inside that priceless  
porcelain vase, in case a mouse is hiding in there or someone might have  
put something vitally important in it for safe keeping and forgotten  
about it. Now that wouldn't do at all, would it?

Naturally with all their thoroughness, occasionally, accidents happen  
but that is never a cats fault. People put fragile things in such stupid  
places, like on high, narrow shelves. How is a cat supposed to do his  
job?



Wiggy could take a hint. He wandered out to the kitchen to see if any odd food might have been overlooked and was just waiting to be finished off. It hadn't!

In a street the other side of the castle there was hole being dug, under a back garden gate. An escape plan was being put into action. The other side of the gate there was adventure, fun, surely not danger, never danger. No, ADVENTURE!

Boots frustration grew. It is not easy, this surveillance game. He wanted to scream, "Please, just talk about the mice, that's not much to ask, is it"? But of course he couldn't.

"Have the people from the Bowls Club said any more"?

"Yes, they can't leave anything in the pavilion now or it gets nibbled".

"Ah ha"! Now it made sense to him, he never went near the bowling green, far too tiresome. People threw balls down a field but there was nothing to hit or scare off.

No birds or mice, nothing. It made no sense at all.

He was still surprised that he had not picked up their scent though, even from there. Perhaps the wind had been blowing from the wrong direction ever since they arrived.

Tonight, he would check it out.

(Chapter Two)

The Sun set over the Priory and made long strange shadows on the ground. It set over Ann of Cleve's House and the Tea Gardens and the Flea Market as well, although none of the purveyors of antiques and collectibles would know, as at Five o'clock they disappeared in a cloud of dust and if the fairy stories are true, by five minutes past, the threadbare teddies and porcelain dolls were having a whale of a time. It also set on the high street and the last of the shopkeepers pulled in their blinds, locked their doors and assessed their day's trading.

The sky darkened, evening turned into night. Boots headed indoors, out of the chill and hopefully to get a bite to eat.

The lights came on and all over town. The pubs and restaurants filled with revellers and carousers although it was more a, "Bye Love, I'm just popping out for a swift half with Bob", sort of thing. Glasses chinked, knives and forks clattered onto empty plates, voices were raised in debate and joviality.

At St. Michaels, Daniel lead a prayer meeting and Wiggy watched in awe, listening to every word but nobody was aware of his presence.

In the house in the castle grounds, Charlotte sat knitting and watching the telly (she was clever like that), Richard just watched the telly and nearly dozed off, in his favourite chair. Boots bided his time.

In the town pubs, Barmaids called, "Last orders", and Landlords urged, "Time Gentlemen, please"! Pints were downed and Darts games conceded.

In the eating houses, coffees were left unfinished and peppermints were stuffed in pockets.

People flowed out onto the streets to the music of car doors being opened and closed and engines starting. Social calendars were agreed and farewells called.

Some headed for the Chinese or Indian Take-aways (it is amazing how consuming alcohol makes one insatiable for a 'Vindaloo' or a 'Sweet and Sour') but most just headed for home.

The throng became a trickle and then stopped.

The last train shuddered to a halt in the station and then rattled it's way back out, although no one got off and no one got on.

On a door step in a back street, a young couple said their long good nights and eventually submitted, reluctantly, to the need for sleep, possibly encouraged by the movement of a curtain in the bedroom window above them. She ducked inside the door as quietly as she could. He shrugged his shoulders, sighed and wandered down the street as the non strategic street lamps went dark.

Finally all was quiet.

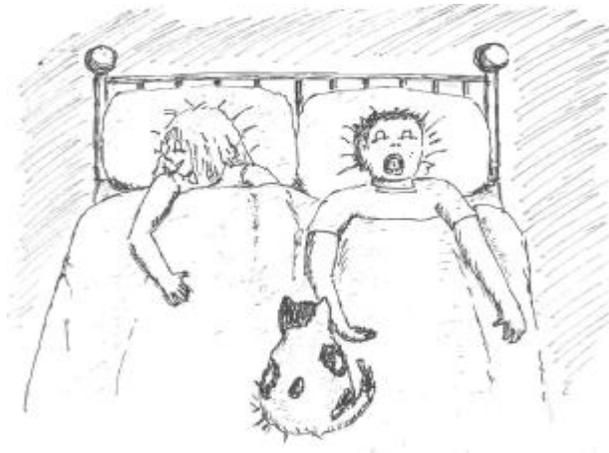
Boots had prepared for a night's activity with an afternoon's intense inactivity. He had carefully selected a quiet, sunny corner of the lawn and slept an unworried, peaceful sleep. Unworried by Mortgages or M.O.T's or V.A.T, a really peaceful sleep.

The time was drawing near for a discreet reccy of the target area, the battle ground, the scene of his impending victory. He was confident of success, as usual, mice versus cats, no competition.

The moon shone brightly but there was a low lying mist swirling, menacingly, around. It was a great night for his mission and he was the cat for the task.

The bowling green wasn't strictly speaking part of the castle and therefore not really Boots' responsibility but it was inside the old castle walls and no other cat could claim it as his territory, so he was accepting liability.

He was on his way now. First he crept, ever so quietly, up stairs to make sure all was well. They were both sound asleep (sound being the operative word where Richard was concerned).



Out of the warmth of the kitchen, through his flap, head only at first, he scanned all around to make sure no surprises awaited him. Into the cold, Blue-Black, night air of the garden. Quietly through the bushes and into the castle grounds proper, his patch. Quickly, down the pathway to the Iron Gate near the High street. No gate was ever a barrier to a cat, especially not this one, The gate or the cat.

Now past the door of the museum and under the huge, dark archway of the Gatehouse and along Castle Precinct. The mist cloaked his movements as he crept along, keeping low and close to the ground, merging with his surroundings.

He was now just the wrong side of the wall and with one bound he was on top of it. From here, the mist, hovering inches over The Green, made it look more like a lake.

For a split second, Boots thought about leaving the Mice to their own devices but only for a moment. No cat could allow this travesty to take place and he wasn't just any cat, he was the "The Castle Cat", the "65th Cat of Lewes" and he was sure none of the other sixty-four would have.

Cats aren't scared of water, cats aren't scared of anything, they just dislike it with an intensity which, a mere person, would not be able to comprehend.

To give you an idea of how much they dislike it, try taking, the dislike women have for, men's opinions on their driving and multiply that by, the dislike men have for, shopping for a pair of shoes that are comfortable, elegant, don't make my legs look too fat and will go with the outfit I've got for our Emma's wedding. Now add that to, the dislike an average six year old boy has for bath time and throw in, the dislike a teenager has for getting up in the morning on a school day and you are getting somewhere close. Only close though!

He dived down through the layer of mist and stayed close to the wall, so close he fitted in the mortar cracks and seemed to become one of the stones.

He edged nearer and nearer to the pavilion but very slowly and even more quietly, nearer and nearer.

From the building came a very faint, almost indiscernible sound but Boots recognized it immediately, an almost inaudible scratching and squeaking, definitely MI CE!

He was right outside, now he faced a dilemma, how to get a look inside, without his presence being revealed?

He scouted around and found that outside one window there was a bench which would enable him to climb up to the window sill and not jump but he would still have to be careful not to startle them, if he was to ascertain the full scale of the problem.

Carefully he climbed, he made no sound at all, quiet as a.... (no, that is unthinkable).

The window was old and discoloured and needed cleaning but even through the film, he could see inside.

He wasn't shocked at what he saw because cats are unable to be shocked, that would be undignified. They can be taken unawares or even surprised but this could never be mistaken for shock, most certainly not.

So Boots was not shocked by what he saw. He saw, large mice and small mice, single mice and married mice, young mice and old mice, every conceivable type of mice, very definitely more than enough mice. More than enough, he thought, for even a Castle Cat to deal with on his own.

"I may need a little help here", he confessed.

( Chapter Three )

The Sun stretched, yawned, threw back the covers and started it's long journey, across the East Sussex sky. It lit up the lush green grass and ancient woodlands of the South Downs and glistened on the ripples of a calm, English Channel, like a huge tray of diamonds, which would have been the pride and joy of, any of the jewellers in the Brighton Lanes, nearby.

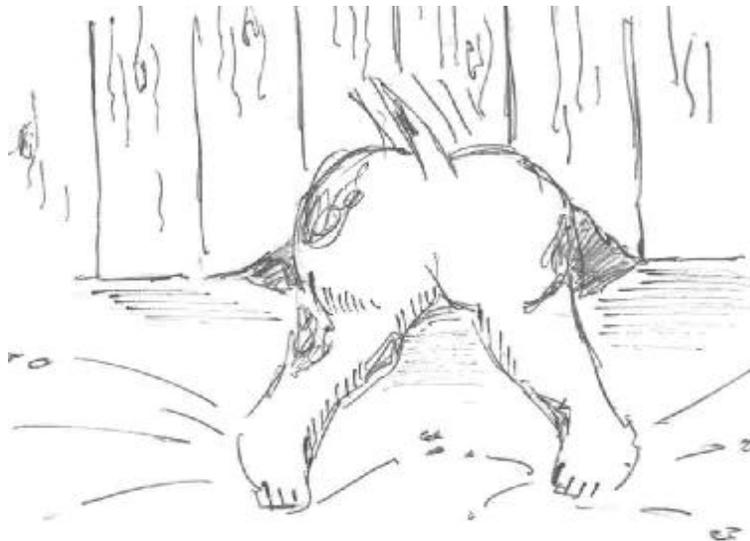
In a farm yard, just outside of town, it woke up a rooster. He too, stretched and yawned. He also threw back the covers and performed his first task of the day.

Filling his lungs with air, he let out a long, loud , Cock-a-doodle-do, for all that he was worth but if it was for Boots' sake, he might just as well have had a good lie-in. This cat was going nowhere until long after most people had forgotten their breakfasts.

FREEDOM! Yahoo! The Great Outside!

The last few grains of dirt that stood between a young Jack Russell Terrier and Adventure had fallen. The hole near the back garden gate was now just large enough for him to squeeze through and nothing was going to stop him.

