

The Adventures of Socrates the Cat

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Chapter 1. Sote Great.

Socrates Great, unlike his parents, was really short. He was also thin and brittle. Only his shapely paws and grace of movements made an unforgettable impression on others.

When he was seven weeks, Darian took him to their first hunting. Little Sote understood quickly all grandfather's techniques and decided to feed himself from that very moment. His mother - Imelda - was sobbing with every meal. There was no recipe for mice that would convince Sote to eat at home - I'll eat in town - he used to say when he set off for hunting.

At the age of three months, he decided to leave home. It took a long time to convince him it wasn't such a good idea he thought it was. Plus, he was in no hurry to study. He partied all the time while his peers were at college.

- Ha, ha, ha! Well, who's the Darling Sote? – he asked with eyes shining from excitement.

- You are - admitted Darian and looked at the mouse in his paw. - I haven't taught you this trick – he said after a moment.

- I know, Grandpa - nodded Socrates. - Eugene showed it to me.

- Sh... - Darian hissed, looking anxious around. - How many times have I asked you not to call me Grandpa in public? It makes me feel old.

- Ok, Grandpa - Socrates lowered his voice. – I won't call you like that again, but we're not in public, you know – Sote laughed.

- Why were you hunting with Eugene? - Darian changed the subject.

- I was hungry so I hunted - laughed Socrates and his big, blue eyes sparkled like two fireflies.

- Don't be so smart - Darian sat down. - And mind your tone when you talk to your grandfather.

- What do you mean?

- It's just that ... - Darian broke off, unable to find a logical answer. - It's about Eugene and his gang. I don't like that you hang out with them.

- What gang?! – Socrates asked, surprised. - It's not a gang, just a group of friends. I really don't understand what you have against Eugene.

- He comes from a notorious family – explained Darian.

- That's not a good reason – Socrates said, dismissively. – Maybe it's better to come from a notorious family. Cats from families with good reputation are quickly forgotten.

- You think so? - Darian scratched his ear.

- Yeah. Take me for an example. Will I be remembered? I don't think so. No one from our family is in the history books of this city. It's no wonder why - he continued. - How could I be remembered with a typical childhood of a typical teenager?

- And would you like to being mentioned in the books? - Darian asked.

- Yes, but not in the way you think I would. What do I need college for?

Darian walked him around and then tenderly touched his back. – You see, my dear Sote, everyone has their own responsibilities. I had to go to college, and I liked it. It will be good to you too. You can learn a lot of interesting things. For example, they can teach you the latest hunting techniques and how to hypnotize dogs. Foreign language classes can help you understand every animal in the world, and history will help you get a future job.

- Darian, I already know this all from Daddy's books he keeps in his library. It's all nice and boring, and for cats who want to spend their lives in college and then at work, and then die and be forgotten. I want to be remembered for doing something beyond all those things. I want to give something valuable to the world.

Darian gave him a wide smile – You will - he said. You'll marry and have children. Children are the greatest gift to the world - he patted him on the back.

- You weren't listening carefully - Socrates said. - I don't want to get married and have children.

- What did you say?! – Darian screamed in horror. - Every decent cat has a wife and children. There's no other way.

- Yes, that I'll do, but first I want to do something meaningful and have some fun with it.

- You can have fun on vacations. And you can afford them when you get a good job. And you can get a good job when you graduate from college. Do you know where cats with no education work? They work in mice processing factories. Do you really want to end up like them? The Cat's Dungeon probably would be better than that.

- Eugene doesn't go to college and no one seems to be bothered.

- Eugene comes from a rich family - Darian said sharply. – His grandfather made a fortune on the harm of common cats – he whirred with disgust. - His mine shortened many lives. I repeat again, this is not a decent family. Three years ago, before you were born, The Work Safety Commission announced the family of Mixed broke the safety rules of the excavations. Eugene's father has done nothing about that. Half a year later a ceiling in one of the shafts collapsed. Four common cats and two sphinxes were killed. Eugene's father has done nothing to improve the working conditions of the miners. Nothing, I repeat. And you hang out with this family and compare yourself to Eugene as if you were of the same class. Eugene Mixed is not the right company for you.

