

The Story of Saint Catrick



by robby charters

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by *Robby Charters*

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Dr. Catrick is a professor at the Feline University in Catropolis. As a young cat, he had a life changing experience that set him on his mission in life, to proclaim that animal species can and should live in harmony. All the while, the rodents are rising up against cat rule. Catrick and his friends encounter political agendas, prejudices, and countless other reasons for not doing the obvious.

"As one reads this book there are many different things that can come to ones mind ... the ghetto wars between different gangs or ethnic groups. The Nazis and the Jews, The revolts in Ireland, or the Blacks versus the Whites. About peace makers or what one has to face in this generation. Using the animals instead of people the author has written this in such a way as one can let their imagination take them to places that could relate to them in some manner..." Lynn at Goodreads.com

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Exerpts (first four chapters):

- Chapter the First -

A Gentlecat and a Scholar

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• early history • in which Catrick enrolls in the School of Hard Knocks • Professor Catrick unwittingly starts a student movement •

Towards his latter days, people who knew him often referred to Catrick as a 'saint and a scholar'. After his passing, nobody contested the designation. Though there weren't any miracles attributed to him - except, perhaps, the opening of blind eyes (the inner ones, that is) - and no posthumous appearance (unless one counts the dubious claim by a hamster who happened to be drunk at the time) he did die a martyr's death, so the epithet stuck.

Earlier in his career, before anyone began to think of him as a saint, Catrick was simply called a 'gentlecat and a scholar'.

A gentlecat he was indeed, as he was of royal Siamese extraction, of the ancient Siswart clan, and was even said to know a few words of Siamese, taught him by his mother.

As for being a scholar, he had studied, as all young gentlecats do, at the Royal Feline University. He received his Ph.D. in Cultural Felidaeology (the study of feline social customs), and later, occupied the professor's chair in that department. This scholarship, of course, pertained to his gentlecatliness - hence the designation, 'a gentlecat and a scholar'.

But in reference to the later epithet, 'a saint and a scholar', that was from the School of Hard Knocks, which offers the only scholarship that prepares one for sainthood.

Being of noble blood, Catrick was a citizen of the Kingdom of Catropolis. Royal Siamese cats all enjoyed a privileged position in Catropolitan society but Persians, even more so. The king of the realm was a Persian Cat, King Cattivus III of the ancient Gorbekh clan, who tended to favour Persians over all other pedigrees. However, as Catrick's grandfather had distinguished himself in the Dog Wars and exhibited outstanding loyalty to the Crown, this was a mark in their favour whenever Siswart family issues came up in the royal court, so the family always received favourable treatment.

The Dog Wars were an important event in the history of Catropolis. In them the cats fought to establish their kingdom, and finally overthrew the Cocker Spaniel dynasty. Ever since, dogs tended to behave themselves, and either worked in their fields in the rural parts, or did jobs as beasts of burden or as saddle dogs. There were never enough of them allowed in any one place at a time to cause any trouble -- that is, except for the wild dogs packs that inhabited the frontier areas to the West. Every so often they made raids on the settlements near the frontier. Usually the victims were rodent communities, but whenever they threatened the feline populations, it was cause for a military campaign.

One such incident occurred when Catrick, just out of kittenhood, was of the age to perform his tour of military service. He had hardly been inducted and made a corporal (as cats of noble blood are), when his whole regiment marched right off to the frontier to fight the wild dogs. It was probably the events of this campaign that began to shape the thinking of young Catrick; or shall we say, it was his first lesson in the School of Hard Knocks. His regiment met with disaster, and Catrick had to flee for his life, wounded, until he finally lost consciousness somewhere in the pastures and hedges of County Mullen.

When he came to, he found himself in the home of a family of field mice. Still not in good health, and with a broken foreleg, he stayed with them for several months, until he had fully recovered, his foreleg had mended, and they thought it safe for a cat in military uniform to show his face outside. Despite being a cat, the mice treated him as a member of the family, and when it was time to go home, there were tears shed, both by the cat and the mice.

Catrick had been presumed dead, so it was with great joy that his family received him back again. The fighting then took another turn for the worse, and the mouse family that had befriended Catrick, were either killed or had to flee. All Catrick could find later were the ruins of their humble cottage.

The typical cat response would have been, 'What's one more family of mice?' so nobody understood Catrick's sorrow at not finding his friends. Catrick was forced to keep his sadness to himself, but something on the inside had changed forever.