No lead, no walker just adventure.  
Now, which way?



Last night, was last night. This morning Boots had to come up with a plan. What he had to do was obvious; he needed a quiet spot in the sunshine, to think through his options. He had already made his selection and headed straight there, having finished his breakfast, naturally.

It was the perfect place. He could do his thinking and fulfil his daily chore of observing the public. He stretched himself out on a ledge overlooking the main path and settled down for a nice long think.

Toby hadn't realized just how many lamp posts there were in the High Street before, or how many dogs visited them. This was wonderful; his nose was almost worn out from all this discovery.

His walker, Frank, normally took him to the park where, he could run as much as he liked and find Frank's stick, as many times as he lost it.

Frank did seem to lose it quite a lot; it just seemed to fly out of his hand, several times a day. Toby suspected that there might be a problem with the stick or with Frank's hand but it didn't matter; he could always find it again.

Now he was out on his own, he could go where adventure took him and it had taken him to the High Street.

He seemed to be invisible though. Not one person had bent down and stroked him yet and he was more than a little disappointed that nobody had asked him what he was doing there.

Wasn't anyone interested in his adventure? He knew he couldn't tell them, they never seemed to understand what he was saying but he still wanted them to be interested.

Suddenly he was missing attention. "Adventure is not all they make it out to be", He thought.

He found himself at the castle.

"Ahh"! He thought, "There's someone who might be interested in my escapades".

Boots had really tried to think but the Sun was warm and the ledge, remarkably comfortable. He hadn't come up with a single idea yet and now, there was a Jack Russell missile incoming. Just what he needed!

"Hi, my name's Toby, what's yours? You're a cat aren't you? Do you live here? I'm on an adventure! My walker's name is Frank, What's yours"?

Boots' natural instinct was to ignore this sort of intrusion but an idea was beginning to form in his, not yet, fully functioning head.

It would not be easy to find an ally amongst the cats of the town. Cats aren't team players (you will never see a cat competing in a, synchronized swimming, event) and he couldn't think of, even, one that he liked. The Butcher's cat was spoiled, the Mayor's cat thought he ran the town (preposterous idea), the Flea Market cat goes without explanation and the list went on and on.

Maybe, just maybe he could use this opportunity to his advantage. Dogs are gullible and this one seemed exceptionally so. Boots' day was looking up.

"Walker? What are you talking about little dog"?

"You know, the person you play with, or go to the park with,  
You know"!

"I am afraid I have no idea what you are talking about, but never mind".

"Do you need someone to play with, do you, do you"?

"Do you know something little dog, maybe I do".

"Call me Toby, call me Toby"!

"Alright, and my name is Boots but you can call me Sir".

Boots decided to start as he meant to go on.

At this moment in time, Wiggy had found a way up to the highest window in the church and was sunning himself through the filter of a pane of glass which hadn't been cleaned since the end of the war (which war is uncertain). He had a good view of parts of the castle and was bemused by the sight of a small dog, bouncing around in front of a cat and yapping.

What he couldn't understand was, the cat appeared to be accepting it.

Most strange!

As he had nothing better to do, he continued to watch and enjoy the sunshine.



"I know a game we can play".

"Yes Sir, Yes Sir"?

"But not right now. Can you come back after dark"?

"I think so Sir. I will certainly try".

"Good, good. Meet me here later when the Sun has gone down and I will show you a great new game".

"Oh thank you. I had better get back now though, I am sure my walker will be missing me".

"Alright, you may be dismissed".

"Bye, see you later".

Boots wasn't sure if this was such a good idea. Could he cope with the enthusiasm of a young Jack Russell Terrier? He was pretty worn out just thinking about it. Maybe there was another way? Boots couldn't think of one at this point in time. "Oh well, I suppose it could be worse", He thought, but he was struggling to think how.

Toby scurried under the fence and sat by the back door just as it opened. "Come on boy", Frank called, as he stepped out into the garden, holding Toby's collar and lead. As he placed the collar around Toby's neck, he thought that he was rather warm but instantly put it out of his mind.

When they were in the park Frank thought Toby was a little quieter than usual but he wasn't concerned. He gave his little friend a few more hugs than other days in case he was a feeling under the weather.

"Oh he really missed me", Toby thought, and felt all warm inside.

Wiggy woke up from a cat nap and realised the strange couple had departed. He did that stretch that only a cat can do and wandered downstairs to see if he could catch a bite to eat.

( Chapter Four )

The day rolled on from morning into afternoon and ,oh! How it was dragging for Toby. If he knew what a clock was, he would have been watching one and it would have appeared not to be moving. He fidgeted about, he kept running to the window, hoping it would be dark this time. It wasn't. He just couldn't wait for this, particular, night.

Boots' words kept running through his head and bouncing off the walls of his brain, like a battery powered hamster, " Meet me here later when the Sun has gone down and I will show you a great new game".

A great new game, a great new game, he just couldn't wait.

Boots wanted to keep up on current events and decided that a good venue for that, had turned out to be, under the kitchen table.

"Richard, I was thinking", Said Charlotte, thoughtfully.

"I hear warning bells".

"Oh don't please? I just thought that it might be quite nice to invite the new Vicar around for a meal".

"I knew it, I knew it".

"What's so bad about that"? asked Billy.

"Oh, You know. I will have to get all spruced up and stuff".

"And it's not even his birthday".

"Huh"? Billy was lost again.

"Look", Charlotte put on her best, I really do need a new pair of shoes and it's not just that I've seen some in the window that are calling my name, look, "He's all alone in that great big vicarage, no family or friends around here".

"Alright, alright. I know when I'm beaten but can we have something I like"?

"Of course. I'm sure I can find something that you, the Vicar and Uncle Frank, all like".

"Hey what? How did Uncle Frank get in there"?

"Oh come on, he is not that big and we haven't seen him for ages, even though he only lives down the road".

"Ok, ok, and Uncle Frank".

"Thank you darling. I'll ring them both this afternoon".

"It's alright", Said Billy, airily, "I don't think I can make it".

"That's good", replied Richard, "You weren't invited".

They both got up and left the kitchen, Billy thumping Richard and Richard thumping him back.

“Frank”? thought Boots, “That name sounds familiar”.

The sound of scraping chairs in the church hall, indicated the commencement of a meeting of the Mothers Union committee.

Wiggy had decided to attend, not because he was interested in flower arranging, cake baking or even charity work but because he felt it only right and proper for at least one of the clergy team to be present.

He also liked to be accessible to the congregation, especially the ladies, as they were most likely to call him cute and scratch behind his ear.

Oh how he loved to be scratched behind the ear!

He wasn't to be disappointed.

Boots relaxed in the Sun and planned.

Wiggy weaved himself around legs and got stroked occasionally.

Toby ran backwards and forwards to the window as if he were attached to it by elastic.

The Sun got bored, checked his watch and clocked off for the day.

The town wound down in the same old way and darkness checked in.

Toby got even more excited but also quite anxious. Until now he hadn't thought about how he was going to get out. He and Frank were both in the sitting room and the great new game was somewhere outside. He was starting to panic.

Frank saw him fidgeting and also got a little anxious. He thought it was a sign that a call of nature was imminent.

“Come on Little'un I think you need a trip to the garden”.

He was used to Toby's turn of speed but this time he was just a blur. Frank had only opened the door a crack and the little dog squeezed through it like he was liquid.

Frank went back to his chair in front of the telly, Toby went through the hole under the fence.

Daniel sat in the study trying to write this week's sermon. Wiggy made it difficult.

When Boots got to the set rendezvous point, Toby was already waiting.

"What's the game, where is it, how do we play it"? The little dog yapped excitedly.

"Calm down". Replied Boots with authority, "All will be revealed".

"I can't wait, I can't wait".

"I realize that but all in good time, it never does to rush these things".

"Please, please"?

"We will start our adventure now".

"Adventure"? "I knew it, I knew it".

"Now be very quiet and follow me".

That was a bit like asking an explosion, not to leave a mess, but Toby was trying. He didn't want to ruin the game.

Boots lead him through the gate, along the path under the archway and down towards the bowling green.

When they got there Boots became aware of the first flaw in his plan.

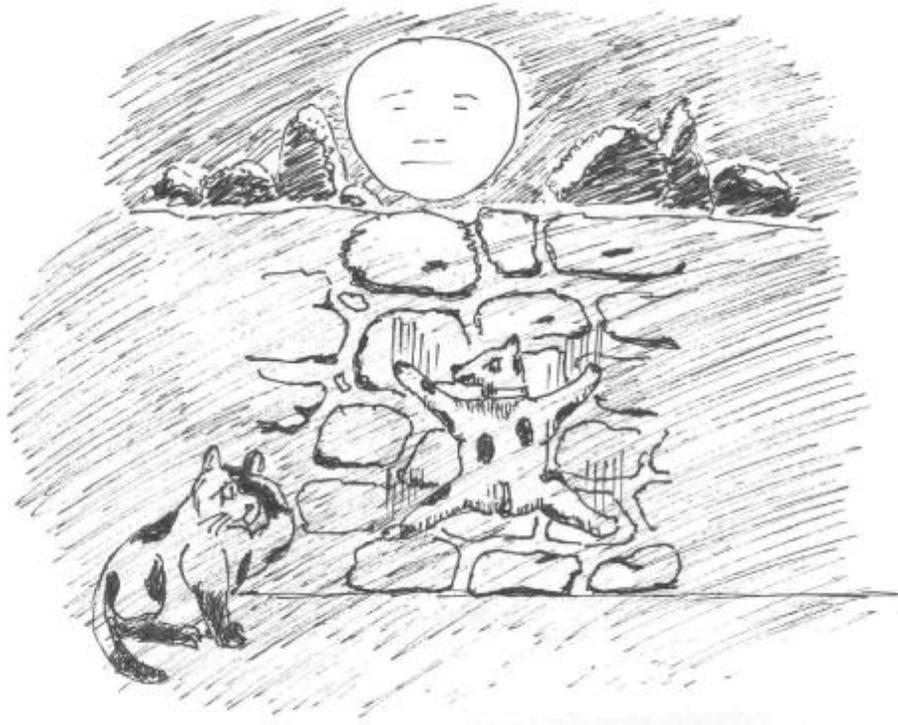
"We have to jump up on this wall", he whispered.

