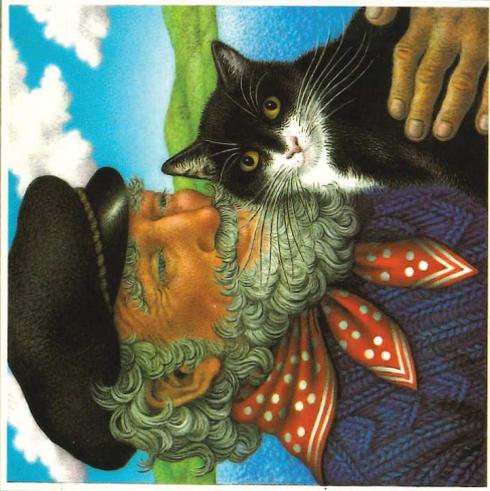


THE
MOUSEHOLE
CAT



Antonia Barber · Nicola Bayley





At the far end of England, a land of rocks and moorland stretches itself out into a blue-green sea. Between its high headlands lie tiny sheltering harbours where the fishing boats hide when the winter storms are blowing.

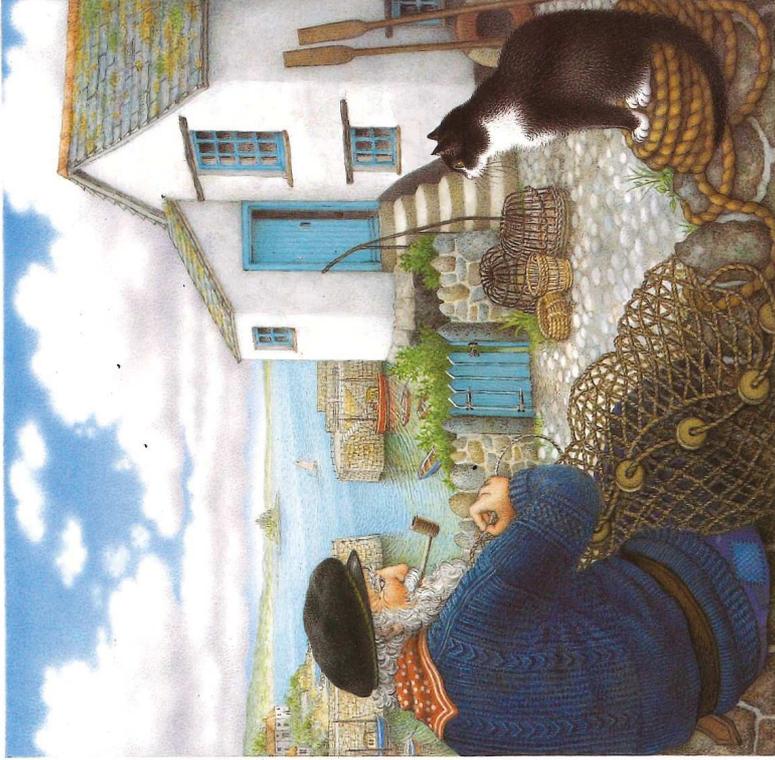
One of these harbours is so small and the entrance between its great stone breakwaters is so narrow that fishermen called it "the Mousehole".

The people who lived in the cottages around the harbour grew fond of the name and they call their village Mousehole to this day.

They say it in the Cornish way, "Mowzel", but you may say it as you choose.

Once there lived in the village a cat whose name was Mowzer.

She had an old cottage with a window overlooking the harbour, an old rocking-chair with patchwork cushions and an old fisherman named Tom.

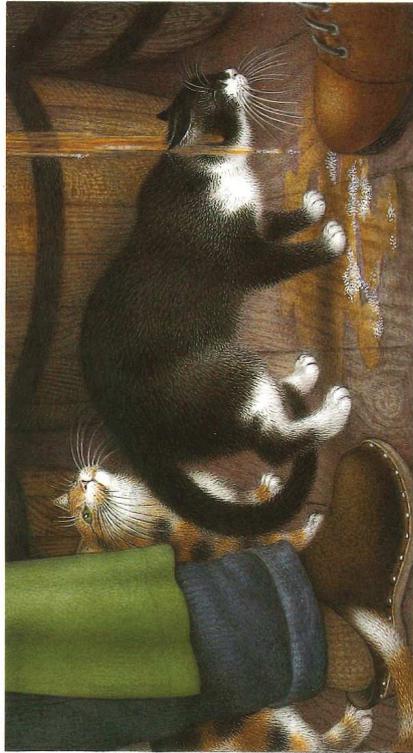




Mowzer had had many kittens in her time but they had all grown up and left home.