One of the usual methods of training at the School of Hard Knocks is never quite knowing whether one is normal or not. Things that seem quite sensible to one's own mind, are nonsense to everyone else. Why a cat would place any value whatsoever on a family of mice was just the sort of issue

that kept Catrick wavering on the edge of social self-confidence. Why, Catrick's own forefathers were mouse hunters! Even today, though the sport was officially banned, many cats accepted in polite cat-society were still known mousers.

Life was full of social exchanges with cats of every type. As Catrick began his studies at the university, he met them all. Sometimes, he would feel emboldened to speak up against the cruel sport of mouse-hunting, or the value of a mouse's life. He lost a few friends at the outset, and even made a few enemies. As time went on, however, Catrick wearied of losing friends, so he became quiet about his feelings so that, by the time he was a professor, he seemed just like any other cat. Later, when he was the head of the Felidaeology department, he even laughed along with the others when a colleague told a rodent joke, but something inside never felt right.

One day, he told his students the story of the mouse family that befriended him during the Wild Dog Campaigns. The fire that had once burned inside Catrick, suddenly started doing so once again, just for a few minutes. The kittens saw it, and the next day, they begged him to tell it again; and a day later, again; and again. Each time, the fire burned more intensely. Usually, that was in a class room, but sometimes, they were out on the campus grounds during breaks when the kittens were idly chatting and asking him questions. Then, the fire that lit his eyes would kindle the imaginations of his pupils.

The result was that Catrick soon found himself the unwitting leader of a small and growing group of students and junior professors who met for lunch to discuss the place of rodents in society. Now and then, the topic would turn toward equal justice, and the bigoted attitudes on the part of most cats. Some of the kittens began to develop strong opinions, and a few even began to foster friendships with their rodent neighbours.

Catrick wasn't a thoroughly willing leader for such a group. He did see his earlier self in some of the enthusiastic young cats whose opinions were taking shape, and some of this tugged on his heart strings so as to further fan the fires. He also had a wide circle of friends among the senior professors and aristocratic friends of the family who took exception to the unbridled free-thinking of the youth. Now and then, he tried to defend the youthful energy of his young friends while with the seniors, only to be rejoined with a 'humph' or a sudden change of subject. Also, just knowing about the influence he was having would put some off.

Right about that time, the Rodents Revolt was beginning to pick up steam. Catrick's position began to look awkward indeed.

- Chapter the Second -

Rodenski

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• introducing Vladimer Rodenski • David Mousecovitz • the kitten student movement attracts
the attention of the rodent front • of the ancient Ratsburg dynasty •

The de facto leader of the rodent revolution was a rat answering to the name of Vladimer Rodenski. His original home was the rodent ghettos of Catropolis where he grew up, but since becoming a fugitive of justice it was more often the hedges and the byways of the counties.

He started out in life as a good little rat, and with his intelligence and nimbleness, it looked as though he would go as far as a rat could in a cat dominated society. His parents had taught him to be satisfied with his lot, and satisfied he was. That was until his father was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and mistaken for a troublemaker. The cat-wardens chased him as far as the rat neighbourhood where the neighbours banded together to fend them off. The end result was, both of Vladimer's parents and several of the neighbours were taken away, the house boarded up, and young Vladimer, left to roam the streets.

Even then, he did well for himself, and got into as little mischief as he could. He even continued to attend school, until the school master, a cat -- schools run by rodents weren't allowed in the city -- began giving him notes to take to his parents demanding his school fees. Then, he simply stopped going to school, and spent more time looking for food. It was when winter approached that life for an honest young rat without a home became hard to cope with. But banding together with other street urchins made the living easier, though not the staying out of mischief.

As he grew into an adult, Vladimer Rodenski continued to develop into a street-wise survivalist with a resentment against the society that had made him that way. He learned well from every mistake. From each tangle with the authorities, he gained know-how in avoiding further trouble. Whenever he managed to get jobs as a messenger, or other odd jobs, he used the opportunity to observe cat life closely. The attitudes of the cats he met daily taught him to hate their culture, but not so much that he couldn't learn a thing or two from them. He learned what made cat society purr, and ways to turn it to his advantage. Gradually, he pieced together his knowledge of every level of society to form ideas of how an ideal rodent nation could work, given the chance. He spread his ideas via the print media.

Both his experience and his charisma drew others to him until his name was a household word in every rodent home. Of course he was too dangerous to be allowed to run free in the city, so he fled to the counties.

