

And because the fishermen could not fish, there was no more food.

They ate up the few vegetables that were left in their storm-wracked gardens. They ate up the salted pilchards that were left in the cellars. Mowzer hated vegetables and the pilchards were too salty for her taste.

Soon there was nothing left. The cats and their people grew very hungry.

Mowzer sat by her window, staring out at the storm, and thought

longingly of morgy-broth and star-gazy pie.

Every day the fishermen gathered on the quayside and sometimes they would try to take a boat out through the Mousehole. But always the Great Storm-Cat lay in wait for them and they were lucky to escape with their lives.





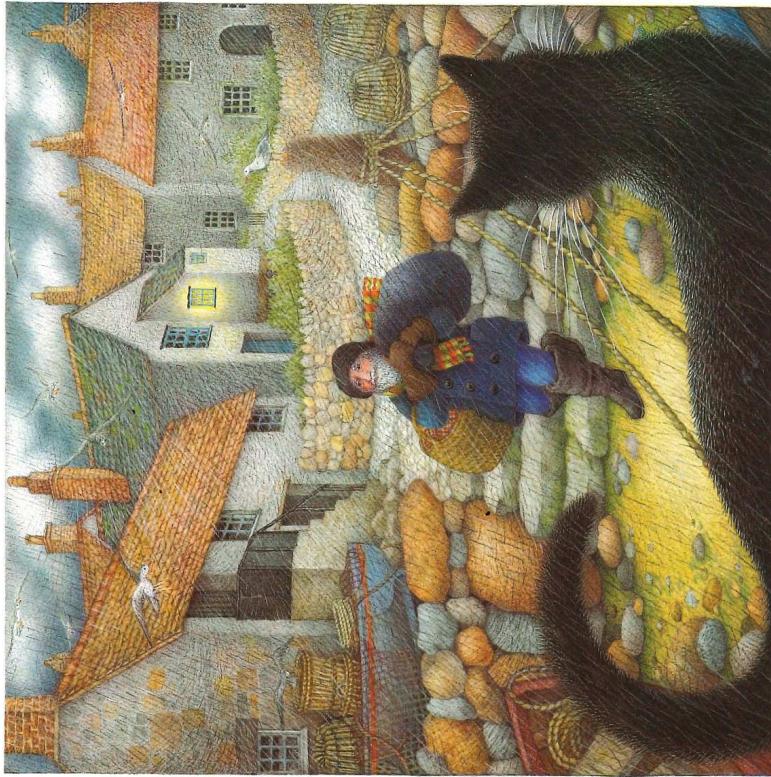
Then at last one evening, as old Tom sat with Mowzer on his knee, she felt him take a deep sigh.

"Mowzer, my handsome," he said, "for he was a courteous and well-spoken man, "Mowzer, my handsome, it will soon be Christmas, and no man can stand by at Christmas and see the children starve. "Someone must go fishing come what may, and I think it must be me. It cannot be the young men, for they have wives and children and mothers to weep for them if they do not return. But my wife and parents are dead long since and my children are grown and gone." Mowzer purred to tell him that she understood, for it was the same with her.

"I shall go out tomorrow, Mowzer, my handsome," said the old man, "and I shall not come back without a catch."

Mowzer purred louder to tell him that she would go with him. For he was only a man, she thought, and men were like mice in the paws of the Great Storm-Cat.





Besides, she knew that if he did not come back, she would not much care to live in her cottage without him. There would be no one to pour the cream or stoke up the range or rock the rocking-chair. There would be no one in all the world who knew just where she liked to be tickled behind her left ear.

"Tomorrow night, Mowzer, my handsome," he said, "we shall eat morgy-broth, baked hake, ling and launces, fairmaids, soured scad and star-gazy pie!"

Then Mowzer purred as if she would burst to tell him that she loved him more than any of these things.

The next morning they set out very early before the others were waking. Before they went, Tom stoked up the old range and damped it down so that it would burn steadily until they returned. Then he hung a lamp in the window so that it would shine out across the harbour and light their way.

As they reached the quayside, Mowzer looked back through the wind and rain, and thought how warm and welcoming the window looked.



Soon their little boat was crossing the harbour towards the Mousehole gap and the voice of the Great Storm-Cat rose all around them like a giant caterwauling.



As she listened to his wailing, Mowzer felt a sudden strange sadness for him. How lonely he must be, she thought, endlessly hunting the men-mice in the deeps of darkness, and never returning to the rosy glow of a red-hot range.

And her kind heart was moved to comfort him.

Many a tom-cat had Mowzer tamed in her time with the sweetness of her singing. Now she lifted her head and sang like a siren, joining her call with the cry of the Great Storm-Cat.

And so it was that he was taken off guard as the little boat made its bid for freedom. Soothed by the sweetness of Mowzer's serenade, the Great Storm-Cat paused in his prowling and pulled back his giant cat's paw for a mere moment. Swiftly the little boat passed through the Mousehole and out into the open sea.

Then the Great Storm-Cat played with them as a cat plays with a mouse. He would let them loose for a little as they fought their way towards the fishing grounds. Then down would come his giant cat's paw in a flurry of foam and water. But he did not yet strike to sink them, for that would have spoiled his sport.

When they reached the fishing grounds the sea was so rough that it was hard to put out the nets.

"I fancy you must sing again, Mowzer, my handsome," said Tom, "for your voice seems to soothe the sea like the sirens of old." So Mowzer sang again, longer and louder than she had ever sung before. Indeed, old Tom was forced to block up his ears so that her siren-song should not distract him from the business of fishing.

And again, the Great Storm-Cat paused in his play and sang with her until the nets were safely shot.