

KATIE AND THE CAT WHO TALKED



Every Saturday, not far from where Katie lived, there was a market. Farmers came into town and set up their stalls in a car park. They sold the tastiest apples, the freshest eggs, and all sorts of vegetables that still had the mud from the fields on them. Katie liked to go there with her mum who looked for unusual herbs like sorrel, angelica and coltsfoot. Sometimes she made spells with these herbs, but quite often she just put them in her soups. One morning, as they were leaving the market, they passed an old lady who was standing on the corner holding a wicker basket.





“Little girl, do you want to see what I have inside this basket?” she asked.

Katie was a bit afraid, because she thought that perhaps she had something bad in the basket, like apples that were poisonous. Besides, she knew that she must never speak to strangers. But then she heard a little sound, “Mee-ow.”

“Oh Mum, can we look please?” she asked. Katie’s mum was curious to see too.



The old lady pulled back the cloth, and they saw that inside the basket, there were four little kittens clambering over each other.

“Oh please, they are so cute, Mum can we have one?” Mum shook her head.

“Oh please, please, can we have a kitten? I want one so much. I promise to look after it and besides,” she whispered, “a cat could help me with my magic.”

One of the kittens was black. Mum picked it up by the scruff on the back of its neck – the way a mother cat picks up her kittens. “All right,” she said. “We’ll buy this one.”



Back at home, the fluffy little creature did loads of incredibly cute things like playing with a ball of wool, looking in the mirror and thinking there was another cat there, and climbing in and out of Katie's shoes.

"Mum, what sort of magic can cats do?" asked Katie.

"Cats are very clever and can be your ears and eyes," said Mum. "But you must be very careful. Cats don't have much tact. They can get you into all sorts of trouble."

"By my cat's the cleverest of all," said Katie. She picked up her kitten and kissed him. "I shall call you Solomon," she said. "Because you are so much wiser than ordinary cats." The months passed and Solomon grew up into a serious young cat who liked to sit and watch Katie do her homework.

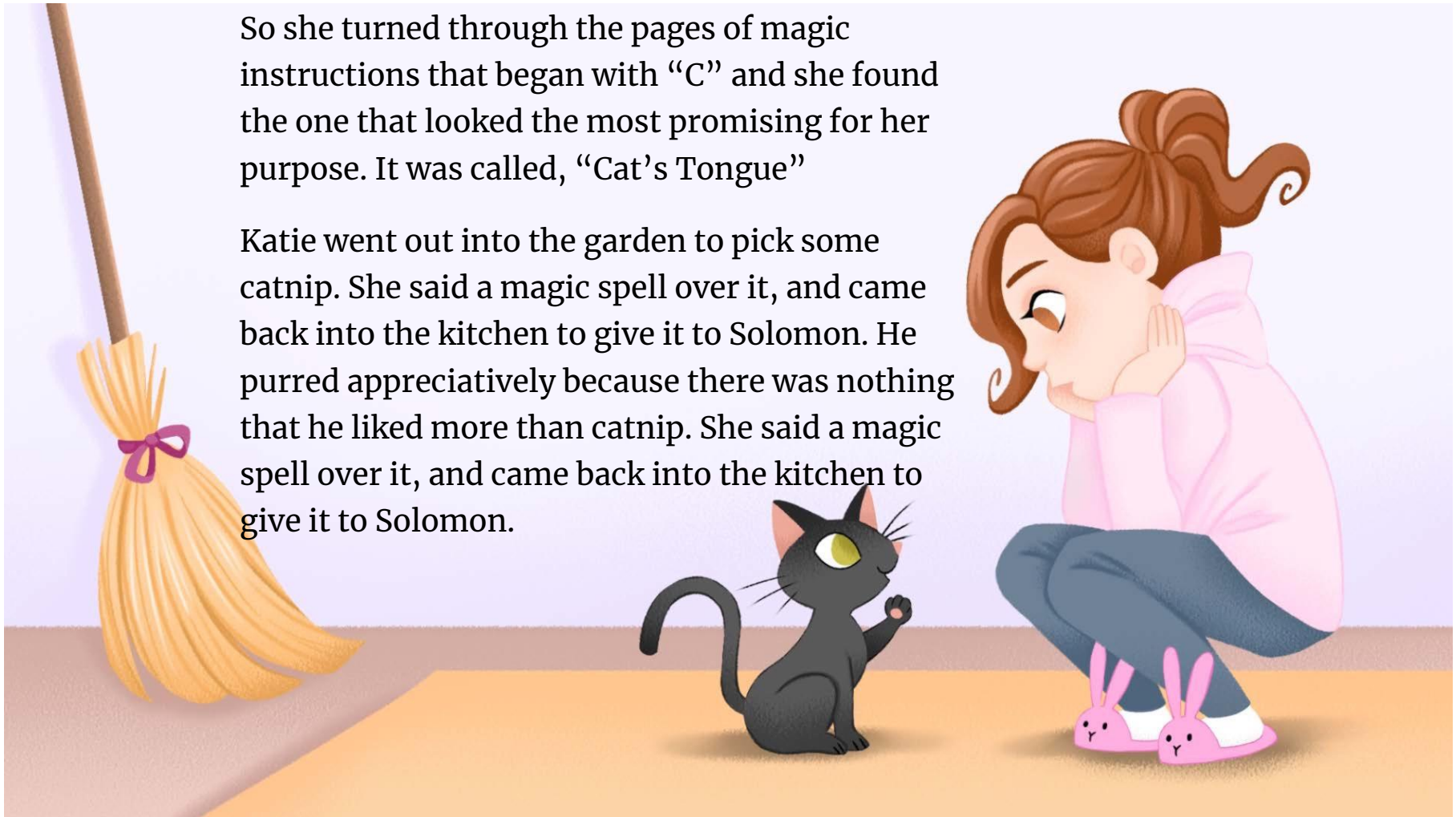
He often went out for long walks on his own, and Katie wondered where he wandered and what he saw.