Her eldest son kept the inn on the quayside. It was noisy and smoky and his man had once spilled beer on Mowzer's head as he was drawing a pint.

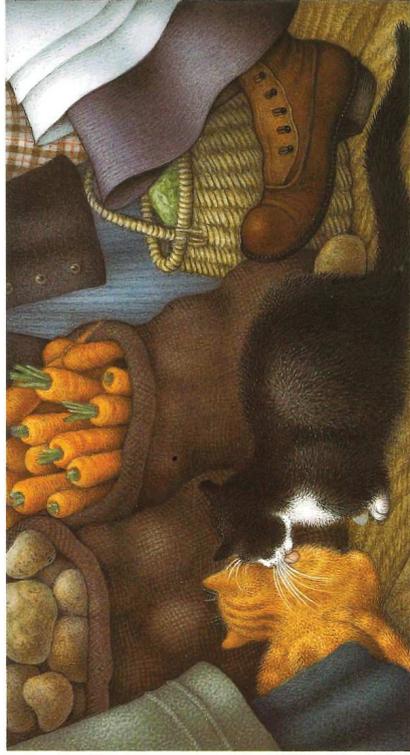
So she did not go there very often.

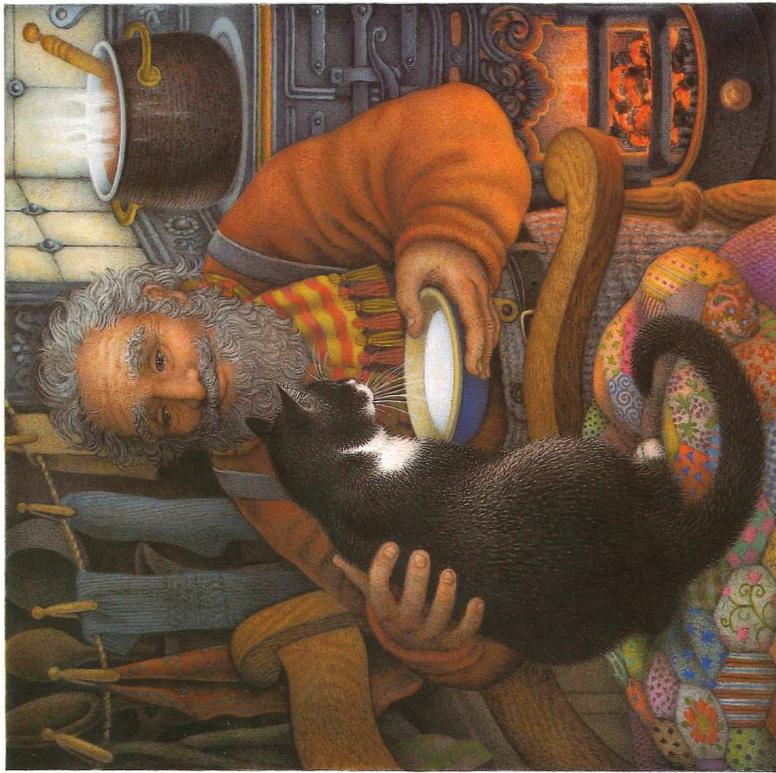


One of her daughters kept the shop on the corner. It was busy and crowded and her lady had once stepped on Mowzer's tail as she was weighing out some vegetables.

So she did not go there very often either.

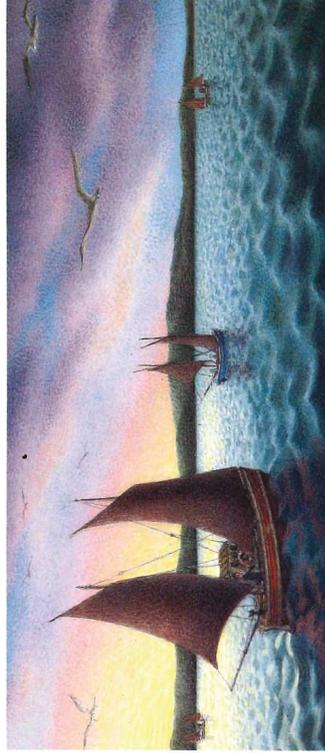
Sometimes Mowzer felt that her children had not trained their people properly.