The education that he managed to obtain for himself enabled him to write persuasive pamphlets, which the underground printing presses reproduced by the thousands, and the network of rats and other rodents that had joined his cause distributed throughout the kingdom. Some of the presses were literally underground, operated by moles.

Two of Rodenski's closest colleagues were his cousin, Ivan Von Ratsburg and a mouse named David Mousecovitz. Ivan was the nephew of Rodenski's mother, who was of the Von Ratsburg line of noble rats. Long, long before, in ancient history, the forebears of the Von Ratsburgs were a dynasty of rat kings, the last one being defeated by the Nutcracker in a fierce battle, which was later celebrated in a ballet presentation of that name. Rodenski was only reunited with that part of the family since becoming a fugitive, but from the moment they met, Vladimer's and Ivan's hearts were bonded by the cords of family ties and a common cause.

David Mousecovitz was a most valuable contact mouse for the mouse community, as he was on many of the inter-village mouse committees, and

even had a seat on the Kmousett. That's where the experts in mouse law meet to discuss the finer points of proper mouse conduct and inter-community relations. Also, he was quite an accomplished violinist, and was often featured in the concert halls of Catropolis. He had even gained the respect of the cat community. His activities in the rodent liberation front were, of course, under cover.

David Mousecovitz was travelling, one day, from Mouseburg to the twin cities, Red-Leicester and Double-Goucestershire, on his bicycle. In the basket in the front was propped his violin case, and strapped to the back was a carpet bag containing files, a couple of legal volumes, some sheet music, a change of socks and underclothes, a towel, a night-shirt and a toothbrush. In Mouseburg, he had just met with a subcommittee of the Kmousett, and now he was on his way to play at a concert in Double-Goucestershire.

While swerving to avoid puddles and rocks that jutted through the gravel road he kept his eyes peeled for a cottage of a certain description that someone had discretely passed on to him in the pub across from the Kmousett chamber. At one point, he stopped to ask directions from a sheep.

'Thatch roof? All the cottages down this way have thatch roofs, mate - delicious too, I might add if one can reach them. Green window boxes? There's two houses just up the road with window boxes, mate.'

'Thank you very much, sir.'

'G'day mate.'

That was enough for David. He went on his way while the sheep went back to his grazing. The house he wanted would also be surrounded by thick bushes and a hedge. The first house he came to had green window boxes, but it had a tile roof, not thatch. That's the last time he'd ask directions from a sheep! But the next house answered to the description perfectly.

David gave the secret knock, and soon the door was opened a crack by a squirrel whom David knew as Roary McNut.

'Ah, it is you, come on in!' said Roary.

David laid his violin case and carpet bag down by the coat rack, the squirrel took his coat and hat, and directed him into a room joining the corridor. There was a fire roaring in the fireplace.

'Mr. Mouscovitz, good of you to come by on such short notice.' It was Rodenski, who was seated by himself at the end of the wooden table with a rat-pint of ale. 'I knew it must be you from that squeaky bicycle of yours. When will you get that thing oiled? Roary, be a good squirrel and get this gentlemouse a mouse-pint.'

'Half a mouse-pint, thank you,' said David. 'So, Colonel Von Ratsburg hasn't arrived yet?'

'Still on his way.'

'Have you given any thought to the question of the new order?' David asked, when Roary had left the room.

'What are your views on the subject?'

'Considering that the cat kingdom is a monarchy, and the abuses of power are readily apparent, it would be much simpler to rally the sentiments of the wider rodent community by declaring our new order as a republic, with the opportunity for all animals to be represented in a parliament,' answered David.

'There will be representation in any case. A king can have limited power, and preside over a parliament, with the additional benefit that he could act as a guarantor of democracy.'

'But that doesn't seem like such a sharp distinction as would a republic.'

'The distinction,' said Rodenski, 'is that we are rodents; they are cats. This is a war of liberation - of the rodents throwing off the shackles of cat rule. Once we have obtained our liberation, we can have a republic, or we can have a monarchy. Let the rodents decide that for themselves. That way, we don't have to be tied down by any campaign rhetoric. That's the beauty of it!'

David nodded, with a gleam of realisation in his eyes.

Just then, came the secret knock from the door.

'Ah, that will be Colonel Von Ratsburg,' said Rodenski.

