



~ Tabby and the Catfish ~



By Mia Bell



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For Emma McGeachie

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Chapter 1



THE GOLDEN BOAT

“Raise the anchor!” cried Princess Tabby.

“Set sail!” said her younger brother, Leo.

“Stop rushing me!” grumbled Felix, their older brother.

The royal kittens were crouching on a grassy bank in the palace gardens. The river ran past, crystal clear and sparkling in the sunshine. *It's the perfect day to try out our toy boat,* thought Tabby. *If only Felix would stop*

messing with it! The black cat was carefully checking every sail to make sure they were on straight.

“Let me do it!” said Leo, reaching for the boat. But Felix pulled it away and set it gently in the water.

“Wow!” they all gasped together. The boat sailed along, ticking like a watch. Their friend Clawdia’s father had made it out of shining gold. It had a little clockwork engine, moving sails, and an anchor that went up and down.

“It’s the best toy ever,” said Tabby as the boat sailed under a stone bridge.

“I’ll get it on the other side,” called Leo. He ran off in a flash of orange fur.

“But it’s my turn next!” yelled Tabby. She chased after him.

“Careful!” shouted Felix, following. “Don’t break it!”

The three kittens ran along the riverbank, their tails waving behind them. Tabby was the first one past the bridge, and the first to see the boat come bobbing out. *There it is!* Tabby leaned over the water, reaching as far as she could . . .

“Whoops!” cried Felix.

Tabby turned and saw him slip on the wet grass. He grabbed Leo’s paw, but Leo wobbled and bumped into Tabby. *Thump!* Tabby lost her balance. She waved her paws and stuck out her tail. But it was no good.

SPLASH!

All three royal kittens plunged into the river.

The cold water soaked Tabby. She splashed and shivered. “It’s horrible!” she cried. She hated getting wet, just as much as any other kitizen in Mewtopia.

“My whiskers are stuck to my face!” wailed Felix, popping up next to Tabby.

“I’VE GOT WATER IN MY EARS!” yelled Leo. “I CAN’T HEAR A THING!”

Tabby tried to stay calm. *A kitty hero shouldn’t be afraid of a little water...* “Let’s kitty-paddle back to the bank,” she said. “Like Nanny Mittens taught us.”

Together, the royal kittens kicked hard with their back paws and paddled with their front paws. They splashed their way back to the grass and pulled themselves up. They sat, panting on the bank. Their fur was all flat, and water dripped from their whiskers.

“Leaping fleas!” said Felix. “I’m glad that’s over.”



“Did anyone get the boat?” asked Leo, rubbing his ears.

Tabby spotted it drifting away from them. “There it is!” She pointed. But it was already out of reach, and moving fast in the current.

“We’ll never get it back now,” said Leo sadly. “It was my favorite toy.”

“It’s not *yours*,” said Felix. “And it wouldn’t even have floated if I hadn’t fixed the sails.”

“But if *you* hadn’t been so clumsy, we never would have lost it!” said Tabby.

“That’s enough!” said a familiar meow.

The royal kittens turned. King Pouncalot and Queen Elizapet were walking over the grass toward them, dressed in their crowns

and red capes. Normally Tabby was glad to see her parents. But today they looked very annoyed.

King Pouncalot gave each kitten a stern look. “Haven’t we warned you about playing near water? We’re cats, for meow’s sake!”

“And all this arguing,” added Queen Elizapet. “Today of all days!”

“The Peace Parade will begin soon,” said King Pouncalot. “And here you are, fighting . . . Well, I’m afraid we can’t let you ride on the royal boat with us now.”

The royal kittens gasped.

“But we always go on the royal boat!” cried Tabby.

“We *love* the Peace Parade,” added Felix.
“All the different boats, and the kitizens
cheering, and the brass band playing . . .”

“You’ll have to watch all that from beside
the river,” said Queen Elizapet.

“But—” began Leo.

“Not another word,” said Queen Elizapet.
“Back to your room to get dry!”

Tabby and her brothers were still shivering
and dripping as they went through a side
door into the palace courtyard. Tabby felt
ashamed. *I can’t believe we ruined our chance to
be part of the Peace Parade!*

“What’s going on over there?” said Felix.

Tabby saw a little crowd of cat lords and

ladies by a door, talking excitedly. They all wore their best clothes, ready for the Peace Parade.

“Make way!” called a voice from inside. Then Captain Edmund came marching out. The big orange tomcat was wearing his shiniest silver armor, and in one paw he held a golden torch. Magical orange flames flickered from the end.

“Meowza!” gasped Leo. “It’s the Torch of Peace!”

Tabby couldn’t help it—her tail flicked with excitement. “Last one there’s a stinky rat!” she called.

“Mom and Dad said . . .” began Felix. But Tabby was already running across the

courtyard, leaving wet paw prints behind her. She pushed through the crowd, with Leo, then Felix, following.

“Slow down there, kitties!” cried Captain Edmund. He held the torch away from them. “This torch has been lit for a hundred years, and we can’t have you splashing water on it!”

“Is it the Torch of Peace, sir?” asked Leo. He stopped next to Tabby. “Is it true that it’s really magical? Is it true that it keeps the peace among all kitizens, all through the land?”

“It most certainly is,” replied Captain Edmund. “And it will travel with the king and queen on the royal boat.”