- You can't blame Eugene for what does his family. I can't answer for you or dad or anybody else. Eugene doesn't go to college because as same as I, he wants to do something that is going to serve all the cats.

- What is that? - Darian grunted.

- Music - said Socrates.

- You'll be earning your living with purring?

- Not exactly.

- I don't understand.

- I know – nodded Socrates. - I'll explain it to you some other time because now I'm already pretty late for the rehearsal - he said, giving him the mouse, and then leaped toward the remote storage of grain.

- The rehearsal of what?! - Darian yelled after him but didn't get the answer because Sote was already gone. – I'll never understand this boy- he said to himself and sighed loudly.

Chapter 2. Rehearsal.

Eugene put up his hind, not very shapely paws just to be able to admire brand- new, silver-gray sandals - Socrates! We are pleased that you've decided to appear - he said, sliding down from the eyes, pink glasses with green frames.

- The hunting with Darian took a bit longer I thought - said Socrates, who stood in front of the deck chair where Eugene sank his body. - On Cat the Highest, where did you get those? - he showed the glasses, unable to stop staring at the green frames.

- No, no - laughed Eugene, reaching for a glass of Viola Tricolor liqueur. - I don't disclose such things. It's classified slashed by highly destructive - he took a sip and then twisted mouth in disgust. - What company released this juice?! - he reached for the bottle. - Yeah. Norwegian Forest Cats - he read the label. - I've always said that the real liqueur can make only Siberian Cats. The world went to mice. Nobody cares for customer's satisfaction - he stood up quickly. And equally quickly found himself back in the chair because as soon as he took the first step he lost his balance - On Cat the Highest - he muttered after a momentary shock. - Wedges look nice, but they're not the most comfortable - he pointed on the sandals.

Socrates looked at the sandals - Where did you get those? - he asked.

- From the Secret Warehouse of the Archeology Agency - said Lineus, who was tuning the guitar in the corner.

Eugene jumped up from the deck chair, but this time he leaned on the table - Haven't I just said it's classified slashed by highly destructive?! - he yelled to Lineus. - I have. And you babble like a girl.

- Why are you so nervous? - laughed Lineus. - Try a pepper pipe and you'll relax.

- Pepper pipe is allowed from the age of two - cut in Socrates. - And that jumper also comes from the secret warehouse? - he turned to Eugene, who was brushing dust off the leather jacket thrown on his back.

- Sure. I thought it could be a part of our scenic image. It would be good to start with something strong, you know, memorable.

- How did you get into the secret warehouse? - Socrates frowned.

- I have my ways - said Eugene and sank back in the deck chair.

- Such as stealing a key from my father? - Socrates stood on four paws and waved his tail.

- Oh, no! - said Eugene with a warning. - I beg your pardon! You can call me Gene, and I'll forgive you, but calling me a thief is too much - he stood again, leaning on the table. His gaze scanned the magazine to make sure everybody listened. Having ensured he drew

their attention he continued - This is much too much – he said in a grieving tone. - I, the same cat who wiped your tears with his own fur when the Bengali girl dumped you. The same cat who taught you piano has been named the thief of the key. My heart bleeds, Socrates - and here he clutched his chest, and then ostentatiously dropped in the deck chair.

- Well, because... - Socrates paused, not quite knowing what to say. - I mean, you can admit yourself that my father was the only cat with the access to the warehouse. So how would you get the key? You would have thought the same.

- No, no - Eugene shook his paw. - I wouldn't have thought the same. I'm not so quick to judgments like you. I know that I come from a family that doesn't have a good reputation in this city, but that doesn't make me a thief. And your father is not the only cat with the access to the warehouse. I also have my ways to get things done without stealing, you know. I am our manager, and I need to know things you and Lineus have no clue about. All I do is for our band. I found out the warehouse is full of clothes and other stuff, and I've risked potential sentence to the Cat's Dungeon by going there. And you thank me for that by calling me a thief.