“Wouldn’t it be nice to ask him?” she thought. And then she had an idea. She went into her mother’s room and pulled down a volume from the Encyclopedia of Magic. There were some spells in there that were so secret that they weren’t even on the internet yet



So she turned through the pages of magic instructions that began with “C” and she found the one that looked the most promising for her purpose. It was called, “Cat’s Tongue”

Katie went out into the garden to pick some catnip. She said a magic spell over it, and came back into the kitchen to give it to Solomon. He purred appreciatively because there was nothing that he liked more than catnip. She said a magic spell over it, and came back into the kitchen to give it to Solomon.



“Now Solomon,” said Katie, “can you tell me where you went on your walk today and what you saw?”

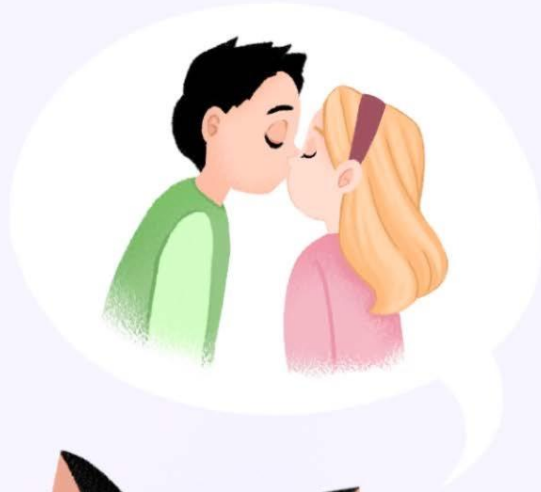
“Murrrrr,” said Solomon.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand cat talk,” said Katie.

“I was just thinking,” said Solomon, “what to tell you first. Would you like to know about the mouse that I caught and ate for breakfast?”

“Not really.”





“Or would you like to know about the oak tree where I sharpen my claws?”

“Not especially.”

“Then shall I tell you who I saw with your friend Isis?”

“Yes,” said Katie. “That would be rather more interesting.”

“I saw Isis sitting in her garden with Tim eating ice creams, and do you know what? They kissed!”

“Huh! They didn’t!”

And Katie was so excited that she couldn’t wait to tell everyone at school all about Isis and Tim.