Soon, the door to the corridor opened, and in strode Ivan Von Ratsburg, still in his great-coat, with a sword hanging by his side. The coat looked like part of a military officer's uniform from a bygone regime.

'What ho!' he said in his usual booming voice (booming to a rat or mouse, but still probably on the squeaky side to anyone else).

'Glad you could make it, cousin,' said Rodenski.

'Cheers, to be sure,' said David.

Another rat pint along with a mouse pint of ale were brought in.

'So what's this meeting about then?' said Von Ratsburg.

'Some ideas I have, but before we get into that, there's something I wanted to ask you about: The grape vine has it that the kittens of the Royal Feline University are sympathetic to our cause. Can either of you fill me in?'

'Ah, yes,' responded David. 'It appears that a certain Dr. Catrick Siswart has opened some of his pupil's minds by relating his war experiences, in which he was befriended by a mouse family somewhere in the region of Co. Mullen. It appears that the mice saved his life.'

'A-ha,' responded Rodenski thoughtfully. The look on his face showed that he didn't know what to think of a cat having any sense of appreciation whatsoever towards a mouse.

'When did this happen?' enquired Von Ratsburg.

'During the Wild Dog Campaigns.'

'Is the mouse family still there?'

'I would have to find out more, like their names and other details. There were many refugees from that area that the mouse councils had to account for. Some of them returned after the campaigns, but quite a large number resettled elsewhere,' said David.

'Perhaps,' said Von Ratsburg, 'Some benefit can be achieved by making contact with the kittens. Can they be made to work for us?'

'Against their own community?'

'Very young minds can be made to do anything.'

'Mousecovitz,' said Rodenski, 'You have contact with the university. Why don't you try to feel them out and find out anything you can about them, and perhaps see if you can influence some of them.'

'In fact,' said David, 'Right after my concert in Double-Goucestershire, I'll be playing first violin at the university auditorium for a performance of the *Nutcracker*.'

'The *Nutcracker*!' snorted Von Ratsburg almost choking in his ale.

Rodenski was also taken aback, but it was he who brought calm. 'Come, come, Ivan, it's an opportunity. He has the chance to mingle with the enemy and forward our cause. In a war, one must stoop ever so low at times.'

'Yes, ever so low,' muttered Von Ratsburg with a leery glance.

'...like turning kittens against their own community,' muttered David in return.

The other issues were brought to the table, and after they were resolved, David excused himself and went on his way.

As the squeak, squeak, squeak of his bicycle faded out, Rodenski turned to Von Ratsburg, and said, 'He was of the opinion that the new order should be republican.'

'Is that the position of whole mouse community?'

'The mice are free thinkers.'

'What did you say to him?' asked Von Ratsburg.

'I said the issue is not republicanism versus monarchism, but freedom from cat rule, and that we don't have to be tied down to any doctrine. Once the rodents have achieved victory, let the rodents decide for themselves.'

'That's where you must be careful. You promise them a choice, and what will they choose? The mice are free thinkers, as you say, and of course they'll choose a republic. What about the squirrels? What about the rabbits?'

'The rats will be on our side, certainly,' said Rodenski.

'Ah, yes, the rats. Remind them of the past glories of the Ratsburg empire. They will rally. If it came to a show of force, the rats are the strongest of all the rodents by far.'

'Yes, in a fight, we'd win, hands down. But let's hope it doesn't come to fighting with our fellow rodents,' said Rodenski.

'With your power of persuasion, Vladimer, and my military prowess, it won't, I assure you.'

There was a pause in which Rodenski wondered if his cousin believed it as firmly as he himself hoped it.

Von Ratsburg added, 'You can also rest assured that the Ratsburg throne will be yours at the outset -- with the condition attached, of course.'

'Thanks to the cats, no offspring will ever proceed from my body. As my nearest relative, the throne will pass from me to you, and on to your eldest son.'

'Here, then, is to the revival of the Ratsburg dynasty,' said Ivan, lifting his ale mug. Rodenski did likewise.

Then, it was Von Ratsburg's time to leave.

Outside, wearing his cocked officer's hat, he whistled. Out from the pub around the bend sprinted Pepe, his chihuahua. Von Ratsburg saddled him and climbed on to his back.

'Where, Señor Ivan?' enquired the Chihuahua.

'County Mullen,' he said, bracing himself.

At once, Pepe took off racing in the direction of County Mullen, barking as he went, Ivan expertly clinging to his back.

'Please stop the infernal barking, Pepe,' ordered Von Ratsburg.