Toby could not be called unwilling but dogs and cats possess very different skills in this department.

He took a good run at it but was unable to make better than half way up.

He tried climbing it but dogs are lacking a bit here too.

Boots watched in disbelief with one paw on his forehead.



They started looking for another way in. Here dogs might even have the advantage, although no cat would admit it.

Toby found a hole in the wall big enough for him, so it was no problem for Boots. His problem was stopping Toby from rushing off straight across the lawn.

Having got his attention, he explained the next phase of his plan. It wasn't a complicated plan.

The idea was for them to take one side of the pavilion each and make as much noise as possible at a window, thereby scaring the mice inside, into running for the hills.

Straight forward, simple, foolproof.

They made their way towards the target as quietly as they could. Quiet isn't an easy concept for a Jack Russell.

Boots assigned Toby's position and clarified his duties.

"Do you understand exactly what we are doing"?

"Yes Sir"!

"You're sure now"?

"Yes Sir quite sure".

Boots made his way slowly and quietly to his side of the building and carefully climbed the bench.

Toby stood with his tail touching the wall of the pavilion, judged his run up and paced it out. He turned around and crouched down, patiently awaiting the signal to pounce.

The tension grew as the two animals lurked in the darkness, Boots judging the perfect moment and Toby wound up like a clockwork toy, begging for the signal to come.

Boots made the decision, took a deep breath and started hissing and screeching as loud as he could, at the window. He wailed, he pulled faces, he screeched some more.

Toby ran at the wall, jumped and started barking as loud as he could too. He jumped for all he was worth, he barked even harder than that.

Nothing! No panic, not a sausage!

Boots couldn't understand this at all. He ran around to the other side to see if Toby was performing his task properly. He was.

Toby thought this was all part of the game and ran to the opposite side too. He climbed up on the bench and started barking again, barking and jumping and thoroughly enjoying himself.

Boots thought, "Oh what the heck". He jumped up onto the window sill and started hissing and screeching, on this side now. He puffed himself up in an attempt to make a bigger impression on the situation.

Still nothing!

The mice seemed disinterested, even amused.



Flaw number two, in boots plan was this:-

These mice had established homes here. They had established community. Some had established businesses, American Hand Car Washes, Internet Cafés, Sun bed Tanning Centres and one had even set up an office selling time shares, nice little villas and luxury apartments in places like, Miceland and Mousetique.

These mice weren't going to be seen off easily .

Mission failed!

( Chapter Five )

Boots crept away dejected, a cat beaten, his tail tucked between his legs, or at least that is what you would expect but, in fact you couldn't be more wrong.

This is a cat we are talking about and a castle cat at that!  
He actually strutted away across the grass, head held high.

He knew of course that the plan had not worked but that was not his fault. It might have been Toby's fault (perhaps he should have used a Doberman or Rottweiler), it might have been the fault of the bowling people, for making the mice too welcome but it was definitely not his fault. It could not possibly be his fault, not in a million years!

Toby ran around him yapping excitedly. He didn't know that the plan had failed because he didn't know what they were trying to achieve. Boots hadn't felt it necessary to divulge that much information. Not to a dog!

"That was fun, can we do it again? Huh, can we, can we"?

He was the ultimate optimistic, enthusiasm machine in action. Boots wasn't.

" No"! He replied, curtly.

Toby wasn't that easily put off.

"What about another game then"?

"Not now. I have to think".

Boots had to come up with a better scheme but one a night was enough.

"I will talk to you tomorrow", he said through gritted teeth.

"Oh ok, I'll see you tomorrow then. I had better get back, Frank will be fretting about me", Toby called as he ran off into the darkness.

Boots didn't reply he just marched back home indignantly.

Toby ran home as fast as his little legs would carry him. He would have worried about what Frank would be thinking but he was just too excited.

What an adventure, and there would be more to come with his new best friend.

Frank's elbow slipped off the arm of the chair and he woke up with a start! There was a film on the telly, with subtitles and he knew that wasn't what he'd been watching. He suddenly remembered Toby. "Poor little thing", he thought, "He will be freezing to death out there".

He went to the back door and opened it.

There was Toby sitting on the step, head cocked over to one side, tail wagging.

"Sorry little fella", Said Frank as if begging for forgiveness, "Come inside quick", he said picking him up, "We'll get you warmed up in no time".

Frank was surprised again, to find that Toby was really warm. He was also a little concerned.

Toby didn't understand what was going on but thought it was all fantastic. Life couldn't get any better than this.

The Sun woke up another 'Cinque Port' summers day and nudged the town into life.

Boats bobbed in the river down by the 'Quay', trains rattled into the station and deposited their occupants onto the station platforms, cars either jammed the High Street or whizzed past on the bypass, heading for Brighton or Eastbourne.

The shops and tourist attractions soon filled up with customers, looking for goods, or to be educated.

Wiggy liked his new home. It was more interesting than his previous one, on a Midlands council estate.

There was much more activity here in the heart of the town, as they were.

Of course that didn't mean to say that he had to be more active. He always saw his role as more supervisory than participatory.

This morning he was supervising the passing traffic, both on foot and vehicular. If any person were to enter through the doorway he was sitting in, it was his sworn duty to welcome them in the true cat tradition, by rubbing his body around their legs.

The appropriate response should be a stroke along the back or a scratch between the ears but naturally, not all people are familiar with cat etiquette.

He was amused by the sight of a small dog dragging along a small person.

“Morning Vicar”.

“Good morning”.

Wiggy’s head spun round. Daniel had walked up behind him and he hadn’t even noticed.

“Hello my name is Toby, What’s yours? That’s Frank, he’s my walker, What’s yours called? Huh, huh?”

Wiggy’s head spun round again. He’d been Tobyed.



In the best traditions of nobility, Boots arose fashionably late, took a light breakfast (well lightish) and headed out for his morning constitutional.

Instead of settling down in the garden, he decided to take a stroll over to the Bowling Green and assess the situation from a safe position.

He found a likely spot on the wall, in the sunshine and made himself comfortable.

He thought and dozed and dozed and thought but no brainwave was crashing on the beach of his mind. One eye opened, almost in slow motion, at the sound of the iron gate creaking open and at the far end of the green a figure appeared.

Boots thought he looked like a garden gnome hunched over his

wheelbarrow full of rakes and hoes and things. He shuffled across the grass, fighting to keep the barrow upright and level and once or twice losing the fight. He reached the end of this arduous trek at the pavilion and as he plonked the barrow down, most of the tools tumbled out in a heap on the grass. With one hand he removed his hat and fanned his face, then with the other hand, he reached deep into the pocket of his dungarees, retrieved a crumpled piece of cloth that had once been a Christmas present from his Auntie Madge, and mopped his brow with it. He sat on the bench by the window and thought:-

“He was a man alone, a man on a mission, a mission to clean up this place. Nothing could stand in his way. He had been trained in the deadly skills at a secret government installation, deep in the Sussex countryside. He was equipped with the latest weaponry man could muster. His country would be proud of him. His name was.....BILLY, ...THE WEED EXTERMINATOR!!!”

He set about his mission.

Boots, sort of, half watched, disinterestedly, as Billy potted about, digging up weeds and filling in holes etc. etc. etc.

It had not rained in two or three weeks now and the grass would have been brown and worn looking, if not for the liberal use of the most powerful weapon in Billy's arsenal, the sprinkler.

He placed it strategically in an area which was most in need, connected the hose to the cold water tap and watched with pleasure as the life giving fountain poured out it's refreshment on his precious lawn.

At this point, the clouds retreated and the Sun reappeared in the vastness of Boots mind. Everything was clear. He knew what to do now and all was well in the land.

He stood up, did that stretch and leaped off the wall. He was a cat with a plan.

Billy saw him stand up and threw a weed with a clump of turf attached, in that general direction.

Huh! He 'd scared the mangy cat off. Nothing could stand in his way.

( Chapter Six )

Daniel pulled on his denim jacket and checked himself in the mirror. He ran his hand through the untamed outcrop that he called hair (he only used a comb on Sunday's or for formal occasions, Weddings, funerals, visiting his mother etc.) and started the ritual search for his keys.

"You haven't seen my"?

"Key's have you"? Thought Wiggy, as Daniel said the words.

Of course he had. He knew exactly where they were, he always did but he wasn't going to tell him though, this cat was not about to upset the equilibrium.

The search continued, behind the cushions on the sofa, under the pile of paperwork, not yet attended to, under all the pieces of furniture, in the pockets of the jackets and coats in the hall cupboard, in every vase that did not contain flowers, all the obvious places.

Wiggy let out a massive sigh as, at last, Daniel looked on the key hook in the kitchen.

"What idiot put them there"? Asked Daniel apparently oblivious to the fact that he was the only person living in the house at the time.

"Now, I won't be back too late, behave yourself. See you later", said Daniel closing the door behind him.

"You really ought to get out more", thought Wiggy settling down in the most comfortable chair.

"Do I have to"?

"Yes Richard, you do"!

"But".

"No buts. Oh come on! We never entertain".

"I know but a tie? Why do I have to wear a tie"?

"Because I asked nicely and it is worth a big kiss".

"Ought to be more than that", he muttered under his breath and more than a bit huffily.

"Pardon"?

"Nothing"! "much", he added under his breath again.

"Come on, hurry yourself now, they'll be here any minute".

"I'm going as fast as I can", he lied.

The door bell chimed and fortunately Charlotte was ready (as always). She rushed down to answer the door and was amused as much as

surprised to see her new vicar in such attire. She smiled Sweetly  
Richard arrived at the door behind her, huffed loudly and went in to the living room without saying another word.

"Hello vicar"

"Hi, please call me Daniel or Dan anything really except vicar".

"Sorry".

