Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

White Chin

written by

Marilyn Edwards

published by

Catnip Publishing Plc

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

White Chin

The Cat that Walked by his Wild Lone

Marilyn Edwards

with illustrations by *France Bauduin*





"When the moon gets up and night comes . . .
he goes out to the Wet Wild Woods . . .
waving his wild tail and walking by his wild lone."

From 'The Cat that Walked by Himself' by Rudyard Kipling
collected in *Just So Stories* (1902)

1



Out into the wet wild woods

An old grey car drove up the hill towards the gate that led into High Fell Wood. The road ended here and the car paused. Slowly it edged forward in a circle, its wheels crunching over leaves and fir cones, until it faced downhill again. It stopped. The engine fell silent. After a few moments the driver's door opened and two large feet clad in trainers emerged. A tall man wearing jeans and a football shirt climbed out, stretched himself and turned to look up at the trees towering above him.

The wind was blowing in warm gusts from the west and the air was heavy with moisture, carrying a rich smell of damp earth and rotting leaves. Thin sunlight

filtered through the tree tops, picking out the russet and gold of the autumn leaves.

A wood mouse rustled through the undergrowth of the forest floor. Every so often she would squat back on her hind legs, twitching her nose while she stared around her. Absent-mindedly she tweaked her ears and whiskers with her forepaws. She was nervous. The little wood mouse was pregnant with her last litter of the year and had done well to escape the attentions of the many creatures who stalked these woods, all of whom might at any time consider her a delicious meal. She was busy gathering food into small piles to take back to her burrow under the roots of an oak tree. At this time of year the trees were teeming with nuts and as a small creature she had learned to watch out that she didn't get hit on the head by them as treeborne creatures made them bounce to earth. Squirrels were the worst; in their haste they dropped as many nuts as they collected.

As the wood mouse squeezed through the tangle of tree roots, struggling with the awkward bulk of a prized acorn, she missed the distant voices of the two men talking as they stood by their car. Their presence, however, did not go unnoticed by two watchful rooks and one called out a warning 'kaw, kaw, kaw' to his distant companion, who replied in kind. The taller of the men, the one who had been driving, pulled out a sack from the back seat and tossed it, carelessly, over his shoulder. They hurried off up the steep path into the

wood and as they walked, the sack on the man's shoulder wriggled around in a squirmy sort of way. Whatever was in it was squeaking a great deal.

The young man panted noisily as he half-ran up the hill behind his big-striding companion. Neither of them noticed the young girl looking down at them, hidden amidst a dark group of trees. Kirstie had been watching them since their car first started crawling up the hill. As their voices came nearer, she wiggled herself into the middle of a thick bush, fingering loose strands of long auburn hair back into a knot so it didn't fly out and give her away. She was curious. What on earth was in that sack? She listened hard. Their voices weren't local. The younger man had put out his hand and was tugging at the shirt of the other, trying to get his attention.

'Hey, listen – do you think he'll survive out here, or even last the night? He's not very old is he?'

'Old enough!' The bigger man swung round sharply and pointed a finger at his questioner. 'Look here, let's just get this straight, shall we? I wanted to drown him, remember. It was *your* blinking idea to let him out in some wild wood somewhere, so this one is strictly down to you, mate.'

The younger man pulled his shoulders up around his neck and stuck out his lower lip. He looked up at the dark swaying trees and wrinkled his forehead.

'This place gives me the creeps big time. I wouldn't fancy being left here,' he said in a whiny voice.

'Well, you're not being left here,' the older man

called over his shoulder, the sack bumping against him as he moved ahead. He looked back and raised his eyebrows as he registered the look of doubt on the lad's face. He turned to face him and shouted crossly, 'But if you carry on like this that's exactly what I'll do. I *will* bloomin' well leave you here! *You* wanted to come. And besides, these woods are nice, *very* nice – as you may discover one day if you play your cards right. So nice we might even make a special trip back sometime soon and get to know the place really well.'