- Try a pepper pipe and you'll relax – said again Lineus, tuning the guitar.

And at these words, Socrates and Eugene turned to him at once – When did you become so laid back? - asked him Eugene.

- Try a pepper pipe and you'll relax - repeated Lineus with a laugh.

Socrates approached him and took his guitar. - Completely out of tune - he said, trying a few sounds.

- Try a pepper pipe and you'll relax - laughed Lineus and then loudly hiccupped.

Eugene sighed loudly - How much did you smoke, Lineus? – he asked, disappointed.

- You mean when you were toppling over the warehouse, trying on the sandals or when you were paying the guard to let us in? - asked innocently Lineus, smiling at him.

- On all cats holiness! – screamed Eugene and the hair on his back stood up. – What a band! Sote has me for a thief, and you smoke pepper all the time! – he continued, taking the sandals off. - I break my back for our Catband, and you two parties all the time! Do you know what I should do now?! – he shouted to Lineus.

- Try the pepper pipe? - asked the little smoker and that was the way they ended their rehearsal.

Chapter 3. Anniversary.

Darian stood up with a glass full of the nettle tincture - We are gathered here to celebrate another wedding anniversary of my beloved children – Angelus and Imelda. May you always cherish each other the way you have been for the last four years - he said in a solemn tone and looked expectantly at Socrates – Do you want to say something?

Socrates cleared his throat, standing from his chair - I would like to make heartfelt congratulations to my parents on this solemn day. Indeed, I am full of admiration for your achievements - he said then drank a glass of the tincture.

Angelus gave him a wide smile – Thank you, son – he said, standing up. – On behalf of myself and Imelda I thank you all for celebrating with us today. Time flies, indeed. It seemed it was yesterday we met and had our Socrates. And look at him now, he is going to college tomorrow – he looked at Sote and sighed loudly.

- No - murmured Socrates.

- I'm sorry? – asked Angelus.

- I'm not going to college – said loud Socrates, goggle-eyed.

- And what are you going to do, if you're not going to college? – asked Imelda.

- I'm going to make music – said Socrates with enthusiasm.

- What? – Angelus stood up again.

- Music – repeated Socrates.

- Hold me or I'll scratch the table! – yelled suddenly Angelus, showing long claws that dug into the table. – My son wants to make a living on purring!

- No Daddy! It's not purring. It's music. We play, sing and dance – explained Socrates.

- Who are the others? – asked Imelda.

- Eugene and Lineus.

- Oh, Eugene and his gang - she shook her head disapprovingly.

- Mommy, it's a band and we make music. We will be the first rock band in the history.

- What band? - asked simultaneously Imelda and Darian.

- Rock band - Socrates repeated.

- And what is rock? – Darian asked.

- People’s music – explained Angelus. - How do you know about that? - he turned to Socrates.

- I found out from leaks - Socrates looked at him innocently.

- Leaks from where?

- From the agency.

- What agency?

- Yours.

- That’s not possible. My agency doesn’t leak – frowned Angelus.

- Daddy, your agency has more holes than the pipes in this house - laughed Socrates.

- Watch your mouth! – yelled Angelus, jumping up on the table. - That’s enough of the jokes. There will be no music. Tomorrow, you’re starting college.

- Tomorrow, I’m going to have a great concert.

- Stop this, both of you – cried Imelda. – Socrates, this music thing is only a dream that can’t come true. Some dreams stay only dreams. You have to accept that.

- I can’t Mommy. Music is the only thing I want to do in life. That’s why I should go for the rehearsal now – he said, standing up.

- You have no home to come back to if you leave now – said suddenly Angelus.

Socrates gave him a long look – Daddy, I’m sorry you can’t see there’s nothing wrong with me or what I do. I just wished you listened to my music before making judgments – he said and fled through the window before anyone could stop him.