Her own pet, old Tom, was very well behaved. He never spilled the cream when he was filling her saucer. He always stoked the range to a beautiful golden glow. He rocked the rocking-chair at just the right speed. He knew the exact spot behind her left ear where Mowzer liked to be tickled. What was more, he never wasted his time drawing pints of beer or weighing out vegetables.

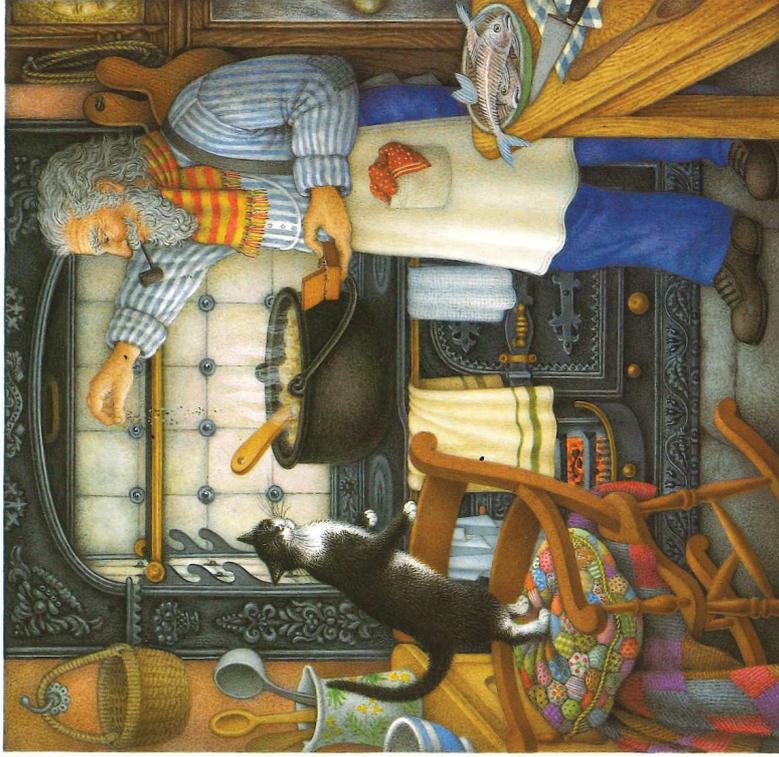
When he was not looking after Mowzer he passed the day in the most useful way possible. He took his little boat through the narrow opening between the great breakwaters, out into the blue-green sea, and caught fish for Mowzer's dinner.



Mowzer was very partial to a plate of fresh fish. In fact she never ate anything else. But she liked a little variety.

- So, on Mondays they made morgy-broth,
Mowzer's favourite fish stew.
- On Tuesdays they baked hake and topped it with
golden mashed potatoes.
- On Wednesdays they cooked kedgereee with
delicious smoked ling.
- On Thursdays they grilled fairmaids,
a mouth-watering meal.
- On Fridays they fried launces with a knob
of butter and a squeeze of lemon.
- On Saturdays they soured scad with
vinegar and onions.
- And on Sundays they made star-gazy pie
with prime pilchards in pastry.

All in all, Mowzer's days passed very pleasantly.





Then one year there came a terrible winter. At the far end of England the blue-green sea turned grey and black.

The Great Storm-Cat is stirring, thought Mowzer as she watched at her window. The wind whined like a wild thing about the high headlands. It came hunting the fishing boats in their hidden harbours. When the Great Storm-Cat is howling, thought Mowzer, it is best to stay snug indoors by a friendly fire.

The sea drew itself up into giant waves and flung itself against the great breakwaters. All along the coast of Cornwall, the stone walls stood the shock.

Then the sea sucked up its strength again and roared right over them, sinking the sailing boats in their home havens. But it could not get into the Mousehole.

Mowzer watched as the Great Storm-Cat clawed with his giant cat's paw through the gap in the harbour wall. But it was too small.

He snarled and leaped up at the great breakwater under the lowering sky. But it was too high.

The fishing boats sat safe as mice in their own mousehole. But they could not get out.