'Oh, that sort of trip. Really? Are these the woods where you do it then?'

'They might be, but you just keep your lip buttoned. You never know who might be listening.'

Kirstie pulled back further into her bush, shivering. She wondered just how long she might have to stay there. She was getting cramp. The older man dropped the sack roughly on the ground and bent down out of the wind to light a cigarette.

'Trees have ears you know.' He laughed unpleasantly and stood up. He threw the sack roughly over his back again and walked on a few hundred yards before he stopped and turned the sack upside down, tipping its wriggling contents on the ground.

Kirstie stood on tiptoes, risking all, to peer through the protective branches of her bush. What emerged from the sack was a protesting tangle of black-and-white legs and a tail. As she watched she saw one young, unhappy cat stand up, miaow and then shake himself.

Each of his long legs ended in a white sock. He had a white chest, neck and tummy, and a distinctive white, off-centre patch on his chin. The man holding the sack kicked out hard at the little cat with his foot.

'Shove off White Chin, and good riddance. What the wife and kids don't know, won't hurt 'em. I'll be happy never to see you again.'

White Chin fell forward as the man's foot lifted his rear end and he mewled out in pain. He blinked his eyes in the sudden light – and – realising he was free, his mournful whimper changed into a gleeful miaow and he scampered off a few feet in triumph. The men glanced at his back briefly, nodded to each other and without a word started to run back down the hill, out of the woods and towards the car. The young cat turned to watch them. As soon as he understood that they were about to leave him where he stood, he started down the hill after them. He saw the car edge out into the road and he stopped as he saw it drive off. He gazed after it, his large flecked amber eyes unblinking, as he stood quite still. After some moments he opened his mouth and let out an anguished howl, at first tentatively and then with increased intensity as his utter loneliness overwhelmed him.

Kirstie, still hidden behind her tree, covered her mouth in dismay as he wailed out. She wasn't the only one to hear him. The little wood mouse heard him. The vigilant rooks heard him. A solitary blackbird heard him. A three-quarters-grown rabbit heard him and a

small bank vole heard him. A new predator had been added to the woodland register.



White Chin sat down amongst the leaves, looking down the length of the empty road, bewildered and sad. A bank of clouds scudded across the sun and the late afternoon breeze blew with a chill bite. His tremble turned into a violent shiver.

In his whole life he had never strayed beyond the yard of the terraced house where he'd been born, surrounded by the sound of noisy city traffic. As to catching food for himself, he didn't have the first idea. In recent weeks he had started to investigate any small life that moved around him, and spiders in particular interested him since he had discovered they were good to eat. One day, by accident, he had jumped on and killed a young bluetit who was hanging on the bird feeder, but he hadn't eaten the bird because the feathers made him sneeze.

Now, finding himself surrounded by these great dark looming trees he felt a bit frightened. And lonely. For a start there was no sound of traffic and apart from a trace of the grey car there was no smell of oil or petrol in the air. The smells and sounds of the wood and its wildlife were totally new to him. He could hear a great mixture of bird, insect and animal sounds but he had no idea what sort of creatures might be making these

noises. White Chin had no experience to draw on, only instinct.

Hungry and thirsty, he turned around and climbed back up the hill to investigate the wood. As he did so, he saw a young girl coming down towards him. She called out to him, but he ran away. He was not used to strangers and he was unaccustomed to being out in the open air. Whilst he longed to be looked after and cuddled, he was confused by all the things that had happened to him and keeping still and hidden felt like the safest thing to do. He didn't know who this girl was or what she wanted with him.

Kirstie called out again, but White Chin stayed crouched beneath a fern. The little girl called one more time. Nothing. Shrugging sadly, she wandered off down the hill, swinging the basket of nuts she had collected before the grey car approaching High Fell Wood had disturbed her.