Chapter 4. Meeting.

It was almost second hour of roaming around the city, when Socrates realized that he was homeless. He didn’t feel bad with this thought. On the contrary, he thought that was it, he - civilized urban cat has the opportunity to feel like his ancestors. Without a roof over his head, no family, no do's and don'ts, depended only on the primal instincts of survival.

He wasn’t going to ask anyone for help, though he was convinced that if only he asked Eugene and Lineus would give him a shelter. Something inside told him that he should try to cope alone. And probably he would have coped if not the fine drops of rain that turned into a downpour - How is this the most important moments of my life has to happen in the rain! -he thought angrily, remembering the first step on two paws, after which broke in a downpour that lasted four days.

A storm after the first hunting with Darian forced them to spend the night in a youth hostel for dogs. Imelda was cutting off fleas he caught then for the next two weeks.

The first note played on the guitar summoned sleet. And now, when he became a free cat, a spring downpour has started.

So he stood on four paws, and trying to avoid the puddles headed for the storage of grain. Disgusted with the wet fur he didn't notice that the warehouse doors were open. He jumped quickly inside and leaped to the wardrobe. He grabbed a woolen shawl, wiped the fur, and then stretched out on Eugene's deck chair - Now I could use a little of the warming liquor – he thought aloud.

- Right. And after the liquor you would like to stay for the night - he heard a female voice.

- Who is here?! - he yelled, jumping off the deck chair. - Who's in my warehouse?! - he repeated, whirring a warning.

- I've marked the whole warehouse, so it's mine. You can check using your nose on your way out. The sooner you leave, the better – she emerged slowly from a dark corner of the warehouse and approached the deck chair. Her blue-gray hair, combed into a neat, one curl on top of her head was shining. In front paws she was holding a hat with a feather. As far as Socrates recognized the same hat that Eugene dug in the secret warehouse. On the hind paws she wore white trousers with a floral motif, which widened in the shape of a bell. Unless the trousers were a novelty, the gray- silver sandals certainly belonged to Eugene. The image was completed by white, silk blouse - Goddess – Socrates thought and his heart pounded so hard he caught his chest.

- What are you waiting for? - she asked, but Socrates had no idea what she said, because the words came from the mouth, which seemed to him more beautiful than a spring rose in Imelda's garden. And Imelda's roses were famous for their unusual beauty.

- Well - she said, noticing his stupor. - You can drink some viola tincture, but after that you'll leave my house - she said, heading for the table. She opened a bottle of the liquor and poured him a huge portion. - Drink - she said, handing him a glass.

Without taking his eyes from her he took a glass and sat down.

- What's wrong? – she asked, seeing that he even didn't try it. - Listen, either you drink or you immediately disappear from here - she whirred a warning.

As disenchanted Socrates drank a glass - What's your name? – the words finally broke through his throat.

- Margarita – she smiled slightly.

- What are you doing in the warehouse?

- I live here.

- Since when?

- Since I've marked it.

- You can't live here because this warehouse belongs to me and the rest of the band – he said in a firmer tone.

- Amendment – she raised the eyebrows. - It belonged to you and the rest of the band. You haven't shown here for a long time, so now the warehouse belongs to me.

- We haven't shown here because there was no material to practice with – Socrates explained. - How do you know we haven't shown here for a long time? – he asked.

- I could hear you sometimes - she said without enthusiasm.

- Really? - he asked, delighted.

- Really - she nodded.

- Do you like our music?

- Yes. I must say, you have a good sound, but the vocal is failing.

- Yes, I know. I need to improve it a bit and... - began Socrates, but she cut him off.

- You drank now disappear. The rain stopped.

- I'm not going anywhere, the warehouse is ours, and you are using Eugene's clothes - he stood up.

- He left them, so I'm using. Besides, they look better on me than on him – she laughed.

- That's for sure. You look like a goddess - he spit out.

- You think so? – she fluttered her long eyelashes.