'Sí Señor,' said Pepe.

• • •

David Mousecovitz played an entire violin concerto by Mousezart, followed by a couple of short pieces by Tchaicatzky rendered for the violin. The mice of Red-Leicester and Double-Goucestershire applauded and applauded, and after several curtain calls, he played, for an encore, Johann Mauss' Tails from the Vienna Woods, following which, they all called it a night.

David put up in the tavern, and by early the next morning, was peddling away on his squeaky bicycle towards Catropolis. It was still early for the performance of the Nutcracker, even the rehearsals, but David had been given an assignment. It would be best, he thought, to get right to the bottom of it with all the time he had.

- Chapter the Third - The Cat-Cell

--

• further lessons in the School of Hard Knocks • Catrick meets Mr. Mousecovitz • in which
Catrick is imprisoned for his association with the student movement •

Catrick was more disturbed than ever by what he was hearing. This was beyond just befriending a mouse, or cultivating a relationship with a rabbit, or a rat. Some of the kittens were even joining the rodent demonstrations, and a couple had been jailed for a night for throwing rocks at cat-wardens during a riot that ensued.

Parents of students were lodging protests to Dr. McTabbie, the president of the university. He, in turn, called for Catrick and sat him down to do some explaining. Catrick assured him as best he could that all he had done, really, was tell the story of the mouse family that had rescued him during the Wild Dog Campaigns, and encourage the fostering of friendships with mice and other rodents. Nothing more. And he absolutely didn't condone the subversive activity that some of the kittens had been indulging in of late.

Dr. McTabbie was half satisfied and let him go.

'There's a mouse here to see you, Dr. Siswart,' said the administrator, as he arrived in the professors' chambers. 'Also, some of the students would like to see you in the dining hall.'

'Thank you, Miss Fritz.'

Catrick walked first to his office, where he met a grey mouse in a dusty suit, holding a bowler hat.

'David Mousecovitz at your service, Sir,' said the mouse with a polite bow.

'Catrick Siswart at yours. What may I do for you?'

He handed Catrick a calling card, and said:

'I'm a member of the Kmousett, and I'm on several of the mouse boards, and I'm actually in the city to direct the performance of the Nutcracker in just a few days. I thought I would like to make your acquaintance, as I believe we share some common interests.'

'Ah! Mr. Mousecovitz the violinist! I'm a leading admirer of yours,' said Catrick. 'Why don't you sit here while I confer for a few moments with some of the students, and then we can go out for a sandwich. I'll ask Miss Fritz to fix you a cup of tea in the mean time.'

David was pleased to wait. Catrick met briefly with the students, and told them sternly that things were going too far and had to be put on hold for a while before they all landed in the soup. There would be no meetings of the 'Phillorodent society' for the foreseeable future.

On his way back to his office, he noticed some cat-wardens in the reception area. He rejoined his guest, and was beginning to put on his hat and overcoat when there was a loud bang at the door.

It was three cat-wardens. 'Dr. Catrick Siswart, I place you under arrest for subversive activity and encouraging unrest.'

'B-but...'

'There's a mouse here too!'

'No doubt part of the conspiracy. Bring him along for questioning.'

'Sir,' protested Catrick. 'This is David Mousecovitz, he has nothing to do with any of the unrest, I assure you. He's a...'

'We'll be the judge of that. Come along then both of you.'

As they were led along, Catrick mumbled non stop to David, 'I sincerely apologise for this - I mean - this is a thoroughly unexpected turn of events, and you shouldn't be mixed up in all this - oh dear me - please accept my apologies...'

Being apologised to so profusely by a cat was almost enough of a surprise to David to offset the shock of being arrested.

When they were finally bundled in to a cell, he had one or two questions to ask of his would-be host.

'Dr. Siswart, I understand you knew some mice in County Mullen. Can you tell me their names?'

'Their family name was Isaacs. Aaron and Rivka Isaacs, and their seven children. Avram was the oldest, next was Naomi, then Nachaama, then Joel, and the twins, Yachov and Yochannan, and the youngest, Yachoved.'

David was impressed that he remembered their names so well as to recite them without hesitation.

'How did you come to meet them?'

Catrick told his story, and soon David saw, for himself, the light burning in his eye as he told it.