When White Chin was sure she had gone, he crept out. He nibbled at some grass but it soon made him feel sick. He wandered off and found a pool of water in a hollow stone, which he lapped at for a long time, raising his head at every strange sound. Some leaves rasped together, making him jump. Twice his body tensed in alarm as he heard falling leaves and small twigs cracking underfoot. This wood was a noisy place.

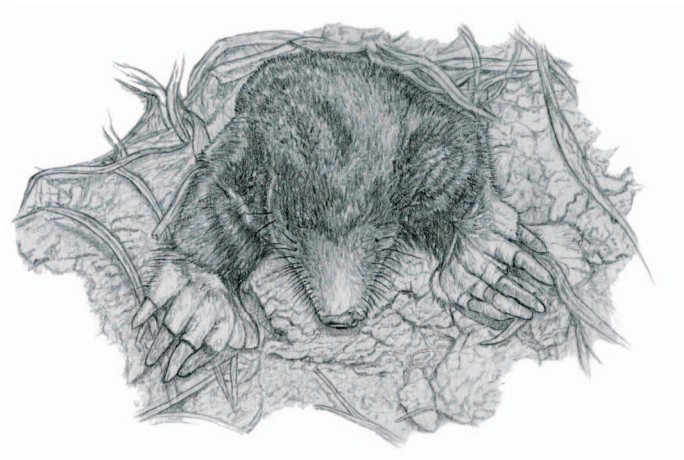
At last the little cat's luck changed. He saw and pounced upon a large spider which he hastily gobbled up. Sitting down after his snack, he licked his lips,

then cleaned his whiskers and buffed his ears with each forepaw in turn, like the well brought-up cat that he was.

White Chin looked around him. He still felt hungry. He really would have to find something else to eat, and soon.



2



Told-you-so! Told-you-so! Told-you-so!

As White Chin went deeper into the wood the snapping noises increased and his fear made the blood thump loudly in his ears. He could see daylight showing through the trees to his right so he climbed the hill towards it.

After a while he found himself in a clearing that contained a large expanse of grass and several mounds of dark, freshly dug soil. White Chin stopped and settled down in the low evening sun close to one of the mounds. Suddenly the earth next to him moved. He tensed and sniffed at the soil. It moved again. He could hear and feel digging below. White Chin watched the ground intently, his ears revolving to pick up every

sound. Experimentally he patted the top of the soil with his right paw. He was nervous. He didn't know what to expect. The soil moved again. The little cat pulled back and licked his nose in fear.

Suddenly what looked like two large pink hands ending in long dirty fingernails exploded through the soil. These were immediately followed by a pink snout sporting fine whiskers and an enormous black velvety head.

The near-sightless mole, who was rising from the earth with such energy, paused and for one second seemed to float above the ground. The scent of cat was inflaming his nostrils, and with a wisdom learned from several near misses, he quickly sank back again into the safety of his underworld. When he reached a comfortable depth he shuffled in the direction of his main tunnel and from there to one of the small chambers off it, where he kept his food. It was here, in this grim larder, that he stored his giant horde of worms. Like most moles he had learned the trick of biting into the head of each worm as he met one, which kept the creature alive and fresh but unable to move. A rapid snack of worm was enough to reassure him that all was well.

Back above ground White Chin, having missed his first chance to catch this strange animal with the strong earthy whiff, hunched forward again to have another look and poked enquiringly with his right paw into the soil, but the mole smell had weakened and he lost

interest. Sitting down again, he opened his jaws wide in a dislocating cat yawn revealing prominent fangs. Every inch of this small animal was evolved as a perfect killing machine and his teeth were impeccably designed to cut, scrape and tear the flesh he might expect to kill in the wild.

White Chin stood up and scented the air. His ears flicked and semi-rotated to collect any and every sound that might mean food or danger, or something interesting to play with. Preparing himself for action, he stretched out his body to its fullest length. He pushed out his front legs first, as far as they would go, bottom high in the air. Then he leaned forward pushing his shoulders high, and drew out each of his back legs in turn, shaking them free of some imaginary wetness. That done, he bounded up the bank to the highest vantage point he could find.