- Oh, yes - he shook his head and blushed.

- Are you trying to break me with the compliments? - she raised an eyebrow suspiciously.

- No, of course not - he protested. - I say what I see. I mean, I ... I think every cat would think that. I mean, I think this suit and you really fit together. I mean, it's not that I like you or something, it's just I was thinking that ... you look beautiful.

- Thank you - she smiled triumphantly. - Now, be so kind and leave my house.

- I can't - he sighed.

- Listen – she showed her claws. - I don't like to repeat myself. I waited for three weeks until the warehouse was empty. Take into account that spring wasn't the warmest. I arranged just yesterday, although there are still some things that need to be done, such as the

lock on the door so that nobody could roam here. You jumped in here as to your house, though I clearly marked the front door. I let you dry, because I learned the hard way how unpleasant is wet fur. I gave you the liquor, we had a cultural conversation, but now it's time for you to leave the warehouse. I've searched for the house long enough to give it away now into the paws of the first cat that comes here. I'm glad you came, but now go back to your place.

- I can't – he said.

- Why not?

- Because I have no home anymore - he explained.

And at that moment he gave her such a sad look that willingly or unwillingly she hid claws and sat down - Oh - she said.

- Well - he said. - I threw myself out of the house - he sighed.

- I don't understand.

- I just jumped out the window. I didn't even take any souvenirs. The rattle of the sparrow's skull, a dried mouse in a stone frame – the first mouse I caught, you see. There's also the picture with Cat the Highest. I left them all - he waved his paw with regret.

- You have a picture with Cat the Highest? – she asked.

- I had.

- Why did you run away from home? - she walked gracefully to the deck chair and lay down comfortably.

Socrates watched her for a moment without saying a word - Were you exercising acrobatics? - he changed the subject.

- No. Why do you ask? - she looked at him in surprise.

- You move like you were flying – he explained with admiration in his voice.

- Are you trying to break me again? - she laughed.

- No - he waved his paw.

- So, why did you run away from home? - she asked.

- Family misunderstandings – he cut short.

- With your father, Socrates?

- How do you know my name?

- Well, I explained I waited three weeks until you leave the warehouse. I heard your every word and every piece. Anyway - she waved her paw. - Who wouldn't hear you with this amplifier - she looked away at the box standing on the stage.

- Not a bad purchase – Socrates said and followed her gaze. - Eugene dug it from somewhere.

- Not from somewhere only from someone - she looked at him.

- And how do you know this? - Socrates approached the deck chair.

- I have my sources.

- You sound like Eugene- he laughed.

- No - she shook her head and reached for the viola liquor. - My sources are different from Eugene's.

- You're not from this city - he stated.

- Where did you take such an assumption from?

- Let's say your accent betrays it – he smiled victoriously.

- What is wrong with my accent? - she stood up. - That I don't pronounce "r" properly doesn't mean that I come from another town. Your accent isn't the best either.

- I beg your pardon – Socrates got outraged. - I come from the family whose members have always been the best - educated cats of this city... - he stopped, realizing he broke the chain of the tradition just a few hours ago.

- What happened? - she asked.

- Nothing – he scratched his ear. - Listen, Margarita. I'm tired and somehow I'm not happy about sleeping in the grass. The warehouse is big enough for the two of us, and tomorrow Eugene will decide who should stay here. Today, I sleep here.

- Forget it. You know the way out – she turned and walked toward the stage.

- You can't throw me out. I'm staying - he jumped on the deck chair. But he couldn't even blink, and she already stood beside him - I'm staying - he repeated firmly, seeing her showing sharp claws.

- Forget it! - she cried and prepared to jump.

- I won't fight with a girl- he smiled at her warmly.

- And why is that?! - her eyes flashed, and paws hung just above his neck.

- I believe in the power of a peaceful solution – he said, pulling her claws away, and then yawned loudly. - That viola liqueur is good - he muttered, and to her amazement, quietly fell asleep.

Chapter 5. Yoga.

