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ATTICUS CLAW

On the Misty Moor



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It was Christmas Day and Atticus Grammaticus Cattypuss Claw, once the world's greatest cat burglar and now its best-ever police cat, was relaxing on Inspector Cheddar's favourite armchair at number 2 Blossom Crescent, Littleton-on-Sea. Atticus had just finished his Christmas lunch and his tummy was pleasantly full of turkey.

'That was delicious,' Callie said, throwing herself on the sofa.

'Really good,' Michael agreed, sprawling on the rug in front of the Christmas tree, 'especially the roast potatoes and gravy.'

Mrs Cheddar joined them. 'Yes, thank you, darling,' she called to her husband. 'It was even better than last year.'

'You're welcome.' Inspector Cheddar's cheery voice came from the kitchen as he went about collecting plates and stacking them in the dishwasher. Inspector Cheddar always did the cooking on Christmas Day. It was a Cheddar family tradition. 'Do you want pudding now or shall we open our presents first?' he asked.

'Presents first,' the children chorused.

'I thought you'd say that!' Inspector Cheddar said amiably.

Presents after lunch was another Cheddar Christmas family tradition.

Inspector Cheddar came into the sitting room and rearranged Atticus so that there was room for both of them in the armchair.

Atticus wished every day could be like Christmas. Normally Inspector Cheddar just booted him off.

There was a big pile of presents under the



Christmas tree. Michael sat on his heels and started handing them out.

'One at a time,' Inspector Cheddar said. 'And remember to fold the paper so we can use it again next Christmas.'

'You always say that, Dad!' Michael rolled his eyes at Callie. Callie giggled.

Atticus understood why. Inspector Cheddar got so excited about Christmas presents he never took his own advice. He couldn't wait for his turn to open a present and he always ripped the wrapping paper to shreds as soon as he got his hands on one.

'Mum can start!' Michael handed a gift to Mrs Cheddar. 'This is for you, Mum, from me and Callie.'

Mrs Cheddar peeled off the Sellotape carefully.

'Hurry up!' Inspector Cheddar said.

'I'm trying not to tear the paper,' Mrs Cheddar protested. 'You said you wanted to keep it for next year!' She winked at the children.

'I didn't say take all day about it, though, did I?' Inspector Cheddar said impatiently. 'Pass me a present, Michael. It'll be next Christmas before Mum opens that one at the rate she's going.'

Michael handed Inspector Cheddar a parcel. Inspector Cheddar grabbed it and ripped it open with his thumbs.

'Well, if you're going to be like that . . .' Mrs Cheddar laughed.

After that everyone dived in, including Atticus. Very soon the rug was piled high with a mountain of torn Christmas paper.

'Phew, that was fun!' Michael said when all the presents had been unwrapped.

'I told you we should have folded up the paper,' Inspector Cheddar grumbled. 'Look at the mess!'

Callie and Michael laughed. 'Honestly, Dad!' said Callie. 'You made most of it.'

'I'll go and get a bin bag,' Mrs Cheddar offered.

Atticus inspected his presents while Mrs Cheddar pushed the remnants of the wrapping paper into a recycling sack.

'Thanks, Mum, thanks, Dad, thanks, Atticus,' said Callie. 'I love all my presents.'

'So do I,' said Michael.

Michael had a new games console and Callie, who loved dressing up, had a new doctor's outfit. They also had books, DVDs, sweets, toys, and,

from Atticus (who was good at paw prints), special Christmas cards that he had made with Mrs Cheddar's help.

'I love my presents too,' said Mrs Cheddar. 'They're very thoughtful.' Mrs Cheddar was keen on gardening. Inspector Cheddar had given her a new pair of wellington boots and two books, which were entitled *How to Make Compost* and *How to Grow Your Own Veg*. She also received some homemade fudge from the children, and a new hairbrush from Atticus to replace the one the children had borrowed to brush his brown-and-black-striped fur and four white socks.

'What about you, Atticus?' Michael asked. 'Do you like your presents?'

Atticus purred throatily. Of course he did! He had a stocking full of cat treats from Callie and Michael, some Thumpers' Badge Bright for his police-cat-sergeant badge from Inspector Cheddar and a new red handkerchief embroidered with his name on it from Mrs Cheddar. 'For when the other one gets dirty,' she said.



Atticus always wore a handkerchief with his name on around his neck. A spare one would be very handy.

'And I like mine too,' said Inspector Cheddar. Atticus had given Inspector Cheddar a sticky roller for removing cat hair from his uniform, and he had a new notebook and pen from the



children for writing down important things when he was investigating a crime. 'Although I'm not sure what this one is,' he added. Mrs Cheddar had given him a scroll of yellow paper tied up with a red ribbon.

It didn't look like a very good present to Atticus. You couldn't wear it or eat it or lie down on it. He wondered what it could be.

'It's your family tree, darling,' Mrs Cheddar said, beaming at her husband.

Atticus was puzzled. He'd heard of an oak tree and a horse chestnut tree and a Christmas tree, but not a *family* tree. Besides, it wasn't a tree. It was a bit of paper.

'It tells you about your ancestors,' Mrs Cheddar explained. 'You know, who your great-great-great-grandparents were.'

That would be interesting, thought Atticus. Atticus was an orphan. He didn't even know who his *parents* were, let alone his great-great-great-grandparents.