He sniffed around the base of the trunks amongst the banks of leaves gathered beneath them. He looked up to catch a glimpse of the birds that were more audible than visible in the crowns of the trees far above him. The birds were already starting their farewell hymn to the day. White Chin watched the little robin singing his wistful autumn song from on high. Its piercing tones hurt his ears and he turned his back on it, knowing the bird to be beyond his reach. An invisible blackbird now started up with his own sweet tune, which was soon joined by a song thrush, singing 'told-you-so, told-you-so, told-you-so' firmly.

The cat lowered his sights. He stared closely at a clump of bushes from which he had smelt a strange odour – slightly mouse-like, but stronger. His excitement had built up as he heard a series of brief high-pitched squeaks that suddenly stopped.

In the first five months of the little cat's life all the food he had eaten had been dried or cooked. Now, however, with an empty belly, he *knew* that what he could hear and smell was a possible meal and he froze into attentive stillness. The small shrew who crept innocently closer was, like the mole, another eager worm-eater born with bad eyesight but superb senses of hearing and smell. Using these skills she was currently concentrating all her energies on digging in the soft earth beneath her for a long earthworm who was burrowing noisily in White Chin's direction.

White Chin's muscles locked and his breathing almost stopped as he concentrated all his attention on this dark-furred pointy-nosed mammal. When the shrew was nearly upon him, he sprang forward and grabbed her by the back of her neck. The shrew let out one shrill squeak of fear as the cat's canine teeth cut through her spinal cord. She struggled briefly and then went limp in his mouth. White Chin had killed his first shrew and it was well that it had been done quickly. White Chin was yet to discover, as he would later on, that pound for pound of bodyweight, shrews are the most fearless warriors around when fighting for their lives. He let out a high-pitched, almost feminine miaow

in triumph. In some haste he devoured the shrew, glancing around him nervously to make sure that no one was about to take his prey from him.

He had nearly finished his little meal, when suddenly he stopped. The taste in his mouth was no longer good. He had swallowed the bitter juices that shrews produce in their glands. Now he needed to find somewhere dark and quiet to hide. He found a large bush which he backed under and there he crouched down, staring out miserably. After a few seconds he was quietly sick. He mewed sadly to himself. Soon, however, he felt a little better and started on a long grooming session. As always he paid particular attention to his whiskers and ears and then, hearing the sound of babbling water in the distance, he slowly clambered through the leaves in its direction.

Dusk was falling and the daytime songbirds were taking their last feed before going to their roosts in hedge and tree. Those who had already fed were singing their own individual songs announcing their possession of territory and warning all others to keep clear. It was that moment in the evening when, as the birds of darkness wake up and start their hunting calls to each other, there is a brief noisy overlap of the two worlds. A tawny owl, who had hunted in silence through most of the summer, started his penetrating low call of autumn, with his special, teasingly long pause, as if he was taking an enormous breath before the final 'Tut-whoooh':

‘Whoooh’ . . . ‘Tut-whoooh’ . . . ‘Whoooh’ . . . . . ‘Tut-whoooh’

And all the while the blackbird cock whose patch this was, who had earlier eaten his fill of berries from the yew tree and snowberry bushes, sang his loud flute-like solo from his traditional song-post before starting a somewhat raucous warning ‘dik-dik-dik . . . dik-dik-dik’.

White Chin had passed the blackbird’s song-post without the slightest intention of disturbing him, and was surprised at the violence of the bird’s alarm call. It made the little cat hurry by to get away from it. White Chin was to become familiar with that call and as he learned of its telltale nature he liked it less and less.

Darkness fell and the noises of the woodland changed. It was drizzling steadily and a strong breeze had got up. White Chin could see well enough, but he was sensitive to the changes around him in the gathering night. He had recovered from his reaction to eating the shrew and was now even hungrier than before. The sounds around him worried him less than when he was first abandoned, but he was tense and alert all the same.