The sun was at its zenith, when Socrates opened his eyes, yawned loudly, and then smacked his lips even louder. His paw instinctively went towards the table searching for

anything that would be suitable for drinking. However, much to his disappointment, nothing like that was on the table - Oh! – he thought angrily, unable to quench his thirst. So he sat with difficulty and sighed loudly. He had to admit that sleeping in the deck chair wasn't a good idea. He didn't curl up in a ball and now he felt all numb - Good morning. It's the first day of your adult life, Socrates - he muttered to himself, jumping off the deck chair with the ache.

- The day is good, so good luck in finding your own home - he heard Margarita from the stage.

- Why didn't you wake me up earlier? - he asked, heading towards her.

Margarita was standing on the right, hind paw. The left one was on the hip, and the front paws were joined at the chest height in a salute gesture. Her eyes were closed.

- On Cat the Highest, what are you doing? - he asked, unable to stop himself from laughing.

Margarita didn't answer. She bent forward and stared off into the distance.

- What are you doing? - he repeated, but again, she didn't answer. So he waved the paw dismissively and turned back - Suit yourself. If you don't want to talk, it's ok. But know that immediately after the hunt I'm going to divide the warehouse. Either we stay here both or neither of us. At least until Eugene decides to whom the warehouse belongs.

- Hunt? - she laughed out loud. - You want to hunt. You can barely move and want to hunt. And you want to divide the warehouse? - she added, standing suddenly in front of him.

- Sure I'm going to hunt - he said to her angrily. - I am a champion of hunting. I won all hunting competitions. I also know all hunting techniques. That's true, I can't do some contortions like you, but I'm an international champion of hunting.

- It's called yoga – she explained with a laugh, making a salute gesture towards him.

- Yo .. What?

- Yoga – she repeated. - My guess is that you've never heard about it – she smiled, winking.

- I haven't heard about yoga? Sure, I've heard - lied Socrates. - You murmured under your breath, so I didn't get that.

- Sure. I get it – she smacked her lips. - Do you want to exercise with me? Focus a bit before the hunt?

- Focus what?

- Your mind – she explained.

- No, no, there's no need for that – he said, waving proudly his tail. - I am an international champion of hunting. I can focus in a second – he said.

- In that case, good luck, champion – she gave him a wide smile, showing white teeth, then she fluttered her eyelashes flirtatiously and before Socrates could say anything she stood on her head with the front paws crossed on the chest.

- You know, I've now thought - he said, admiring her shapes. - That maybe I'll try it. Exercise before the hunt is always good.

- Great – she sounded delighted. - First, you'll learn how to breathe properly. Maybe you can stop snoring – she stood on four paws.

- Was I snoring? - he was surprised.

- Like a dog. All night.

- It must have been the deck chair - justified Socrates.

- Perhaps. And now sit as I sit - she said, and sat down on the ground, crossing her hind paws.

Having sat across from her, Socrates did exactly the same.

- And now take a deep breath – she said. - Well done - she praised him, seeing that he imitates her without a murmur. - Now exhale and again take a deep breath. And once again, inhale and exhale.

- Inhale and exhale - echoed in his mind when he closed his eyes.

- Very good, but try to breathe deeper. Good. The back is straight – she praised his posture.

And then Socrates thought that he really didn't feel like hunting. In fact, he really didn't feel like doing anything. All he wanted was to practice breathing, and listening to her voice.

- What have I just said?! - Eugene screamed at the sight of Socrates.

Socrates jumped to his paws – Eugene? – he asked surprised.

- Yeah, Eugene. What have I just said? - repeated calmly Eugene, poking a paw at accompanying him Lineus. – I've said he surely has a rendezvous.

- You've been right – Lineus smacked his lips. - Half of the city is looking for him, and he's dating.

-Yes - nodded Eugene. - Additionally, in my warehouse. And we agreed a long time ago that the warehouse is a temple of sound, not a place of dates.