"No, that's quite alright. Have I done something to upset your husband"?

"Oh Richard? No, he is just sulking. I'll explain over dinner".

"That sounds good".

"Come in please and make yourself at home".

Charlotte showed him into the living room just as the door bell chimed again.

"Oh hello little fellow. We meet again", said Daniel as Toby jumped up at him.

"Get down Toby", shouted Frank in vain. "I hope you don't mind me bringing him"? he asked apologetically, "He's been acting a little strange recently and I didn't want to leave him on his own. I'm not sure if he might be coming down with something".

Of course Charlotte didn't mind. Richard said nothing, he was still sulking.

The three men were left to chat while Charlotte made the final preparations. She was enjoying this.

"What team do you support Richard"?

Daniel used the classic ice breaker.

"The Seagulls naturally, but I'm more interested in classic motor bikes actually".

"Really? My Dad had a Squariel when I was growing up, with a double adult sidecar. We went everywhere in it".

Charlotte was listening from the kitchen "That's it", she thought, "He's made a friend for life there".

They were still talking about 'push rods' and 'swinging arm suspension' when she called them to the table.

Boots sidled into the kitchen nonchalantly and was quite taken aback, not only to see the group eating and socialising at the table but also his partner in crime, as it were, crouched under one of the chairs.

He gestured to Toby to follow him into the hallway.

"I've got a new plan". He plunged straight in.

"A new game, a new game"? Bubbled Toby

"Quiet! We don't want them to know about it".

"Oh no, no. We don't want them to know about it"!

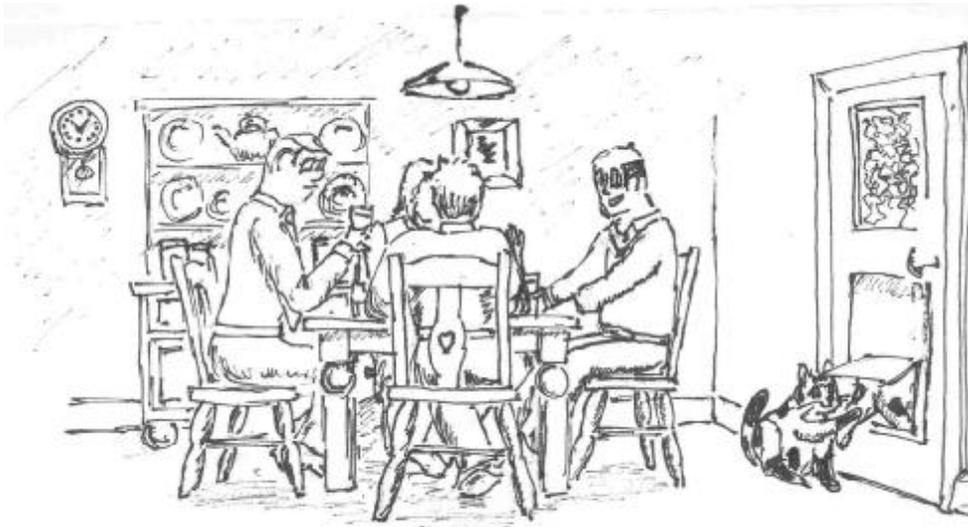
"Right, do you think you could get out through my flap"?

"I think so".

"Ok lets try".

Toby went first and made it through ok. Boots followed.

None of the dinner party even noticed either their presence, or absence.



The garden had blended into a sky filled with stars and the two small creatures were silhouetted by a moon, so big, it could hardly fit in your eyes. A few small fluffy clouds, tried their best to hide it but it was a fruitless task.

"What are we going to do sir"? Enquired Toby trying but failing, to hide his enthusiasm.

"We are going over to the bowling green".

"What are we going to do there"?

"Just wait and see. Follow me".

Toby had real big problems with this waiting thing. Some dogs, 'Border Collies', 'Labradors' and the like, don't seem to mind waiting for, what would seem to Toby, an eternity. He, however, got bored in the time it takes for a cat flap to shut.

All the way from the garden to the green he kept pestering Boots like a child on a trip to the seaside and Boot's patience was being stretched like Toby's lead.

They were both extremely relieved when they reached the hole in the wall but for very different reasons.

They crept quietly around the green.

"What are we looking for"? asked Toby

"Shush! The water spray thingy",

"Water spray thingy"?

"It goes around like a wheel and throws water out all over the place".

"I can do that! Every time I go in the stream, I come out all soaking wet, then I shake as hard as I can and the water goes all over the floor, all over Frank, all over every where".

"Will you be quiet"?

"Sorry sir".

"Now start looking. It's got a hose pipe attached to it".

"There it is", yapped Toby, scurrying off into the darkness and he was right.

Boots wondered how he could do that.

With all his magic powers, Boots couldn't do it.

There was no doubt he had been granted magic powers, of this he was sure. He could jump from any height and would always land on his feet, ready for action. He could see in the dark much better than people. He could also squeeze through a hole that was smaller than himself, but he couldn't sense where that hose was like a mere dog. He put it down to fluke!

In the mean time, the mice were feeling quite secure in their

Fortress. They knew exactly what had happened last night and tonight they were celebrating.

Victory banners had been raised with slogans like:- 'MICE ONE' and 'SAFE AS MUSES' (mice apparently read the tabloid papers). Tables had been laid out with all manner of food stuff.



There was, Cheddar, Cheshire, Double Gloucester, Edam, (mice aren't that imaginative) and jugs of Sacky (a kind of mice wine).

Bands were playing 'mouse' music and mice were dancing to songs like:- 'Mice Just Want To Have Fun' and 'The Mice are Back In Town'. Some of the more romantic mouse couples even smooched to 'Once, Twice, Three Times, A Field mouse'. Every one was having a marvellous time and felt even more at home and even less like moving on.

At the dinner table the four new friends were enjoying the company and the fine food.

"Are vicars allowed pets, Daniel?"

"I certainly hope so, Richard. I've got a cat and I wouldn't like to think that it made me an outlaw.

"I can't imagine you in a cowboy outfit, somehow"

"You have a fancy-dress party and we'll see"

"That's a good idea", chirped in Charlotte.

"Now look what you've done".

"What can I come as"? asked Frank.

"Hang on, hang on", panicked Richard. "We are still having this party at the moment and I don't know how I'm coping with that".

"You are such a baby. This isn't even a real party".

"Whoa. Hold it you two. I didn't want to start a fight".

"Look he's starting to get in character already", observed Charlotte.

"I would like to be a 'pirate', with a hook and everything", added Frank, wistfully.

"Oh I give up. You lot are ganging up on me".

"That gives me an idea. You could come as a 'school boy'. With a catapult and things".

"I might just aim it at you when your not looking".

"Such a baby"!



All this merriment meant, that no one was taking any notice of the dastardly duo in the midst of their espionage mission.

Toby had found the sprinkler and was standing over it.

"Is this it, is this it"?

"Yes. Be quiet". Boots was still asking the impossible. You would think that he would start to get the picture by now, being a cat and all.

"What are we going to do with it, sir"?

"Can you drag the middle of the hose over towards the hut"?

"Of course I can"!

"Then do it"! ordered Boots, "Immediately"!

Toby was absolutely confident but not ready for the task. The hose was a lot heavier than it looked but he was not to be outdone. He bravely struggled with it and eventually got it to the place Boots lead him to.

"Now little dog".

"Toby, Toby"!

"Ok, Now Toby! Can you bite a hole in it"?

" Easy". His confidence was back.

"Well, go on then".

Toby didn't need asking a second time. This was something he was good at. He had lots of experience, to Frank's exasperation.

He snarled as he bit and chewed at the hose. It was bit like a Kung Fu expert making all those noises as they kick or punch. It obviously works for them and it did for Toby. He had made very short work of completely ruining Billy's pride and joy.

"Now", said Boots, "We need to bend it and push this bit through that small hole down there".

He pointed with his paw to a hole in the pavilion wall, at ground level. Toby made short work of that too. He soon had the hose in place, to Boots satisfaction.

"Now we have to put the spinning thing in just the right place".

Boots searched around for a patch of lawn which was in need of watering and which could be easily reached by the length of hose sticking out from the hole.

He found the perfect spot and directed Toby towards it. The little dog dragged the sprinkler into the centre of it.

"Now what do we do"?

"We go home".

"What"?

"We go home"!

And they did.

(Chapter Seven )

"So! Daniel. You were never married then"?

"Not even close, Charlotte. The longest relationship I ever had with a girl only lasted as far as the foyer of the cinema. It seems she was looking forward to seeing 'True Love Never Dies' and I had just bought two tickets to see 'It Crawled Out Of The Swamp'. Not exactly a match made in Heaven".

"More of a lighter made in Taiwan", quipped Richard.

"Oh, how sweet! How old were you Daniel, thirteen, fourteen"?

"Twenty-seven actually".

"Sounds like you have as much trouble with women as I do".

"You'll regret that Richard"! commented Charlotte, sort of smiling.

"I already do", he replied looking down at the table sheepishly.

"What about you Frank"? Quizzed Daniel, "Were you ever married"?

"Oh yes! Forty-six years to my Betty".

"Lovely Auntie Betty", sighed Charlotte, "Do you miss her very much"?

"Yes every day but I have Toby here to keep me company now", said Frank reaching down under his chair and stroking the little dog on the head.

None of them had noticed him leave and he had just that moment successfully returned, without them realising either.

Neither did Frank notice that he was warm again from his activity.

"This has been a lovely evening", he said, "But I think it is time we were leaving".

"Frank's right", agreed Daniel, "But I'll stay and help with the pot's though".

"You'll do no such thing", Stated Charlotte firmly.

"Ohhh, Why not"? Whined Richard, "Go on let him".