But of course she wasn't going to tell Isis or Tim themselves, because they obviously already knew about it.

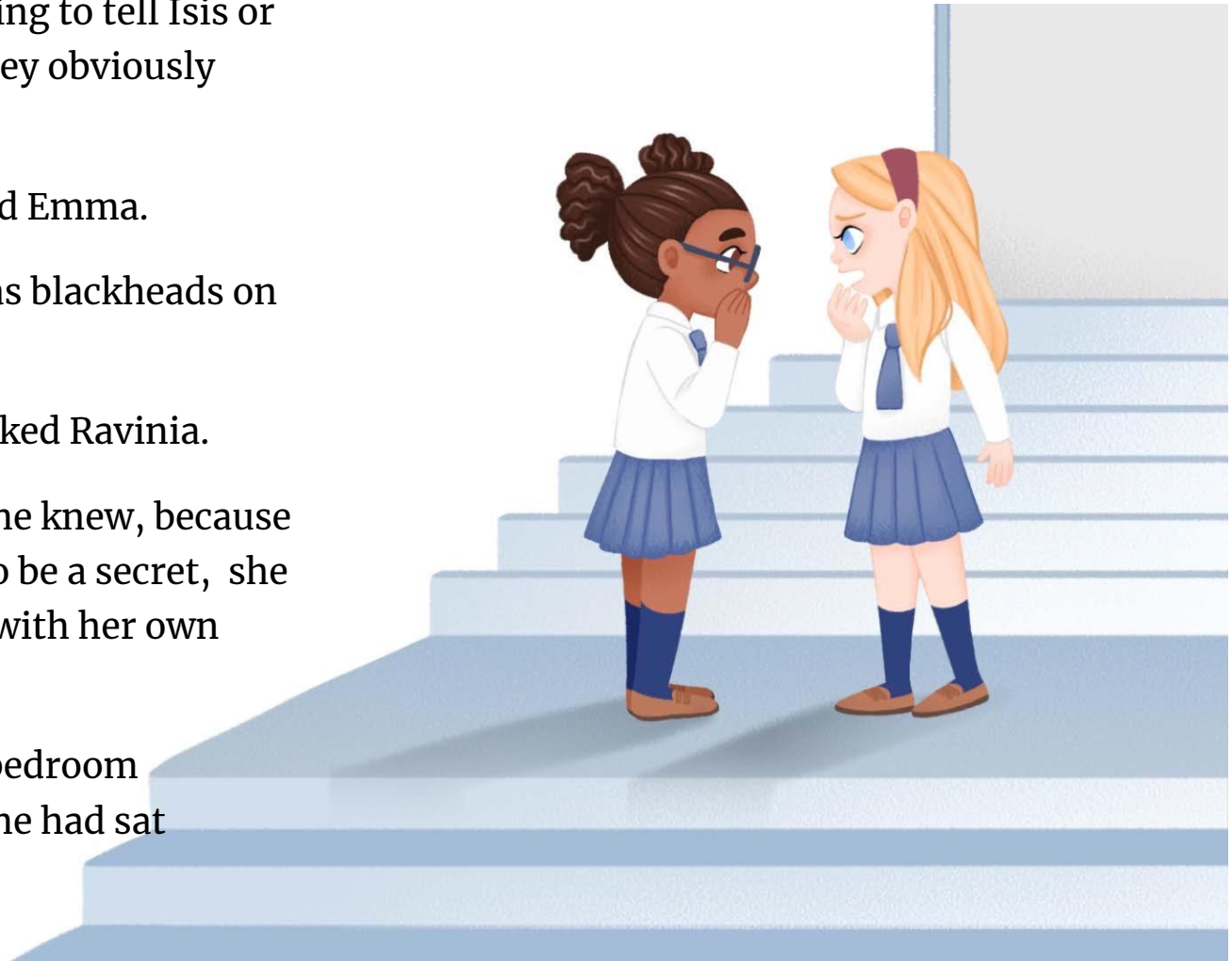
"Wow," you don't say!" said Emma.

"Ugh, how could she? He has blackheads on his nose," exclaimed Jane.

"But how do you know?" asked Ravinia.