The owl cock passed closely over him and as he did so he made one great shrieking ‘whooooooooooo’ to his mate, who replied demurely with ‘kewick’, ‘kewick’, ‘kewick’.

White Chin had never been as close as this to an owl and was slightly alarmed by the huge spread of the

bird's wings and its loud cries, but instinct told him he was safe.

The small cat now discovered an unexpected benefit of following in the wake of this great aerial hunter. A small wood mouse scuttled off into the bushes close by, followed quickly by two more. White Chin went after them and sat very quietly by the thicket where they had disappeared. His patience was rewarded as a small male wood mouse ventured out to be caught immediately by the cat, who having killed his prey, sniffed and licked the tiny body thoroughly, checking for any sign of that bad musty smell he had encountered on the shrew. His mouse smelt good and White Chin ate again, crunchily, and this time his meal stayed in his belly. Soon all that remained visible of the mouse were a few teeth, a couple of feet and a tail.

The rain started to penetrate the outer layer of White Chin's fur and made him shiver. The little cat found a small sheltered patch of ground under a tree and there he set about licking himself dry. Leaves blew around in the wind, and being a cat, he started to pounce on them, pretending to kill them fiercely, ripping and clawing them into little bits. Now he had eaten he felt bouncy and wanted to play, but it was boring on his own. He wanted company. He wanted his mother and everyone else back in the house in the city. This dark wood, where he had been so cruelly tossed away, was lonely and wet and scary.

As he sat there he heard a distant barking sound. To

begin with it sounded like a dog – there had been dogs near his home in the city – but as he listened it changed. It became more like a screech, like a human, but then it lowered to a bark again. White Chin had heard his first fox. He trembled without knowing why. It sounded a long way off, but he wanted to find somewhere safer than here. Slinking in short spurts, low to the ground, he ran away from the sounds of barking and screeching, although as he paused and listened they didn't come any closer. After running some distance, he found himself getting deeper into the dark wood. Might those tree roots provide some shelter?

The little cat started frantically scratching and sniffing. His nose and ears told him there was an empty space in front of him. Then, as he pawed aside another pile of dead leaves, he uncovered the entrance to a small cave. It was formed out of limestone rocks and covered in moss, hidden by the leaves of several autumns banked up against the entrance. It was difficult to crawl into it; he had to squeeze right down with his bottom sticking out in the air, but when he did get into it he was happy to find that it went back a long way and it was dry. Other animals had used it and left their scents behind, but for the moment at least it appeared to be empty.

White Chin tucked himself into the very back of the cave, pulling together a bed of dried-up leaves with his paw. He started to turn in little circles to make a hollow in the centre. Satisfied at last that his bed was as it

should be, he curled into a ball. As he slept, his tail twitched. He was dreaming of mice and his mouth curved from the pleasure of it.



3



The music of the night

Through the night White Chin was woken by an assortment of noises. In spite of these disturbances he remained curled up until a loud huffing sound came so close that he feared it would come right into his cave. At this he got up and thrust his head out through the opening to judge whether he should make a quick run for it.

What he saw, immediately outside, was a large round-backed hedgehog using his long pointy nose to sniff out beetles in a snorty hedgehoggy kind of way. White Chin had no idea what he was looking at. They briefly held each other's gaze and then released each other by looking away again. The hedgehog resumed

his rootling. He was having his last feast of the year before he retired into hibernation, and he wasn't going to let anyone put him off! He had no fear of White Chin, nor White Chin of him. The little cat crawled back to the inner peace of his cave, turned around and curled up again.