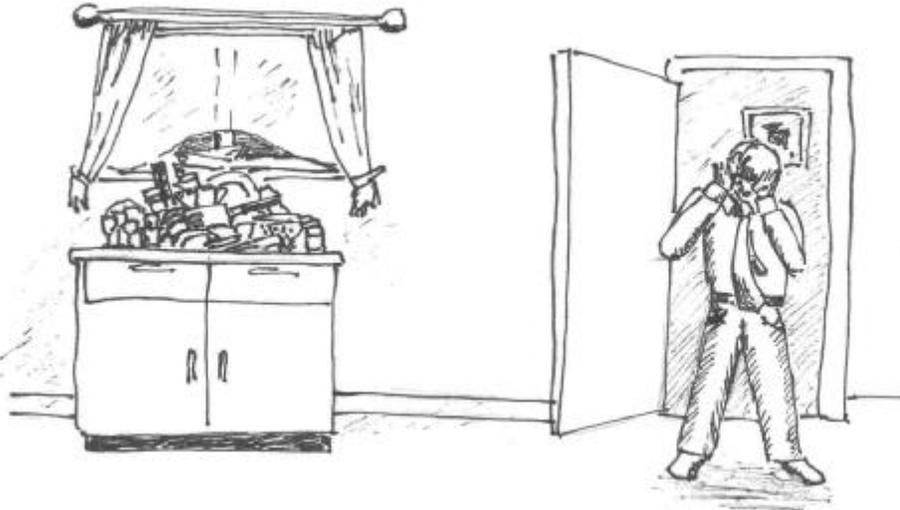
"Richard"!

"Ok,ok,ok". He climbed down quickly, knowing what was good for him.

They showed their guests to the front door and wished them well.

"Stupid tie, stupid pots", sulked Richard as he slouched into the kitchen, and he was sure the cat was smirking at him as well.

“Richard, you are not going to sulk all night, are you?”  
“Might”! he replied sullenly  
“I might have a little surprise for you”, said Charlotte coyly  
“I hope it’s a Hot Chocolate with mini marshmallows”, He  
thought to himself.



Richard was right about Boots, he was smirking at him.

All the time he had been putting his plan into action, they hadn’t noticed a thing. People could be so unobservant most of the time.

He knew a cat would have been aware of everything that had gone on. Is it any wonder then, that cats are put in charge of important things like castles?

People just can’t be trusted with responsibilities like that.

In one movement, Daniel walked through the lounge door, slipped off his jacket and hung it over the back of a dining chair.

“Hi Wiggy, that was fun. Shame you couldn’t go really. There was another cat there and a little dog. I am sure you would have made friends. They are nice people. Richard and Charlotte I mean not the cat and dog, although I am sure they are nice too.

The food was good and we had wine. They have good taste in music. It was all really nice and they might have a fancy dress party soon.

Anyway I am off to bed. Goodnight, I'll see you in the morning".

Wiggy greeted all this in a very cat fashion, he opened one eye momentarily and then went back to sleep.

Just a few hours later, dawn broke gently over the county town.

The Sun rose slowly into another cloudless sky, looked down and smiled.

He didn't realise it of course but he was smiling on Boots.

This was just what Boots was praying for. He would have been distraught if he had woken up to a downpour. That would have ruined everything but he was awake early this morning and smiling back at the Sun.

He took a casual stroll over to the Bowling Green and looked for his spot on the wall. He soon found it and settled down for the show.

"Ah at last Green! Quickly, I have something to show you".

The professor beckoned him over to the laboratory bench.

They were in a room the size of a football pitch and although it was at least one hundred meters below ground, it was as bright as day. All around were people in white coats, working in small groups at computer displays, or looking through microscopes, or twiddling around with odd looking devices. There were strange humming and wiring noises going on from unseen sources and the odd crackle and flash. Suddenly a laser beam went off, hitting the ceiling, leaving a burn mark and a pall of smoke. A voice called out, "Awfully sorry"! and everybody got back on with their work as if this sort of thing happened all the time.

"I think you will like this Green, we have been working on it day and night, perfecting the latest weapon for your fight against tyranny.

It come with infra red night sights, micro digital explosive detecting circuits, high sensitivity close proximity sensors and aerospace grade titanium tips, capable of injecting a toxin with no antidote known to man. Be careful with it Green, it is the only one in existence".

The professor's beautiful raven haired, lab assistant flicked Green a coy smile as she picked up the weapon of mass destruction and handed it to him.

Billy took the rake and with great care, added it to the other weapons in his top secret wheelbarrow.

He exited the gardening shed, checking thoroughly, that he was not under surveillance.

“Here comes the gnome”, thought Boots as the gate creaked open and Billy shuffled through, fighting to control the wheelbarrow all the time. He steered it across the almost glass smooth lawn as if it were a ploughed field and eventually plonked it down outside the pavilion, in the usual manner. He stood next to it surveying his territory. Something unusual caught his eye and deeply perturbed him.

He was sure he had put the sprinkler away yesterday but assumed someone else had been using it, without his authorisation.

He didn't notice the pipe going into the hole, he just saw that the patch of grass where the sprinkler was, needed watering.

Of course he had to reposition it, as no one could be allowed to do that on his behalf (they just didn't have the experience or the expertise). To Boots' relief, he still didn't notice the pipe's route. He just went over to the tap, connected the hose up and turned it on full.

Boots struggled and strained to conceal his laughter, as he watched Billy walk over to the water head and stare down in disbelief at the trickle coming out of it.



He struggled even more as, Billy noticed where the hose was detoured and ran over to the pavilion. He pulled hard at it but at first it wouldn't budge. He sat on the floor with his feet against the wall, either side of the hole and pulled again. He tugged at it like he was in a tug 'o' war until it suddenly came out in a rush. A fountain shot out into the air and landed directly on the defenceless super hero, drenching him through to the skin.

Boots quickly ran over to the pavilion and leaped up onto the back window sill for a look.

He couldn't believe his eyes.

He saw mice in swimsuits lounging on sun beds or swimming, some doing 'breast stroke', some doing 'back stroke', some had got rubber dinghies. There was a game of water-polo going on with a real peppermint, one had even set up a makeshift mice cream stall and was making a tidy profit on '11's' (like a '99' but mouse sized) and mice lollies. They had parasols, they had air beds, pedalos, buckets and spades, all they could possibly want and more.



He was annoyed but also begrudgingly impressed by their entrepreneurial skills.

Mission failed!!

( Chapter Eight )

Boots retreated to the castle garden in a bemused state of mind.

Another plan had failed and he could not understand how. These were mere mice he was dealing with and he was one of the chosen kind. This should not be happening. Someone, somewhere, was letting him down and time was running out now too. He needed plan 'C' and he needed it quickly. "Time to sunbathe and meditate on the entrance path", he thought.

He thought about the fact that, the presence of a guardian cat in a castle made the people behave themselves. He had observed that as a general rule, when they saw him on duty, they kept to the path, put litter in the bins and were not too noisy. This was very different to the way they were in the 'High Street', outside.

The respect that they showed him was quite humbling really. The question was :- Why did the mice not realise who they were dealing with? They were obviously badly informed or stupid.

Daniel bounded up the path towards the house. He was wearing his official garb and was carrying a box of chocolates and a bottle of "Old Gribthorpe's Belly Trembler".

"Good morning cat", He called as he passed Boots' and on he rushed up to the front door. He whistled a tune which Boots didn't recognise, as he rang the door bell and then leaned against the door frame, waiting for the door to be opened.

"Oh hi Daniel", said Charlotte with surprise in her voice, "Richard, Daniel is here".

Richard appeared behind her in the passageway, "Hello mate". At this point Boots' curiosity had got the better of him and he slyly sidled up to the house and hid in the flower bed.

"Look, I hope you don't mind", said Daniel, "But I got you a little something each, in way of saying thank you for the meal and everything".

"Mind", said Richard grabbing the bottle, "I should think not".

"Oh Daniel. You shouldn't have" added Charlotte.

"Huh! Why not"? said Richard with a quizzical frown.

"We are very grateful Daniel". Charlotte smiled.

"Did I get the right things"? Daniel asked hopefully.

"Oh yes"! Richard almost shouted.

"Yes Daniel, they're lovely gifts. Thank you very much"

"That's good. See you on Sunday then Charlotte"?

"Of course! I wouldn't miss it", she replied.

Daniel turned to go and then half turned back. "Richard"? he said, "I t's Harvest Festival in a couple of weeks. I f I saved you a special seat, would you come"?

"A special seat"?

"Yes, just for you".

"I n that case, yes alright I 'll come"

"Great" said Daniel as he walked off and glancing back, he added, " I'll sort that out then. Bye", and he was off at a pace.

"There goes a wise man", thought Charlotte to herself.

"Hmmm", thought Boots, and crept away back to his guard post.

"Come on boy", called Frank, fetching Toby's collar and lead off of the coat hook.

Toby came scampering in to the kitchen, tail wagging as if it were driven by a motor, and slipping on the polished floor in his excitement.

"We're off to the shops this morning lad. I need to get a present for our Charlotte, she did us proud last night".

Toby didn't mind where they were going, out is out and that is all he cared about. He liked the busy hustle and bustle of the 'High Street' anyway. Life is one big playground to a young Jack Russell Terrier.

Wiggy on the other hand, liked a bit of peace and quiet but was getting a little too much of it this morning and was going a bit stir crazy. There were no ladies discussing tactics for the next 'table sale', no singers stretching their tonsils, not even old men scratching their heads over church finances and Daniel had been gone for hours. He couldn't even seem to get comfortable in any of his favourite haunts.

He checked out all the windows but couldn't see the strange cat or the funny little dog. He felt like boredom would eat him.

"Hello Frank"

"Oh hello Vicar"

Daniel let it pass.

"That was great last night, wasn't it"?

"Yes, Toby and I enjoyed ourselves a lot. Didn't we Toby"?

Toby wasn't listening. He was looking through the castle railings at Boots running down towards them. He was mesmerised at the sight. He couldn't believe that Boots actually seemed excited to see him.

Of course he wasn't, but he was getting desperate to resolve this problem and Toby featured in his new master plan.

The two men kept on chatting, much to Boots relief, giving him time to make hasty arrangements with his young cohort.

"Alright my friend", Boots whispered through the railings, "If you can get away tonight, meet me here and we'll try a new game.