As Katie couldn't say how she knew, because her talking cat was meant to be a secret, she just said that she saw it all with her own eyes.

Isis was looking out of her bedroom window at the spot where she had sat with Tim.



Tim had given her one tiny little kiss, as an experiment, just to see what all the fuss was about, that sort of thing. And she had liked it. She would have liked it less if she had known that Katie was spying on her? But how? The garden had a high wall all around it. Had she climbed up a tree? Or flown over on her broomstick, more like. But however she spied that kiss, the hurtful thing was that she had gossiped about it. When the rumours started to spread around school, thanks to Katie and her big mouth, Tim became embarrassed and stopped being her friend. While Isis was thinking these sad thoughts, she noticed that a black cat was sitting in the apple tree, watching the birds flutter around the nut container that swung to and fro from a branch.

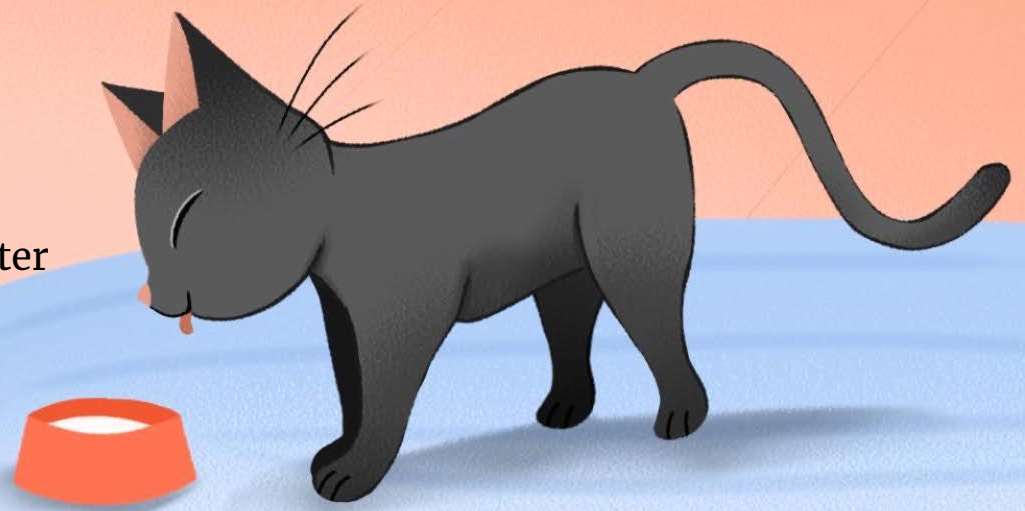


“I know you,” she said. “You’re that witch, Katie’s, cat.” And then Isis thought to herself. “That’s it! The cat is Katie’s spy... but I bet I can turn that cunning creature into a double agent. Soon he’ll be spying for me. It doesn’t take much to win a faithless cat’s heart.”

She knew exactly what to do. Two minutes later she was walking down the garden path carrying a saucer of clotted cream.

“Here kitty, kitty,” she called. That was all it took. Soon Solomon’s rough tongue was lapping up the cream. “Now would you like to come inside and have some gorgeous smelly sardines?” asked Isis.

