

King o' the Cats

Told by Aaron Shepard

Adapted by LHU Language Center

Characters:

Narrators 1 & 2, Peter, Bishop, King, Father Allen, Tom, Cats (2 to 6)

NARRATOR 1: Young Peter Black was a good man, but everyone said he had one big fault. He loved to tell wild stories.

NARRATOR 2: Peter was the sexton at the Church. He lived right next to Father Allen's house. Father Allen had warned him.

FATHER ALLEN: (*sternly*) Peter, this is the last job you're likely to get in this town. If you want to keep it, your wild stories must stop!

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NARRATOR 1: One night Peter couldn't sleep. He tossed and he turned and saw the windows of the church ablaze with light.

NARRATOR 2: Peter pulled on a coat, crossed the yard, and heard a sound from the church.

BISHOP: (*as if performing a ceremony*) Meow, meow

PETER: Sounds like a cat!

NARRATOR 1: He peered around the curtain hung at the church entrance, and what he saw made him gasp.

PETER: (*gasps*)

NARRATOR 2: There was not *one* cat, but *hundreds* of cats. All of them sat upright just like people.

NARRATOR 1: On the steps to the altar, a big black cat was kneeling with his head bowed. The bishop placed the crown on the head of the kneeling cat

BISHOP: *Meow, meow*

NARRATOR 2: Peter raced back to his cottage and stayed trembling till morning.

NARRATOR 1: Bright and early, Peter was over to see Father Allen.

PETER: (*urgently, wide-eyed and gesturing*) Father Allen, I came to tell you about something terribly weird in the church last night.

TOM: (*like a normal cat*) *Meow.*

NARRATOR 2: . . . said the priest's cat, Tom.

PETER: (*looking and pointing at Tom*) Yes, just like that. (*looks back at Father Allen*) And when I looked, there were hundreds of cats in the church.

FATHER ALLEN: (*looking at him sternly and interrupting*) Peter Do you remember what I told you about wild stories?

PETER: But, Father—

FATHER ALLEN: (*changing subject*) Listen, Peter, I have an errand for you. Will you walk over to Brambleton today and deliver a message to Father Rowan?

NARRATOR 1: Peter would and Peter did. But he didn't get to it till late afternoon, and by the time he started home, it was already dusk.

NARRATOR 2, CATS, & KING: *Meow, meow.*

PETER: (*in alarm*) Is it those cats again?

NARRATOR 2: . . . said Peter in alarm, ducking behind a tree.

NARRATOR 1: An Irish setter raced into the meadow, barking. Right behind were half a dozen cats riding—yes, *riding*—on the backs of foxes. The big black cat at their head was wearing a golden crown.

NARRATOR 2: At first Peter thought the setter was leading the cats. Then he realized,

PETER: (*in shocked surprise, to himself*) No, they're hunting the dog!

NARRATOR 1: As the cat with the crown rode by a large rock, his fox tripped and stumbled and the cat went flying.

KING: (*in frightened scream*) MEOW!

NARRATOR 1: He struck his head on the rock and lay still.

NARRATOR 2: The other cats gave up the chase. Then with loud, mournful cries of

NARRATOR 2 & CATS: (*loudly, mournfully*) Meow, meow.

NARRATOR 1: Peter stood shaking, then nipped off home.

NARRATOR 1: He found Father Allen at supper, with his cat, Tom.

PETER: (*urgently, breathlessly*) Father, it's about those cats. I was crossing a meadow, and I heard a dog barking and all these cats crying *meow*—

TOM: (*like a normal cat*) Meow.

NARRATOR 2: . . . said Tom.

PETER: (*looking and pointing at Tom*) Yes, just like that. (*looks back at Father Allen*) And then the cats came riding on foxes, all of them chasing this dog, but then the cat with the crown fell off and hit his head and . . .

and . . . (*looking at Tom, perplexed*) Father, why's Tom staring at me like that?

FATHER ALLEN: (*sternly*) Peter, I've warned you often enough about your wild stories. (*vehemently*) *That's enough, Peter!* (*pauses for a deep breath to calm himself*) Now, I'm sorry to ask you so late, but I have another chore for you. Mrs. Pennyweather has passed on suddenly, and tomorrow's the funeral. I need you to dig her grave—(*pointedly, almost ominously*) tonight.

NARRATOR 1: So it was that Peter was digging in the graveyard. It wasn't till right around midnight that he finished.

NARRATOR 2: Just as he was about to climb out, he heard a distant

NARRATOR 1, BISHOP, & CATS: (*plaintively, in unison*) *Meow.*

NARRATOR 1: . . . then again,

NARRATOR 1, BISHOP, & CATS: *Meow.*

NARRATOR 1: . . . and again,

NARRATOR 1, BISHOP, & CATS: *Meow.*

PETER: (*in terror*) It's the cats!

NARRATOR 1: Coming across the graveyard was the black bishop cat, and behind him were six more black cats, carrying on their shoulders a small coffin.

NARRATOR 2: Their path went right by the grave where Peter hid, and when they were but a few feet away, the bishop held up a paw for a halt. Then he turned and stared straight at Peter and *spoke*.

BISHOP: (*loudly, slowly, imperiously*) Tell Tom Tildrum . . . that Tim Toldrum's . . . *dead*.

NARRATOR 2, BISHOP, & CATS: *Meow.*

NARRATOR 1: Well, Peter scrambled out of that grave and bolted for Father Allen's.

NARRATOR 2: He pounded on the door, shouting,

PETER: Father! Father! Let me in!

FATHER ALLEN: (*befuddled*) Peter, what's going on?

PETER: (*more urgently than ever*) Father, I was out digging Mrs. Pennyweather's grave when I heard a *meow*—

TOM: (*like a normal cat*) *Meow.*

NARRATOR 2: . . . said Tom.

PETER: (*looking and pointing at Tom*) Yes, just like that. (*looks back at Father Allen*) And I looked and saw the cats came right up next to me, . . . and . . . and (*looking at Tom, perplexed*) Father, why's Tom staring at me like that?

FATHER ALLEN: (*starting to lose patience*) Peter—

PETER: But, Father, I tell you, he *spoke* to me! I'm to tell Tom Tildrum that Tim Toldrum's dead. (*desperately*) But how can I tell Tom Tildrum that Tim Toldrum's dead when I don't know who Tom Tildrum *is*?

FATHER ALLEN: (*furiously*) Peter, this is the last straw. I've warned you again and again—

PETER: (*staring and pointing at Tom in terror*) Father! Look at Tom! Look at Tom!

NARRATOR 1: Tom was swaying,

NARRATOR 2: and Tom was swelling,

NARRATOR 1: and Tom was standing on his two hind legs,

NARRATOR 2: and then Tom *spoke*.

TOM: (*loudly, slowly, with rhythm*) *What? Tim Toldrum dead? Then I'm the King o' the Cats!*

NARRATOR 1: Tom leaped toward the fireplace, and with a single

TOM: (*loudly*) *Meow*.

NARRATOR 1: . . . he bounded up the chimney and was gone.

NARRATOR 2: (*gravely*) Never to be seen again.

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NARRATOR 1: After that, there was no more talk of Peter losing his job. But as for Father Allen

NARRATOR 2: Well, Father Allen was a good man, but everyone said he had one big fault. He loved to tell wild stories.