Toby just had time to reply, "Ok"! before Boots had slipped away again into the shadows like a true spy.

"He called me friend, He called me friend", Toby kept repeating to himself.

"I can't think what to get her", said Frank, as Toby turned his attention back to this side of the fence.

"Perhaps Chocolates"?

"No, I did that. Sorry"!

"Flowers then"?

"They always seem to go down well with the ladies but then, what do I know"?

"I'm not very good at this".

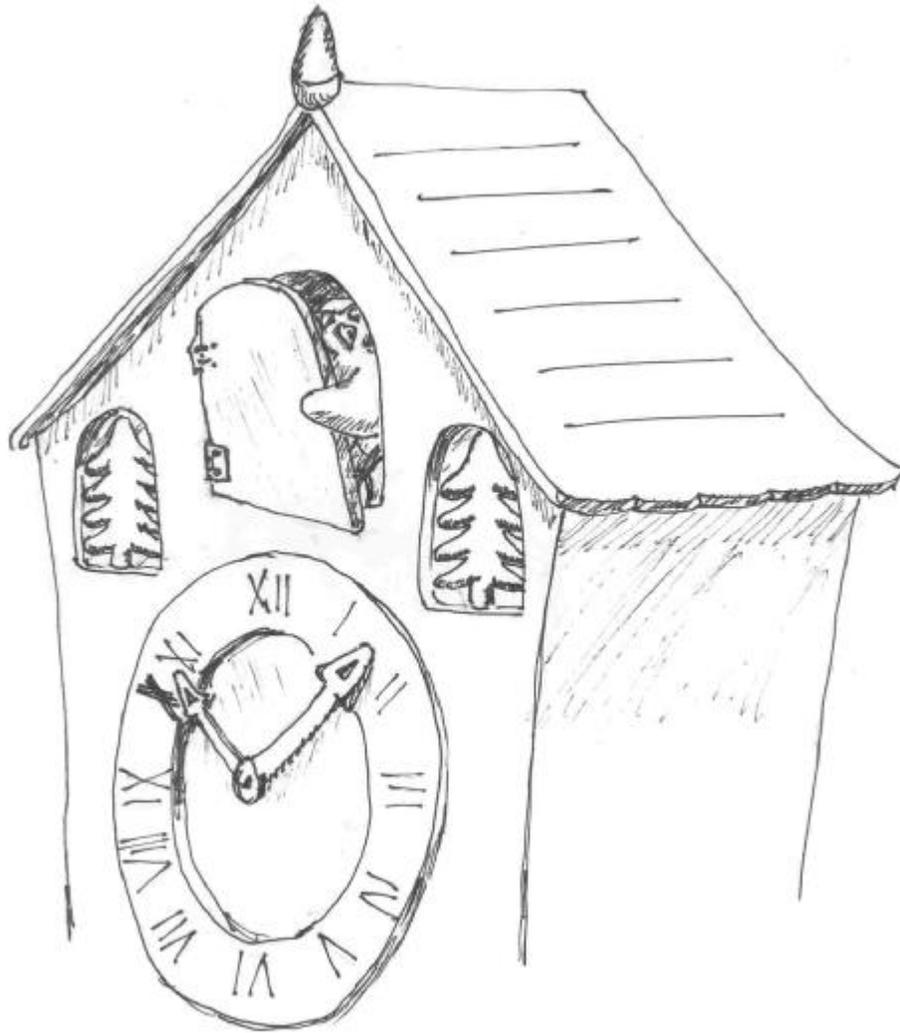
"If I am any judge of character, Charlotte will love anything you decide to give her Frank".

"Yes you're right. A copy of the 'Sporting Times' it is then".

"Maybe I can find the time to help you shop after all"!

The two men headed off towards the 'Flea Market' with Toby in tow observed by one cat, from the castle path and a second, from a church window. Both cats quite happy to be observing in comfort.

Just after lunch, Frank arrived at the house with the fruits of his search, a genuine antique battery powered cuckoo clock, made in 'ye olde' Taiwan. Charlotte was very grateful. Boots was bemused all over again. He just didn't understand people which in turn, he didn't understand, as he was of the most intelligent race in the world.



Wiggy was feeling a little inquisitive this afternoon. There was a lot of activity around the vicarage. Daniel had made several, lengthy phone calls and taken down lots of notes in his 'personal organiser'. There had been a few visitors as well, all of them local vicars or ministers and a Catholic priest. He wondered what was going on, he hadn't seen this much action around in all the time they'd been here. Sometimes it just killed him not to be able to simply ask but he knew the rules.

The afternoon soon wore itself out and the Sun was getting a little tired too. Richard and Billy walked up the path towards the house.

"There's that cat of yours"! said Billy with a sneer.

"Oh yes. Hello Boots".

"I 'm sure he had something to do with my sprinkler being ruined.

I don't trust him, he is always watching me".

"Watching you? You're getting paranoid in your old age"!

"Oh no I 'm not. -Am I"?

"Huh watch you, I 've got better things than that to do", thought Boots.

( Chapter Nine )

Toby just had to get out. He had no idea how he was going to but if he didn't get over to the castle to meet Boots, he would explode from built up excitement and make a nasty mess of the kitchen. He fidgeted around like a he'd just heard the word 'VET'S'.

Frank rushed into the room, taking Toby by surprise.

"I hope you don't mind little fella but I've got to pop up the road and see the vicar. It's rather urgent and I don't think you should come with me this time. It's quite mild out and you look like you need to go outside for a bit so I'll leave you in the garden while I'm gone. Is that ok"? Without waiting for a reply, even though he wouldn't get one, he opened the door and shoed Toby out into the back yard.

Toby had never seen Frank act with such urgency. No sooner had the back door closed than the front door slammed shut and Frank was off towards the vicarage. Of course it was ok with Toby, he couldn't believe his luck. In seconds he was under the fence and gone, making sure not to overtake Frank on his way.

They both arrived at their destinations simultaneously. Frank was greeted by Daniel and Wiggy, both of them welcoming him in their own traditional way. Wiggy was actually quickest off the mark and he received the correct reply. Obviously Frank was well trained.

Toby was greeted with even more enthusiasm by, a very anxious but optimistic, Boots.

"Come with me quickly", he said, leading the little dog away towards the 'High Street', "And I will tell you what we are going to do".

"Yes Sir" replied Toby, strangely struggling to keep up. Boots seemed to be fitted with rocket boosters tonight.

"We need to encourage the mice to come out and play with us", explained Boots, on the run. "So we will take them a little present".

"What present can we take them"? asked Toby, with a deal of incredulity and a great deal of panting. Where was Boots getting all this energy from?

"I thought we would take food. That always seems to go down well".

Toby didn't reply, he was saving his breath.

They rummaged through every bin they could find. Behind shops and restaurants, beside houses, at the fire station, police station and the railway station (not much point there), all over town.

They filled a large carrier bag which Toby just about managed to drag behind him and in all truth, they got quite a good haul. It is amazing just what some people will throw away.

“Now”, said Boots, “All we have to do is get this lot over to the pavilion”.

“How”? asked Toby, “It is too heavy for the two of us to carry all the way up the hill to the castle”.

The two of them? Boots hadn't even considered any physical labour on his part but Toby was right, it was a long way up hill from where they were, to where they wanted to be. He looked around in desperation, he couldn't give up now. Then he saw it. A bus, standing at the stop, with both sets of doors open.

“Quick little friend”. He was gaining people skills all the time.

“Pick up the bag and follow me”

Boots lead Toby, carrying the bag as best he could, to the bus's rear set of doors.

“Ok. This is what we do. We'll get the bag on to the steps here, out of sight of the person. You hide with it and I will meet you up the hill”.

It wasn't easy but they managed to animal handle it onto the bus and Toby joined it in hiding. Boots didn't wait for the doors to close, he ran as fast as he could, up the hill to the bus stop outside the castle and waited impatiently.



He could see the bus from there and watched it pull away and travel the few hundred meters, to where he was. There was nobody at the stop but the driver stopped and opened the doors anyway, probably out of boredom. The two small creatures wasted no time. They pulled the bag out of the bus and onto the pavement. The bus pulled away and disappeared into the night.

Wiggy had sat on Franks lap and let him stroke him for quite some time but, as a cat will do, he then got bored and went off looking for something to do. He found his way up to a high window over looking the 'High Street' and had been watching the occasional passing car or lorry. He hadn't noticed Boots waiting but saw the bus pull up and was now being entertained by a comedy duo, trying to get a lumpy carrier bag across the road.

Toby picked it up with his teeth, stepped forward and promptly tripped over it, tumbling head over heels, like a tiny, fur covered Katherine wheel. While he got to his feet, Boots straightened out the bag again. Toby grabbed it again and this time tried walking sideways, until he tripped down the kerb, spilling the contents all over himself and the road. They gathered it all back up into the bag, took a deep breath and started over. This time Boots helped and although they weaved about drunkenly, they managed to get to the other side without being run down by a car. With a little difficulty, the burden was hoisted on to the kerbside and they half carried, half dragged it off towards the darkness of 'Castle Precinct'.

"What will they get up to next"? He thought to himself and then added, "I will have to meet that cat".

After what seemed like an eternity, they arrived at the battleground with their booty, somewhat bedraggled but intact. The gate was locked as usual, so they quietly carried it one piece at a time, through the hole in the wall and built a pile of food in front of the pavilion.

There it stood in all it's glory, a real feast. Cheese, sausages, bread, vegetables, all gleaming in the moonlight.

The two of them lay, quietly waiting, in the shadows, for some response from the mice. They waited for some time.

The mice didn't seem to notice. Finally, Boots said, "You had better go over there and attract their attention".

"Why me"? asked Toby

"Because they won't trust me. Mice don't trust cats for some reason".

"Oh ok then", replied Toby, now convinced, and ran off towards the pavilion.

He made a brave effort, barking and yapping and then running off. It didn't work the first time so he tried it again. Then again and once more for luck. They weren't taking any notice although Toby was sure they were not only in there but aware of him and the food.