David was quiet for a while. There were two questions going around inside his head now. One had just been asked by Catrick, which was, could he find any clue of the Isaacs family's whereabouts. This, he promised to look into. The other, he was silently asking himself, which had to do with his mission to probe the kitten movement, and Dr. Siswart. There was much more here than he had dreamed. Could he simply turn them around and use them to fight their own kind, and then be rid of them - as seemed to be Von Ratsburg's idea?

Catrick had a few more questions, but mostly to do with Tchaicatsky, the Nutcracker and his other works. By the time the prison warden came to call for Catrick, they were deep in conversation, like old friends, discussing subjects of interest to them both, music, opera and ballet.

They began by grilling him about his association with the mouse. He assured them that this was none other than David Mousecovitz, the violinist, who was scheduled to direct the performance of the Nutcracker at the university auditorium just a few days hence. He had come to discuss subjects of common interest, no doubt because of an essay Catrick had written recently regarding the relationship of Tchaicatsky's Nutcracker and the development of cat culture and historical understanding. Though Mr. Mousecovitz hadn't actually broached that subject, he was positive that was the reason for the visit, as several notable personalities had already expressed an interest in his research and conclusions.

The wardens and investigators conferred among themselves, and concluded that the arrest of David Mousecovitz had been a mistake. Someone went to fetch him from the cell, and after verifying his credentials, released him.

Now they went on to the original reason for the arrest. Catrick found them much more difficult to convince than Dr. McTabbie. Finally, the chief investigator decided to call for a hearing in a few days to see if there was sufficient evidence to bring charges. Inquiries would be made, but in the mean time, Catrick would be confined to a cat cell.

Being in a cat cell, as opposed to a mouse or rat cell meant that he had tea five times a day: once in the morning with eggs, toast and baked beans; mid morning and mid afternoon with cake and biscuits; at noon with a tin of cat food; and in the evening with sardine sandwiches; and last, there was a saucer of milk at bedtime. The mattress was soft and without fleas, and included a pillow of goose down, and clean sheets. There was also an overstuffed arm chair, and a newspaper was brought every morning.

Among the lessons previously learned from the School of Hard Knocks was that of not taking such things for granted. The solitude of the cell made for just the right atmosphere for yet another lesson to sink in.

Catrick had clearly landed on all fours in the middle of something. Just what, he wasn't quite sure.

What had he done? Just as he had told Dr. McTabbie and the interrogating officers, all he'd essentially done was tell his story. What was it about a story of the kindness on the part of some field mice that it should spark such a response among the kittens? So far, he could see nothing wrong. But then, there were the extremes - some kittens actually siding with the rebels.

On the way to his cell, he had seen inside some of the mouse and the rat cells. How thankful he was that Mr. Mousecovitz didn't end up in one of those! Then, he was surprised by the comfort of the cat cell. Why such a big difference? Why should he get tea and biscuits, when all the mice and rats got, were dry crusts and smelly tap water?

One of the kittens, he now remembered, when taken in for his part in the rioting, had demanded to be put into the same cells as the mice. When he first heard about that, Catrick just shook his head, and sighed, 'Kittens! What next?' Now, he could see why.

Kittens see things that adult cats either don't see, or else take for granted.

That there was injustice was now more obvious to Catrick than ever. Ought he to have joined in with the demonstrations? Well, perhaps not, but at least, the kittens were putting words into action.

Catrick could have gone on forever lamenting the injustices against the mice and other rodents, while continuing to enjoy his privileged status as a cat - a Royal Siamese at that! But when his pupils went out and began doing according to what they believed, what was his reaction? 'This is going too far!' 'No more meetings of the Phillorodent Society!' 'This is fanaticism!'

Misguided they were, perhaps, but who was guiding them?

Professor Catrick. Who else?

And how was Professor Catrick guiding his pupils?

Well, he winced a time or two when someone suggested throwing a rock through the big window of the royal palace; said, 'Come, come, be serious,' when another suggested they all join the rodent demonstrations; slapped his forehead when a few of them actually did; and finally cancelled all further meetings.

When had he ever offered a positive suggestion? It was always no, don't do that, no that's too much - always what not to do, but never any creative alternatives.

And so they were misguided. And who had misguided them?

Maybe Catrick was guilty of encouraging unrest and subversive activity. Maybe he did deserve to be put in prison.

But did he deserve to be sitting in a cat-cell, when the rodents ...

His thoughts must have gone around and around in the same circle at least a dozen times. When he came yet again to the part about making positive suggestions, he suddenly found himself stumped.