On and off for the rest of the night he heard an assortment of cries and squeaks from the woodland around him, but they rarely caused him to do more than open an eye and settle back down to sleep. The emotional strain of being away from the comforts of home, an ongoing fear of his current surroundings and his recurring concern about the hunger he felt had left him exhausted. Sleep made all these things disappear. The rain continued through the night, and sometimes the heavy bursts woke him and he lay there listening to it. It sounded much wetter and noisier than when he had lived in a house. If he had but known it, he was fortunate to have found a sleeping place that remained dry on this soaking wet autumn night and as the splashing shafts of water slowed down to a drizzle and then fell as steady rain again, he felt warm enough to tuck his nose under his front leg and fall into a deep sleep.

At one point he awoke and found he was sharing his new quarters with a rodent unlike any he had yet met. He was being studied by a small brown mammal with a snub nose, long whiskers, glittering eyes and round ears. The bank vole stared in horror at him and once she realised he was looking back at her she skittered

away down a tiny tunnel into her burrow below, where, like the wood mouse, she was building up her store of nuts for the winter months. As she moved along her burrow she squeaked repeatedly in alarm. Immediately following this encounter White Chin was kept awake for some time, while the bank vole shuffled back and forth in her nearby tunnel, scratchily ramming acorns at the junction where her hole met White Chin's cave. She was building herself a fortress. White Chin crawled over to inspect the work in progress. He yawned and turned around to sleep, unmoved by the little vole's exertions. She was safe from him, without all her effort. He would never have fitted into her burrow. At last the vole's entrance was sealed to her satisfaction and she fell silent, secure now in her fastness. White Chin continued snoring gently.



Beyond the woods, lower down the valley, at the far side of the village, Kirstie lay in her farmhouse bed, wide awake. Her head was filled with thoughts of the little black-and-white cat she had watched being dumped in High Fell Wood. Earlier in the evening she had heard foxes barking and wondered whether White Chin was all right up there on his own. She imagined him being frightened and hungry. She thought about the men who had left him there. Would they be able to sleep calmly in their beds back in the big town they had

come from, knowing that the little cat was roaming the wet wild woods? What sort of home had he been in? Had there been children who had loved him and who would, even now, be crying at his loss? Did they think he had gone to a new and loving home?

She was restless and getting out of bed she crossed to the window. The darkness was oddly unyielding and she couldn't see anything other than her own reflection. Raindrops played races with each other down the windowpane, joining others and getting so big they burst with their own weight to form tiny channels of water that ran down the glass and disappeared over the windowsill. Her breath formed a mist on the glass and so, with her finger, she drew a little cat. She shivered and climbed back into her warm bed. She resolved that she would ride out on her Fell pony, Buster, and look for him as soon as ever she could.



Up in High Fell Wood the tawny owls, who had called through most of the night, increased the frequency of their hunting cries to each other around first light, just as the woodland birds stuttered out the first bars of their dawn chorus. By this time White Chin had had enough of the rowdy animals of the night and left the shelter of his cave to tour his new territory. The rain had stopped and the sun was rising, yet the air remained cool.

Although the young cat had had good fortune yesterday evening with his mouse supper, the new dawn offered no sign of any meal. He crept down to the stream and scented other mammals that had passed that way. He could smell rabbit, something he hadn't encountered in the flesh, but it excited him nonetheless. He could tell that wood mice and bank voles had passed this way recently, but strongest of all the scents was the rank odour left on the grasses of the bank by a shrew who had scurried past only seconds earlier. It was a smell he would now remember forever. He stepped forward and played at paw-catching the trickling water before lapping at it for some minutes. He jumped across the stream, which had so far been one of his boundaries, and started to explore. As the little black cat with the showy white bib, uneven white socks and wonky white chin wandered slowly through the wood, a solitary crow surveyed him from on high. The bird shouted out in a deep rasping voice for everyone to hear,

'Craaaar, craaaar, craaaar, craaaar.'

Although the cat's ears flipped back and forth, he quickly ceased paying attention to the carrion crow as his senses became focussed entirely on the ground in front of him, unaware that this dark sentry was announcing his presence to the entire woodland. He disturbed a log as he jumped on it. It rolled over revealing a small beetle and a long worm that had been sheltering beneath. Without hesitating the cat gobbled both up. He had no difficulty with the beetle, which

disappeared down his throat in a matter of seconds. The worm, on the other hand, he found very chewy, but eventually, with a mighty gulp, he got it down.