He ran back to Boots.

"They don't want our present after all. What a shame".

"No, it would appear not", responded Boots, seething.

"I had better go now. I don't want Frank to worry".

"Alright, you be off. There's not much more we can do here but I will wait around for a while. They may change their minds and we want them to know who the present is from don't we".

"That is so thoughtful", said Toby, already leaving, "I'll see you tomorrow then".

"Yes, I'll see you tomorrow. Goodbye".

Boots lay there hopeful but dejected, hoping against hope that the mice would see sense and come out for the food.

Toby ran back down to the 'High Street', nearly straight into Frank, making his way home from his little chat with Daniel. Toby detoured and ran like crazy, to get home first. By the time Frank got there, Toby was sitting on the back doorstep, wagging his tail, as if he had been there all night.

Boots continued his vigil for quite some time, (He had no idea how long because a cats attitude towards reading a clock was very much in line with their attitude to counting and reading) contemplating all the time, what had gone wrong with this plan. He had put his best effort into it, the food was all good (at least it had a good strong smell to it), it was highly visible, what else could he do.

In the end he got bored and cold and decided he would be better off indoors, in the warm. He got up and headed out of the bowling green, along the wall, looking back all the time, just in case.

Two minutes after he jumped clear of the wall, a mouse sentry, hiding on the roof, gave the all clear. Two minutes after that, you would not know a scrap of food had been there in the first place.

Cats may be the chosen species but mice have greater patience.

Mission Failed!!!



( Chapter Ten )

Daniel beat the Sun out of Bed the next morning and was rushing around organising things, whistling as he went, much to Wiggy's annoyance.

"It must be against the law to be that cheery, at this time of the morning". He thought.

It didn't take the magical powers of cat, to know that, something unusual was going on. All this activity and Daniel up and about at this hour, something was definitely going on, but he hadn't been able to hear enough of any conversation to make out what it was. He decided not to let it worry him, in true cat style, he would play it cool.

Boots was up early as well. Although he hadn't had that much sleep, he knew he was running out of time and he was at a loss for a new idea. He tried the pathway first and gave it a good while to work but it didn't. He tried the bowling green wall as well but watching the gnome do his secret agent stuff didn't help either. He thought he would try the kitchen next. If he didn't get any inspiration, at least he might get some sustenance.

Frank was awake early too. Toby was waiting for his breakfast and sat outside the bedroom door to greet his walker, with all the warmth he usually did.

He didn't come out though. Toby could hear what he thought was Frank talking to himself. He knew that he talked to the telephone thingy but that was in the living room. Toby was baffled.

After a while Frank emerged from his room smiling and almost tripped over the waiting puppy.

"Hello little chap. Were you listening to me practising? I'll bet you're ready for your breakfast, aren't you"? asked Frank, almost sounding like Toby now.

"Practice? What's that", thought Toby running past Frank down the stairs and almost knocking him over, in his hurry to get his breakfast.

Charlotte had put out some cat biscuits, much to Boots' delight and some digestives on a plate, on the kitchen table with three, steaming mugs of coffee.

Richard and Billy came into the room, chatting between themselves and plonked themselves down at the table.

"Morning Charlotte".

"Oh I'm not invisible then".

"Oops! Hello love".

"Thank you Richard. Help yourself to biscuits Billy".

"Is it tomorrow that those pest people are coming"? enquired Richard.

"Yes, in the morning sometime".

"Good", said Billy, "Those mice ate right through my hose you know".

Boots sniggered under the table.

"Oh yes Billy, I'm sure they did", said Richard sarcastically.

"I'm telling you they did! How else do you explain it? Unless it was that cat of yours".

Boots sneered this time.

"Changing the subject! I'm going out tonight with Carole". Said Charlotte.

"Oh yes"? Replied Richard, "Clubbing it are you"?

"Not exactly"!

Now Boots was worried. He didn't know Thursday from Monday but he knew exactly what tomorrow meant and the difference between morning and afternoon. He had next to no time to get this problem solved but was determined to do so.

The activity at St. Michaels was intensifying by the hour.

Wiggy took up a surveillance position by the church porch and watched people coming and going.

Mid morning, a van pulled up. The sign on the side read, 'P. & J. Noble. Decorators of distinction' but out of the back, instead of ladders and paint pots, came speakers and cables. Two men carried them from the pavement into the church and right up to the front by the Altar.

Boots was drawing a blank, none of the usual places were doing him any good, he needed a change of scenery. Going for a walk seemed like an obvious choice and he didn't often go to the shops so he thought he might as well give it a try. He wandered aimlessly out of the castle grounds and headed down the hill towards the main area of shops. He just strolled in the sunshine and contemplated the situation.

Wiggy watched as more people arrived, this time with a drum kit. He didn't even know they had them in Lewes. They were followed a short while later by a small group of the local clergy, who immediately disappeared into the vestry for a 'holy huddle' with Daniel.

Boots went as far in that direction as he felt was prudent and, having had no inspiration what so ever, crossed the road and headed back in the other direction. The Sun smiled down on the town all the while but Boots wasn't smiling, he was wearing the cat version of a deep frown.

To the everyday person, a cat's expression seems to change very little but to another cat a deep frown would be easy to spot. The shape of the ears change dramatically, the pattern of the fur on their forehead is transformed by the tension of the skin and cats normally only frown in severe cases of 'Meal Delay'.

The day moved from morning, through lunch time and into a warm, lazy, summer afternoon.

Wiggy had taken a short break for lunch and returned to his post by the main doors. He was enjoying the free entertainment and was still trying to work out what was going on.

The prayer meeting ended with the obligatory coffee or tea and the Prayers disbanded cordially.

Boots was still cruising the boulevards of Lewes, looking for a meaning to life and coming up empty.

He was now on the final stretch, back towards the castle and was just passing the church.

"Hello there".

Boots was startled for a second. He had been deep in thought for one thing and for a second thing, he was being greeted by another cat.

That doesn't happen. Cats do not greet each other, they challenge each other, that is the tradition and a long standing one at that.

He wasn't sure what to do but in his dazed state, decided to reply.

"Hello"

There, that was that done, where did he go from here? He needn't have worried though, Wiggy stepped in.

"My name is Wiggy. I've been watching you for a while. What is going on with you and that little dog"?

Boots hesitated, he really wasn't used to this and didn't want to weaken his position, as the number one cat in town. He had to pick his words carefully.

"I am Boot's, the castle cat"! He decided to make that plain early in the conversation. "Wiggy? That's a strange name"?

"It's short for Smith-Wigglesworth".

"You're not one of those pedigree cats are you"?

"No my feeder, Daniel named me after his hero. He was a famous missionary".

"Oh ok, only I don't like snobs. I am training the dog".

"Training him for what"?

"To serve cat kind in an appropriate manner".

"Oh, I see. I think".

"It is very simple really. I set him a task, call it a game and he performs it".

"Tasks like what"?

Boots decided to take a chance on telling the truth. These were difficult times and he needed answers.

"We have been trying to rid the castle of a mouse problem"

"One mouse"?

"Hardly? Do you think I would stoop to calling on the help of a dog, or anyone else for that matter, for just one mouse. No we have more than enough mice"!

"Oh I see. Have you succeeded then"?

"Not yet and they have people coming tomorrow to do the job. That can't be allowed, can it"?

"No! I see your dilemma".

"Do you have any suggestions"

"Not right now but I will pray about it".

"Pray! What's that"?

"Talking to God"

"God, What's God".

"God is God. He made everything!"

"What everything"?

"Yes! Anyway, I'll pray and let you know What he thinks you should do"

"Alright, if you think that will help"?

"I'm sure it will".

"Right I'll see you later then" said Boots turning to go and even more confused than when he had started the conversation.

( Chapter Eleven )

Carole rang the door bell and Richard answered it.

"Hi Richard is Charlotte ready"?

"I don't think so! Glad rags take much longer than an hour to apply.

"Don't be silly Richard", Said Charlotte, coming down the stairs behind him, "Or is that too much to ask"?

"You two don't look like girls out on the town".

"That's because we are going to church, silly", replied Carole.

"CHURCH? On a Wednesday? Has the world gone mad"?

"Calm down darling, or you'll blow a fuse. You know it's dangerous to get too excited at your age".

"Careful! I am only two years older than you".

"Yes, but two years, is two years" chimed in Carole supportively.

"Hey! Who asked you"?

"Truth hurt, does it"? Asked Charlotte with a grin, as she swept past him, pulling on her jacket and stepping out of the door.

"We won't be late", she added waving but not looking back.

The two ladies strolled off into the distance, chattering as they went.

Richard looked down at Boots, who had just joined him in the hall way.

"Just you and me tonight then cat".

Boots didn't mind that. He had nowhere to go because he had not come up with a plan. He knew he was running out of time but hoped he would think of something in the morning. No need to lose sleep.

Frank was ready too. He was all spruced up and looking good.

"I'm off out boy", he said to Toby, "And you can't go with me this time, so I'll let you out in the garden. It's a nice mild night and I'm sure you'll be alright. Come on".

With that, he opened the back door and gave Toby a little push. He turned, picked up a bag from the kitchen table and headed out of the house and into the night.

Toby was out of the garden just as quick and off towards the castle, making sure to avoid crossing Frank's path.

Wiggy had spent the vast majority of his day, by the church doors.

After the drum kit there had been a bit of a lull, but later a small gaggle of ladies had arrived and buried themselves in a small side room. For at least an hour, he had heard the mumblings through the door, which he recognised as prayers.

Then shortly afterwards more equipment had been jostled and lumbered into the area just in front of the altar. It was now filled with amplifiers and guitar stands, microphone stands and monitor speakers, All the paraphernalia of a worship band.

At this point he began to get excited. He knew this was going to be a big meeting and he had seen one, once before, back in the Midlands. He hoped this one would be as good as that one had been.

Now the band members had turned up and were tuning guitars and basses, running scales up and down the keyboard and doing the old, counting up to two bit, into the mics.