- I beg your pardon! - yelled to him Margarita, standing beside Socrates. - The warehouse is mine, and we didn't have a date.

- Well, well, what a kitty - laughed Eugene, sitting down.

- How did you call me? - she asked, moving towards him.

- You know – Eugene gave her angelic smile. - With this hair in a curl and the eyelashes in a range, you're so sweet like a little kitty - he said.

She gave him a seductive look and sat down in front of him - Little kitty, you say? - she repeated in enchanting voice and gently touched his neck with a paw.

- Yes - said dreamily Eugene.

Margarita stood up gently, smiled from ear to ear, and gave such a leap that before he could mutter anything he was lying spread on the ground.

- Help! - he yelled. - Kitty beats me!

Before Lineus and Socrates figured out in the situation Margarita managed to do two somersaults and landed on the stage.

Meanwhile, Eugene still on the ground was shouting - Get her off me! Save me!

- Save from whom? – Lineus asked, leaning over him.

Eugene stopped screaming, sat down uncertainly, looked with suspicion at Socrates and Lineus, who were trying not to laugh, which came to them with a great difficulty, then stood on shaky paws - Outrageous behavior - he muttered under his breath.

- Say what? - Lineus didn't hear him.

- Outrageous behavior - he repeated louder. – And she tore my coat - he continued, looking at a cream linen coat, now torn. - Indescribable scandal. I have no words. Apparently such a Briton, a decent race, civilized and lunges with claws without any warning. I go to her with compliments and a full set of manners, although I deal with a stranger, and she yanks me like I was a mouse - he was throwing words in all directions, gesturing profusely and walking in circles.

- That should teach you not to call me a kitty – Margarita laughed, watching his dance from the stage.

- Oh, yeah? - he stopped and looked at her angrily. - And just who are you?

- Margarita Third the Highest – she introduced herself, spreading paws gracefully.

- The Highest? - Lineus repeated.

- Yes – she confirmed.

- That Highest? – asked Socrates.

- Yes.

- On Cat the Highest – came from Eugene's mouth.

- Don't call my father here – she gave him a warning.

Socrates looked at her suspiciously - Wait a second! - he said. - How can the daughter of Cat the Highest roam alone around the streets?

- The same as the son of Angelus Great. She threw herself out of the house – Margarita explained.

Chapter 6. Suggestion.

Eugene sank his long body in the deck chair, took off sunglasses, and then licked the fur on his chest – Socrates, I have to admit you have pretty good taste when it comes to dating - he said after a long pause. - However, this time you've gone too far. If I were you, I would count every single hair on you, because Cat the Highest will pull them all out for this love affair – he grinned.

- I beg your pardon! - screamed indignantly Margarita.

- I also - Socrates supported her. - Margarita and I met by chance yesterday in this warehouse. We have no connections besides drinking viola liquor, sharing the warehouse over night and yoga.

- It should be added running away from home – cut in Lineus.

- And you're done – added Eugene. - I don't know why nobody heard of Margarita's escape, but about you heard half of the city. As soon as you were gone, your father hung your photos around the town.

- What photos? – asked Socrates.

- Family photos – said Eugene.

- The one with the feeder and the polka-dot nappy is moving - added Lineus. - I have a heart ache when I think someone could lose such a lovely kitten - he sobbed honestly.

- Lineus, I'm standing here and I'm fine! - Socrates yelled to him. - How Daddy could do this to me? These photos ended my career.

- Why do you think so? - asked Lineus.

- Well, let's take you for an example. You cry at the sight of my photos from my childhood.

- That's because you're such a cutie on them – he said apologetically, drying tears.

- And after these photographs hang the band's poster with my name. Who will treat it seriously?

- Few - said Eugene.

- Daddy went too far – Socrates said with sadness. - I was going to keep in touch with him, but after what I heard I decided to break diplomatic relations with my family. Leaving home was the right decision.

- I don't think, so – Eugene sighed loudly. – You put Lineus in danger and me by leaving home.