White Chin ventured deeper into the wood than he had yet been, climbing up a tree-clad hill, until he reached a small grassy clearing lit by dappled sunlight. At the base of a giant oak tree there was a series of large holes in the bank, with an arch of roots providing a ceiling to the entrance of an imposing tunnel. A network of small roots was hanging down over the cavernous hole, like a small curtain. On the ground, some distance from the front of the entrance, was a pile of what looked like discarded bedding and large drag marks in the soil. As White Chin scented the air around him, he was aware of a musky stench unlike anything he had ever encountered before. It was strong and floated up in powerful wafts from within the deep cavern that stretched away in front of him. Instinct made him wary, but he didn't feel afraid. He examined every inch of the wide path leading up to the biggest entrance. Then he stopped. Someone was in there!

Although the timid part of him made him want to rush away from the cave and continue his search for food elsewhere, some other part of his brain made him hang around the entrance to the cave. He rolled over on his back and scent-marked the soil around the

entrance. Having done this he was about to walk away when, for good measure, he decided to spray the tree closest to the entrance. Some basic instinct was making him announce he was there, and that he was one tough cat.

Just as he completed this bold act, something terrible happened! Out of the cave came a deep, rumbling growl. It lasted only a few seconds, but it made every hair on White Chin's body stand out in alarm, making him look like a black-and-white bottle brush. He jumped to one side – all four feet off the ground – with his back arched like the round of a full moon. As his feet touched down he raced away as fast as a cat can run. He had no idea what lay within that cave, but his senses told him that something that could make so deep and terrifying a sound must be gigantic. As the little cat galloped through the trees he imagined an enormous snarling monster gnashing angry teeth close behind him, about to grab him by his tail.

White Chin ran without ceasing until, at last, he could see the rolling fields beyond the forest. He felt safer here, although there were fewer places to hide; there were fewer places for others to hide as well. As he reached a low drystone wall, he jumped on top of it and stopped to listen. His heart was beating fast from his long gallop, but slowly he breathed deeply and the blood stopped banging in his ears. He paused, checked behind and sprang down the far side of the wall, hiding himself amidst a group of tall rushes. The little cat was

in need of some quiet. He found a dry hollow in the long grasses and sank down out of sight.

Time passed and White Chin dozed. He awoke, all attention, having heard a slight scratching sound across a stony patch of ground. The smell, which was coming closer and closer, was new to him. He stood up to see a long bronze-coloured reptile snaking towards him. She had scales on her body and as the cat watched her he saw her blink her eye. As the reptile wound her way in his direction, her notched tongue flickered in and out tasting the air. Her favourite food was slugs and worms and that was how she hunted them down. White Chin waited and then, as the creature drew close to him, he pounced. The reptile curled round, unexpectedly muscled and strong. White Chin released her and grabbed again, feeling her pulling with all her strength as she writhed from side to side. Then, suddenly, he was left with a wriggling tail under his front feet as he heard the rest of the reptile slither away at great speed into the grass behind him. White Chin looked down in surprise finding he was holding a still twitching tail which the female slow-worm had shed in order to save her own life. Although this legless lizard would never regain her former full-tailed glory, she had at least survived this attack.

White Chin licked the trophy tail between his front paws, but found it didn't amount to much and, when it finally stopped writhing, left it lying on the ground like a dead thing. He remained hungry and for a while he

dug around in the grass until he found a worm, which he ate from necessity, with little pleasure. Worms were rubbery and cold. He changed his mind and went back to the slow-worm tail. He threw it around trying to make it wriggle again, but it wouldn't play with him any more. He held it down with one paw, just in case, and crunched his way through it noisily. It was different from worms, but he wasn't sure it was any better.