Daniel was running around greeting the other vicars and ministers, with a grin so wide, you would expect his face to fall in two.

Toby had got to the castle and looked all over for Boots. He checked the garden, the path, the castle and eventually, the bowling green but couldn't find him anywhere. He was still looking, when he saw Frank going up to the church.

He decided he had spent enough time at the task and thought he would see what Frank was up to. He strolled down to the church porch and sat himself down, just outside, but with a good view, down the aisle.

Wiggy determined that a place was required for him to observe undisturbed . He made his way to a spot he had discovered, to the rear of the church, up high above the proceedings and made himself comfortable(one of the earliest skills a cat acquires).

Daniel met Frank, with a big smile and showed him to a seat in the front row, next to the aisle.

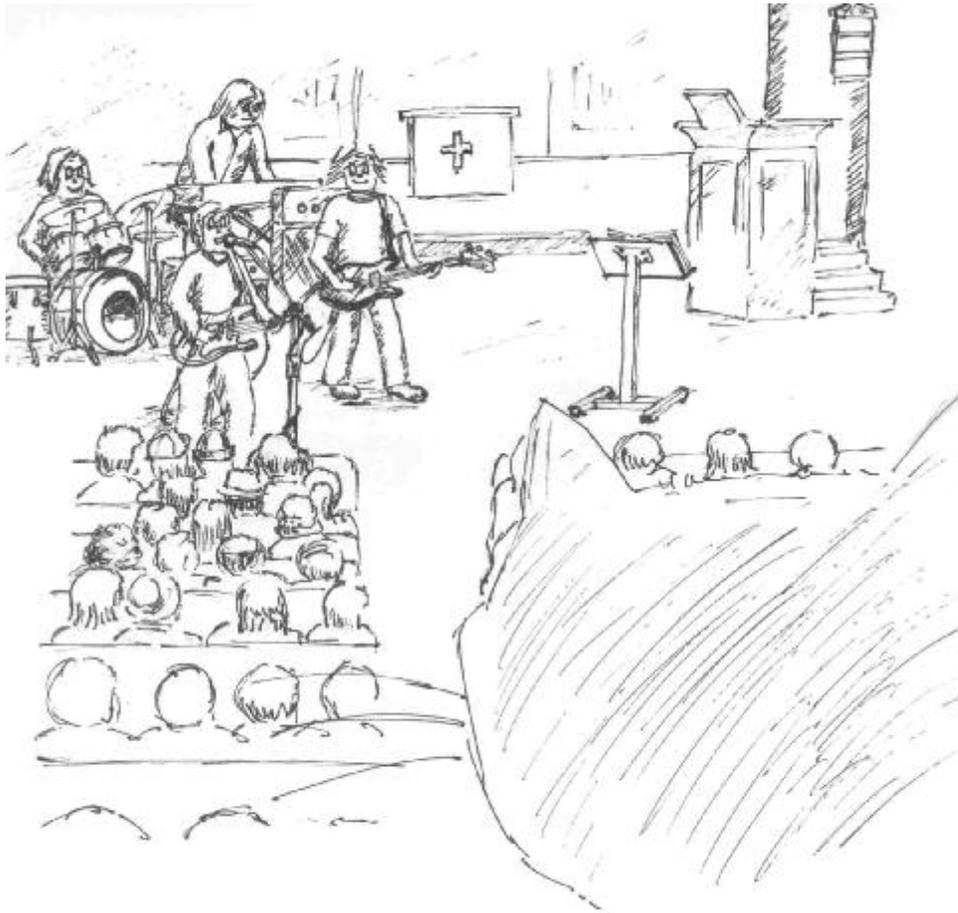
People poured in until it looked as if, the poor old building would burst it's seams.

Wiggy watched, Toby watched, Frank fidgeted, Daniel beamed, Charlotte and Carole chattered, Richard read a motorbike magazine and Boots slept.

It wasn't like a Sunday morning. On Sunday's, people spoke, but in a hushed tone. On Sunday's, people waited quietly for the service to begin. On Sunday's, everything was sort of.... Well... Respectable. Now, people were talking loudly and excitedly. Now, it appeared that, at any moment, the crowd would start chanting, ' Why are we waiting?'

The band were running through passages of songs that were new to them, just making sure they'd remembered them correctly.

Frank was talking silently to himself.



Suddenly! Daniel almost ran to the front of the Church, turned, spread his arms out wide and said, in an elated voice,

"GOOD EVENI NG"!!!

"GOOD EVENI NG"!!!! The response nearly knocked him clean off his feet.

"Welcome to this 'Joint Celebration' I am glad you could all come and it feels like you are all expecting something special to happen. So am I! I am sure the 'Holy Spirit' has joined us already and is ready to change lives. Let's give thanks and praise to 'The Lord'".

He turned and lifted a hand towards the band, who immediately launched into, 'Let everything that has breath praise The Lord'.

They played two more songs, without stopping for breath, the praise express was on a roll.

Daniel stepped forward again.

"Lets Pray". He prayed for the gathered people, that they might hear from 'God' and feel the anointing of the 'Holy Spirit'. He prayed for the people of the town and surrounding area. He prayed for Frank as he was about to read God's word.

Frank got, cautiously, out of his seat and went to the lectern. He placed his Bible down and opened it, looked up and said, with a new found authority, " I am going to read from, 'The Gospel of Luke, chapter eight and verses, forty three to forty eight'!"

He read the story of, the woman who touched Jesus' garment and was instantly healed, by her faith. He concluded with, "This is the word of The Lord". And got a resounding, "AMEN"!

Charlotte stood in the congregation, with a tear in her eye and a smile on her face.

The band played two more songs, quieter, more worshipful , songs.

Daniel introduced, 'Pete Morgan' the pastor of the local 'Christian Fellowship'.

"Pete is going to bring us a word and spend some time in ministry".

Pete stepped up to the lectern but didn't use it, except to rest his bible on. He spoke from the heart about a 'Hurting World', and how 'Jesus' was the only answer.

The congregation was silent, hanging on every word.

Toby was transfixed, he'd never seen anything like it.

Wiggy was loving every minute of it. It was just as good as that other meeting, if not better.

Pete suddenly said, "I think the Holy Spirit wants to minister to people". He fell silent for a moment and you could hear a pin drop in the congregation.

"There is someone here who has been troubled all week by a pain in their left shoulder. Come out to this side and".  
He looked down at lady in the second row and said in a lowered voice,  
"Ann will you pray for her".

A few moments passed and a lady got up in the middle of the church and sheepishly, walked to the front. Ann took her to the side and started praying.

Pete continued with a few more ailments and all the relevant people came out and were prayed for.

The first lady came up to Pete and asked if she could just tell everybody that the pain had completely gone.

This was greeted with a loud cheer and a round of applause for 'God'.

Pete had a troubled expression on his face and said, "I don't understand the feeling I am getting about this but the 'Holy Spirit' is telling me, there is someone here who is concentrating on a problem which is not his own but someone else's".

No one came forward.  
They waited for a while but still no one came forward.

Pete looked up and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'Honesty is the best policy'".

Still no one came forward but Wiggy slipped out of the church unnoticed by anyone, even Toby.

( Chapter Twelve )

Thursday morning dawned. The Sun was up again, bright and early this morning. The town was awake and bustling, still very much in the tourist season, although, it would all to soon, draw to a close.

Everybody was up and about their business.

Boots had a headache like a thunder cloud and he had never had one before. The day had arrived and he had not come up with a plan.

The pest people would come and do the job he was supposed to do and should have done easily. All Catdom would be in disgrace and it all fell on his shoulders. He was not a happy bunny!

Frank was walking on a cloud and Toby was with him. They walked up to the church and sought out Daniel.

"Wasn't that a great night"? exclaimed Frank without even saying, "Hello"

"Oh hi Frank, Yes it was wonderful. You enjoyed yourself then"?

"Oh yes. I'd do it again tomorrow"!

"How about Sunday then"?

"Really"?

"Yes really"!

"Ok you're on. Sunday it is".

"Right let me sort you out a reading".

Wiggy saw Toby first.

"What did you think of last night"?

"I don't really know. It felt sort of special and Frank is a different walker".

"Yes I can see that".

"Have you seen Boots? I tried to find him last night but he was nowhere to be seen".

"No I haven't but he will be alright, just you see".

The door bell rang and Charlotte opened it.

"Hello missus. We have been over to bowling green".

It was the pest people and now all was lost. Boots hid under the telephone table waiting to hear the worst.



"What did you find"? asked Charlotte.

"Well", replied the pest person, "You have had a heavy infestation of mice at some time but now they are all gone". We can put some traps down, if you like, in case they return but it seems unlikely".

"No don't bother. We'll ring you if they come back".

"Ok we'll send you an invoice for the callout charge later".

"That's fine. Thank you very much. Goodbye".

"Bye".

And with that he was gone.

So was Boots, up and running, off down to the church.

Wiggy was by the door waiting.

"What did you do? What did you do"? Boots shouted as he caught sight of Wiggy.

"Calm down and I will tell you".

"The mice have all gone".

"I know".

"How did you do it"?

"I spoke to them".

"And they listened"?

"Yes".

"What on Earth did you tell them"?

"I simply told them the truth. That, very soon, people would be coming with traps and poisons and that although some of them would escape, some would die. I told them the best thing would be for them to build a new community farther away from people".

"And they believed you"?

"Yes".

"Why"?

"Now that I can't explain. I simply did what I was told".

"By who"?

"God".

"Oh. Well. Thanks very much. Bye".

Boots turned and left, still not sure at all, about what had happened, but he did think, "Thank you God", anyway.

He strolled back to the castle grounds, feeling very relieved and at peace with the world.

He took up his guard position, on the path, in the sunshine and settled down to his duties.

Two pigeons landed on the gatehouse. He wasn't worried, he knew they would move on, as soon as they saw him. How could they defy a cat that had overcome a major problem like 'mice in the pavilion'.

It had been a sticky one, but he had succeeded, as he knew he would.

Problem over!

Mission Completed!