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Opening extract from
Queen Sardine

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A SOGGY MOGGY

I love cats. I can't have a pet, though. Mum says *it's a big enough job looking after the two of us, let alone anyone with fur or feathers.*

She did get me a fish once, when I was really little, but I only had him a day. I put him in the bath with me and he started swimming funny, then he died. Kind of put me off having fish. Put me off having baths too. Mum says I've got to have



a bath every other morning, even when I'm already all clean and fresh-smelling. That's just the rule. So here I am, in the bath. Again.

I'm making a massive bubble bath beard. It's a good one. One minute I'm like this:

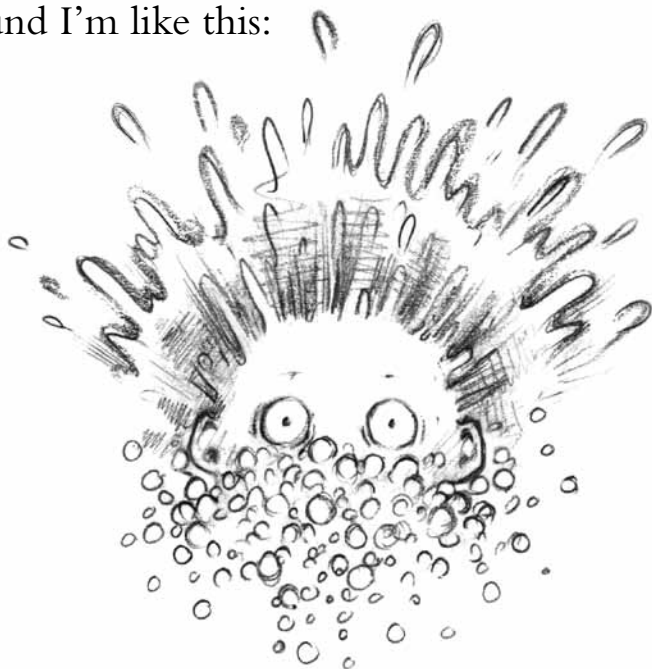


Then suddenly there's a

CRASH... SPLASH...

MeeeeoooooO Who...

and I'm like this:



Because a big fat stripy cat hurls itself through the open window, into my bath. It splash lands next to me, then scrambles out in lightning speed. I scream, and straightaway I wish I hadn't, because:

1. I swallow most of my beard.
2. The cat looks even more scared than I am.



It looks me straight in the eyes and hisses, “Help me!”

No joke. Proper words.

At first, I’m just too flabbergasted to speak. I mean... **Wowzers!** A talking cat! And then, when I *do* speak, the words get all mushed together,

“W-w-whaddidoosay?!”

“Please! *Please* help me,” it begs.

“But cats can’t talk!” I croak, still gobsmacked.

“Neither can you, it seems,” the cat says. It slinks back a little, looking wary, and glances up at the window, like maybe it’s made a mistake.



“Look, you *are* Ivy Meadows, aren’t you?”

I nod.

“Then *please* help me! You must! I’ve heard about you. You’re kind to cats. That’s what he said!”

“Who?” I ask.

“Never mind that, just say you’ll help!” it urges.

I nod again. “Okay...” I whisper, not really sure what I’m agreeing to.

“Thank you. *Thank you*, kind girl,” whispers the cat.

I grab a couple of towels and climb out of the tub.





As the cat dries off, I'm sure it looks familiar.

“Aren't you Mr and Mrs Trott's cat?”
I ask.

Mr and Mrs Trott moved into a house across the road a few weeks ago. Mr Trott is big, grumpy and grunts instead





round the corner as well...”

“Crab Alley?”

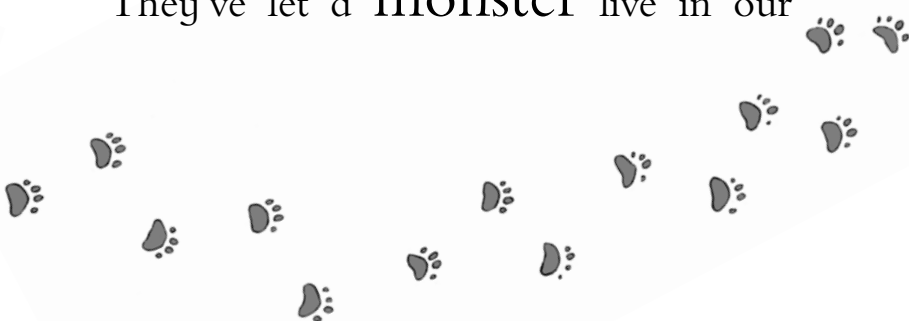
“Yes, that too,” she sighs. “Queen of all of it!”

I start to ask again who *he* is, but she’s not finished...

“And no one *owns* a queen! Yes, I *live* with Mr and Mrs Trott. They serve me...” She says this bit really slowly as though she’s talking to someone a bit thick. “Except... except...” her ears flatten, like she’s in danger.

“Except what?” I whisper.

“Except they’ve gone mad!” she hisses. “They’ve let a **monster** live in our



precious new home!”

What? No way! A monster on Kipper Street?

“What kind of monster?” I ask, a little bit scared of what the answer will be.

Queen Sardine looks at me with huge, wild eyes,

“The *worst* kind of monster...



A fang-gnashing...
rip-snarling...
yip-yooowwlling...

grizzle-bristling...
fuzz-frizzling...





belly-burping...
stonk-stinking...

globersome mOnster!



And worst of all...



IT STEALS MY DINNERS!”

Poor Queen Sardine. Her ears are quivering and she starts mewling pitifully.

“Oh... oh dear,” I say. “Please don’t get upset, Queen Sar—”

“*Your Majesty*,” whimpers the soggy moggy. “Call me *Your Majesty*.”

I hold in a giggle. “Er... all right... and what are you going to do about this monster, *your Majesty*?”

Queen Sardine rubs against my knees. “Well, I can hardly go back home. You’ll look after me, I know you will,” she purrs.

Gulp. I’m sure Mum doesn’t want a cat, but Queen Sardine seems to have it all planned...

“Now, listen carefully,” she says, “I will need somewhere ever so cosy to sleep...”

“I don’t think Mum will let...” I begin.



“Don’t interrupt!” says Queen Sardine. “I was just about to tell you about mealtimes. Twice a day, and plenty of snacks in between. Got that, little human?”

“My name’s Ivy. But—”

“Fish is best but chicken will do,” she says. “Oh, and you *must* remember to leave the bathroom window open so I can... so I can... *do my business*... if you know what I mean!”

I *do* know what she means.

This really isn’t a good idea.

“I don’t think Mum will—”

“Ah, now, I think it’s best you don’t tell your mum about me just yet,” interrupts

Queen Sardine, “I don’t think she’d understand me like *you* do, do you?”

“I doubt it,” I say.



“So we’re agreed then. I’ll live here, instead. Splendid. Right, I think I’m

ready for some breakfast now,” she purrs. “Something fishy perhaps?”