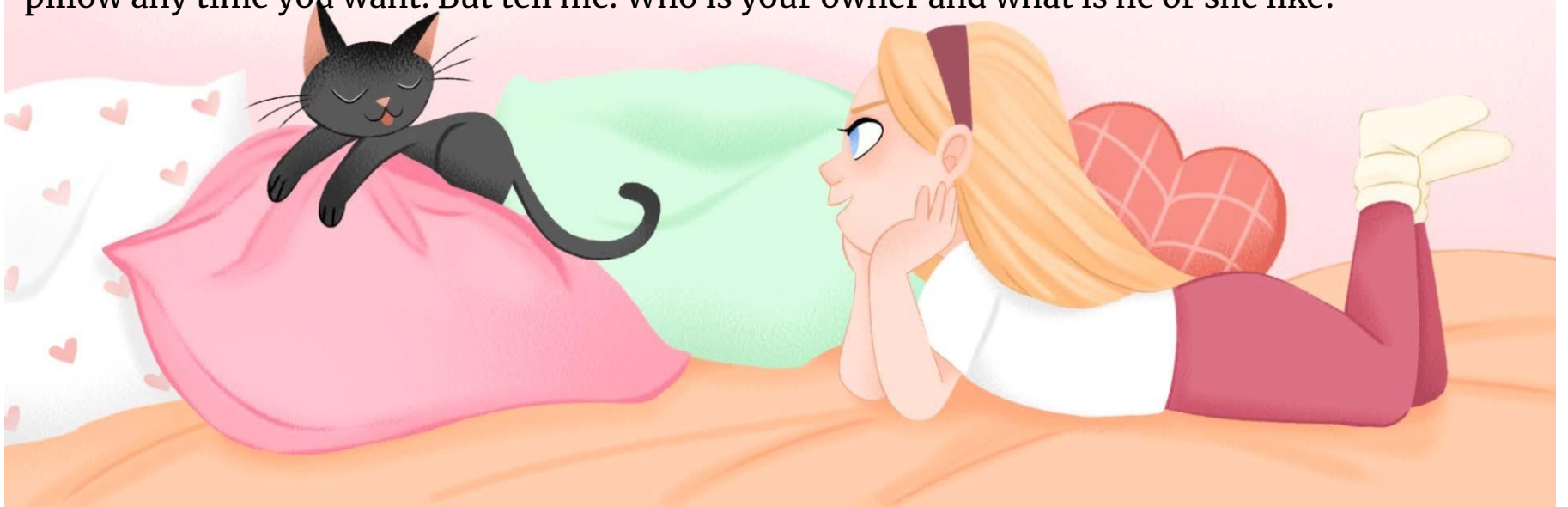
“I don’t mind if I do,” said Solomon.



When Solomon had eaten the tinned sardines in the kitchen, Isis lifted up the feline fellow and took him to her room where she put him down on her big soft pink pillow. As he stretched out she tickled his belly.

“Mrrr. You sure know how to spoil a cat,” said Solomon.

“I sure do,” said Isis. “And you can come here, drink cream, feast on sardines, and lie on my pillow any time you want. But tell me. Who is your owner and what is he or she like?”



“Oh nobody special, just a little witch called Katie,” purred Solomon.

“I know her. She has a boyfriend, doesn’t she?” asked Isis, taking a stab in the dark.

“Not really. She just holds hands with Paul sometimes,” he said.

And Isis thought that was rather interesting. “And tell me,” she said, “what does she say about the other kids at school?”



“Oh nothing worth knowing. Just that Annabel has bandy legs, and Georgie is a cry baby, and Ravinia can’t be trusted to keep a secret, and Laura is so stupid that she takes notes when she’s watching cartoons on TV.”

That was more than enough information. Five minutes later Isis had dialed Katie’s number and she was relating back all the interesting facts that she had just learnt.

“That’s s all rubbish,” said Katie. “It’s a tissue of lies.”

“No, it’s not. It’s the perfect truth.”

“Prove it,” challenged Katie. And she immediately wished that she hadn’t said that.



“All right I will prove it. Your black moggy is lying on my pillow in my room and I’m going to invite Annabel, Georgie, Ravinia and Laura round to hear what he has to say. And then I’m going to tell the entire world about you and Paul. In fact, I’m going to send record dedications for soppy love songs to all the radio stations on your behalf.”

“No, you wouldn’t.”

“Try me.”

And Katie realised that she was in a tight spot – one that magic wouldn’t necessarily get her out of.

“Ok,” she said. “I’m sorry that I gossiped about you.”



And although Isis didn't accept her apology right away, the next day at school, when she found herself next to Katie in the dinner queue she asked:

“How's your cat?”

“I don't know. He's not talking to me.”

“You mean that even your cat doesn't talk to you any more?”

“Not since last night. I took the spell off him. I'm not so sure that a talking cat is such a good idea.” And after that, Isis and Katie became friends again – because everyone needs somebody special that they can talk to.



Katie and the Cat who Talked

By Bertie Fraser

Read by Natasha Lee Lewis

Illustrated by Chiara Civati

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