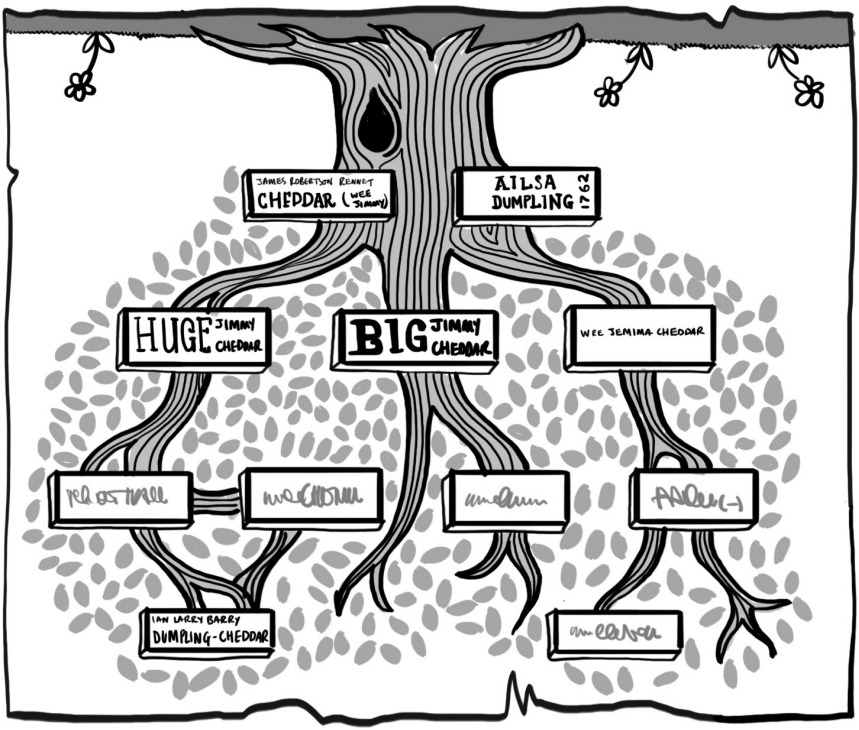
'I thought you'd like it,' said Mrs Cheddar to her husband, 'because you're so keen on family traditions, especially at Christmas.'

'I love it!' Inspector Cheddar gave her a kiss on the cheek. 'Come on, kids, let's see if we're descended from anyone famous.' He squeezed in between Callie and Michael on the sofa.

Atticus wanted to see too so he sat on Michael's lap.

Mrs Cheddar perched on the arm of the sofa.

Inspector Cheddar untied the ribbon and unrolled the piece of paper.



Atticus squinted at it. Now he could see why it was called a family tree. On the paper a chart had been drawn. It had lots of lines at the bottom that looked like branches and got narrower as it went up the page, like an upside-down tree. Beside each branch was the name of one of Inspector Cheddar's ancestors.

'The earliest trace of the Cheddar family is the

Scottish Cheddars of Biggnaherry,' Mrs Cheddar pointed to the name at the top of the chart.

'James Robertson Rennet Cheddar, also known as Wee Jimmy Cheddar,' Callie read.

Atticus listened, fascinated.

'He was a cheesemaker from the Isle of Mull,' said Mrs Cheddar. 'That's why he was given the name Cheddar. He married Ailsa Dumpling in 1762 and they settled near Biggnaherry, where she was from.'

Atticus watched her trace three lines with her finger under Wee Jimmy's name. 'Wee Jimmy and Ailsa had three children.' She waited for Callie to read the names.

'Huge Jimmy, Big Jimmy and Wee Jemima,' Callie said.

Atticus was getting the hang of it now. Underneath the names of Huge Jimmy, Big Jimmy and Wee Jemima were the names of *their* children and the people *they* married and so on and so on and so on until the chart got down to Inspector Cheddar, whose full name, interestingly enough, was Ian Larry Barry Dumpling Cheddar.

'The Scottish Cheddars of Biggnaherry,' said

Inspector Cheddar. 'Well I never! I always wondered why one of my middle names was Dumpling.'

'I didn't know you were Scottish, Dad!' said Callie.

'Neither did I,' said Inspector Cheddar. 'You learn something every day.'

'Where's Big and Hairy?' Michael asked.

'It's not "big and hairy", Michael,' said Inspector Cheddar, affronted. 'It's Biggnaherry.'

'It's in the Highlands,' Mrs Cheddar told them, 'at the edge of a great moor. I looked it up on the map. We should go sometime, so Dad can learn more about his roots.'

Just then there was a loud roar from a motorbike outside, shortly followed by a knock at the front door. Mrs Cheddar went to open it. It was Mrs Tucker, the family's child minder. She took off her motorbike helmet and hung it on the coat stand.

'Merry Christmas!' she said, coming into the sitting room. 'I hope you don't have any plans for New Year.'

'No, not really,' Mrs Cheddar replied.

'Well, you do now,' Mrs Tucker said. 'Mr Tucker's cousin has invited us all for Hogmanay.'

'What's Hogmanay?' asked Callie.

'It's a Scottish New Year's Eve party,' said Mrs Tucker.

That sounded fun, thought Atticus. He liked parties. People dropped lots of food on the floor that he hoovered up without anyone noticing.

'Mr Tucker's cousin lives in the Highlands,' Mrs Tucker added.

'Whereabouts in the Highlands?' asked Michael.

'At Biggnaherry,' said Mrs Tucker. 'On the moor. Why?' she asked, seeing the expression on Inspector Cheddar's face. 'Do you know it?'