What positive suggestions could he have made?

What can a group of kittens do to address the injustices of society?

What had he done himself? He couldn't help but feel that something he had done was right, but what?

He had told his story. What was it about that story?

After a can of tuna cat chow served with a bun and a cup of tea, he curled up on his bed for his afternoon catnap.

When he woke up, he continued to lie there, his tail slowly going around and around in every direction while his mind went over the events of that adventure long long ago, and his sojourn with the Isaacs family.

He remembered that every time the subject of the wars came up, Mr. Isaacs would take down the big book from the mantelpiece and read one of his favourite passages:

*He will judge between the nations
And arbitrate for many species.*

*Then they will hammer their swords into plow-blades
And their spears into pruning-knives;
Nations will not raise swords at each other,
And they will no longer learn war.*

Who was he reading about? Mr. Isaacs said it was the one who made all the animals. He would, one day, restore everything to the way they were at the beginning.

*The wolf will live with the lamb;
The leopard lie down with the kid;
Calf, young lion and fattened lamb together,
With a baby mouse to lead them.
Cow and bear will feed together
Their young will lie down together
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
A kitten will play on a cobra's hole,
A puppy put his paw in a viper's nest.
They will not hurt or destroy
Anywhere on my holy mountain,
For the earth will be as full
Of the knowledge of the Maker
As water covering the sea.*

Mr. Isaacs had read those passages so often, Catrick remembered them by heart. Just now, the act of going over them again and again in his mind was doing something for him. He did that until he went to sleep again.

He was awakened by the arrival of afternoon tea and biscuits. His drowsy mind had jumbled up the lines, and he was thinking, 'The cat shall lie down with the rat.'

Almost spontaneously, he asked the uniformed cat who brought the tea, 'Can I please make a request to the prison warden?'

'I'll call him for you,' he said.

Presently, the warden came to the cell.

'I request to be placed in a rat's cell,' said Catrick.

The warden looked at him as though he were just slightly off in the head, but said, 'Okay.'

Presently a guard came and ushered him down the corridor, through an iron door, down another corridor, and into a bare cell with only a wooden bench on the far end. His tea and biscuits were left in the other cell, untouched.

This actually wasn't as bad as it seemed at first. For the rest of the day, he took cat-naps, interspersed with the lines from the big book going through his head.

He was happier here.

- Chapter the Fourth - A Taste of Victory

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• in which it's made known what a squirrel has under his kilt • Colonel Von Ratsburg trees the cats • fair dinkum sheep • news for the presses • Rodenski suggests an easier line •

The squirrel militia was lightly armed, but that didn't matter to Colonel Von Ratsburg. From where he, his Chihuahua, and the rat militia waited, hidden behind the bushes, he could see both the squirrels and the advancing cat army.

The cats had never fought squirrels before, so they weren't sure what to expect. They continued to advance as the squirrels simply stood, jeered, threw nuts, while a few of them ran to the forefront, turned around, lifted their kilts and wriggled their bushy tails at them.

At this, the cats sighed, rolled their eyes, but continued to advance.

Colonel Von Ratsburg kept his eyes on the cat captain, who now had his sword up in the air, ready to wave it down as the signal to fire. He was a good judge of cat actions, so just a split second before the cat captain should have yelled 'fire', Von Ratsburg gave a shrill whistle.

At that, all the squirrels turned their bushy tails and ran for the trees across the meadow.

So, instead of yelling, 'fire', the cat captain yelled, 'charge!'

Across the meadow, the squirrels began scampering up the trees, and into the branches. As soon as the last squirrel was up, the cats reached the trees, and they began to follow the squirrels up. By the time, the cats reached the branches, however, the squirrels were jumping from tree to tree, and away from the cats.

Then, Von Ratsburg gave two shrill whistles, and from somewhere behind him, off to the side, ran a pack of wild dogs barking ferociously. The cats that had remained on the ground, including the captain, looked and immediately they, too, fled up the trees.

Now, the cats, who are not adept at jumping from tree to tree, were in the branches, peering at the dogs below, who were dancing around, barking and yelling 'Hee Hah!'. The squirrels were now out of shooting range, so the cats began to find their positions, and take aim at the dogs.

However, before they could do so, Von Ratsburg gave three sharp whistles, and the rat militia appeared from behind the bushes and began firing at the cats in the trees until they were falling like ripe fruit.

The dogs, as Von Ratsburg had promised they could, devoured what they were able, put the rest into sacks, but left the weapons and ammunition for the rodents. This was fine with the dogs, who much preferred their Smith and Moussen revolvers to the rifles used by the army. Those cats that remained, the rats ordered down at gun-point, and took prisoner. The dogs, with the cat sacks slung over their shoulders, began marching off. Their leader, 'Mad' Mutt Roverson, waved Von Ratsburg a friendly goodbye.

'We'll stay in touch,' said Von Ratsburg.

'Ya'll take care now, ye hear?' said Mutt.

Now, the Western half of County Mullen was held by the rodent front - for the time being at least. Von Ratsburg knew the cats would soon be back in greater force. Then, Mad Mutt and his dog pack would again be of valuable help. The squirrels would also be vital, and now that an important victory had been won, the rabbits, chipmunks and moles would be emboldened to take part. However, now that the local rat militia had a taste of victory, they could confidently handle the rest without Von Ratsburg's presence.

Von Ratsburg consulted with the lieutenants, and prepared to depart for County Blakeston. This time, he didn't go dressed as a colonel. After such a

direct confrontation, the cats would be on the lookout. In just a few short hours, all roads in and out of the western half of County Mullen would be closed. Von Ratsburg had to make his exit before that happened, as there was work to do in other parts of the kingdom.

So, dressed in the tattered outfit of a farmer, with a straw hat instead of the plumed colonel's hat, he set off on Pepe's back for County Blakeston. Pepe wore his new broad brimmed hat, a present from one of the wild dogs. They went along the roads for as long as they dared, and then began sprinting across pastures and over hedges. Pepe knew how to jump, and Ivan, how to hang on. What sheep they passed just looked. One of them asked, 'Where's the fire, mate?'

When they came to a major road, Ivan asked a sheep, 'Have any cat patrols been through here?'

'Why do you want to know, mate?'

'Well, you know what they're like. I'm sure you wouldn't want to tangle with them, would you?'

'We're fair dinkum law abiding sheep, we are, mate,' said the sheep. 'Why should they tangle with us? It ain't even shearing time is it!'

'You keep calling me "mate", but you won't even give a helping hoof. Bark, Pepe!'

Pepe barked, and the whole flock of sheep scattered across the pasture.

Von Ratsburg decided to chance it, and they took off down the road. The wind was in their face, so Pepe could catch the scent if there were any cat patrols ahead. On the road, Von Ratsburg could rest a bit, not having to hang on so tightly.

Not far along, they smelled feline, so they took to the pastures again.

The next day, after spending a night under a hedge, and travelling along in the same fashion, he finally reached the cottage where Rodenski was hiding out.

'How did it go at the front?' Rodenski asked as soon as Von Ratsburg sat down.

'Victory! We just need to get the word out through the underground networks and presses.'

'That will have the whole rodent community emboldened for action.'

'And, we must mobilise the militias on the east side in time for the cats to do massive troop movements westward,' said Von Ratsburg.

'Great strategy, Colonel. Hit from all sides at once. The moles will be here this afternoon. Give them all the details, and they'll have it off the presses by tomorrow. By early next week, word will have reached the city. Then, no doubt, Ratsloff and Ratsovich will make maximum use of it.'

'Yes, Ratsloff and Ratsovich know the ways of the city like no one else.'

Von Ratsburg was hungry so a meal was brought in. After some more talk about strategy and victory, Von Ratsburg said, 'Have you felt out any of the other rodent leaders regarding their ideas for the new order?'

'I don't think they're too enthusiastic about simply having a rat dynasty take over from the cat one. I didn't suggest that overtly, of course, but I could sense concern about who is to have the balance of power when the time comes. I think our own expectations must be lowered a bit, as far as that goes.'

Von Ratsburg frowned. After a pause, Rodenski continued:

'If we simply have a parliament, with a moderator or a president, and then each species can set up its own style of leadership, I think the Von Ratsburg line can fit within that kind of framework as representing the rats.'

'That could be a start,' said the Colonel. 'But I think with your influence and my skill, we can do much more than that.'

'I'm sure that under such a system, I would gain the presidency, and from there, we could slowly work our way into a permanent leadership role for us.'

'But still controlled by a parliament! The ancient Ratsburgs weren't encumbered with any such thing.'

'It's a new age, cousin. we may have to bend a little,' said Rodenski.
'Perhaps,' sighed, Von Ratsburg, 'but ... '

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