- How? - asked surprised Socrates.

- I've heard that your dad turned for help to Cat the Highest, who reportedly became very concerned about your escape. Given the Margarita's story, I know where that compassion came from. This way, you are wanted by his agents, and by the chasing pigeons. It's not difficult to lose the first ones, but it's really not easy with the pigeons. It took us half a day to get here. Lineus, how many times we had to act crazy?

Lineus started counting on his paws - The first time was when an agent stopped us on the Bridge of Cat the Founder, and you had to perform a belly dance in public. I don't think he believed you were a professional dancer.

- It doesn't matter now, go on – hurried him Eugene.

- The second time was, when they spotted us in your father's mine and we had to pretend we were building pyramids. I can't remember the third time, because you hit me with your shoe... - he broke off.

- In the Old Town when I was trying on a coat at a fair, and you were chanting about Sote's escape - recalled Eugene.

- Oh - he smacked his lips disapprovingly to himself. - I've remembered now. Well, and the fourth time was, when we were approaching the warehouse and your boots stuck in the mud. The pigeons spotted us right away. You started crying that when you get yesterday's rain, you'll get it paid for your damaged boots. And only then the pigeons recognize you as a lunatic, and then turned back to the city.

- I would immediately fly with you to the House of Something's – Not –Right –Cats - laughed Margarita.

- You can act a wise man when you try to outsmart the chasing pigeons at least once - said Eugene offended.

- You know, somehow I managed that for a month - she said to him. - This warehouse was the only place the agents or pigeons didn't trace. Although, honestly, I think it was the roar of the amplifier what discouraged them. Well, but I see now that this hideaway is also burned.

- Why? – Socrates asked, surprised.

- Because Eugene and Lineus led the pigeons right here. Maybe they returned to the city, but certainly they'll be back to check properly on you two, lunatics – she smiled at Eugene.

-We can't stay here – said Eugene.

- What I'm going to do now? - Socrates worried. - My career is over. I don't know what to do - he murmured sadly.

- What would you say about vacations? – asked suddenly Eugene.

Sote stared at him – You're feeling ok?

- You want to go on vacations, now? – asked Margarita.

- Sure. I hope you like skiing - he smiled wide, and she looked at him like he really was a lunatic.

Chapter 7. Love at the first jump.

Socrates definitely wasn't wasting time in the Eternal Snow Mountains. He loved skiing and skateboarding. Apart from that, he was writing new songs. Every day he would come out with one song. He had to admit that Eugene's idea was genius.

Eugene, on the other hand, seemed to have other plans than vacations because after three days in the Eternal Snow Mountains he left them without an explanation. And because he went to Nobody - Knows – Where, no one was able to follow him. As it was widely known, no one knew where the city was.

There were some rumors that few cats managed to get there, but they kept the details of the journey only to themselves. Socrates suspected that Eugene could have a map with the location of the city from his father, because as a fresh rumor said his family was trying to open a new mine there. But for what purpose Eugene decided to go to the city, of which everyone heard, but few knew he had no idea.

The least interest in this matter showed Lineus, who had a great time at the winter resort. Admittedly, skiing, skateboarding, skating and all kinds of physical activity was not one of his favorites, but he couldn't deny that hanging out on the slopes for hours and watching Sote's performances was a pleasure.

To the disappointment of all, the least enthusiastic about the holiday was Margarita. Nothing suited her. She didn't like the mountains, and she didn't like skiing or hanging out on the slopes.

- I don't understand – let it out Socrates. - How someone, who does yoga can be afraid of skiing? - he asked, sipping the nettle tincture with orange.

- I don't understand - said Margarita, trying to keep balance on skis. - How cat who ski so well can't do yoga – she looked down at him.

- I know the answers - said bored Lineus.

- Oh, yeah? - Margarita twisted mouth. - Explain then why I'm afraid of skis, and he's afraid of yoga? – she looked at him with no hope for an answer.

Lineus drove a stick over his tail, and then bent his paws quite as though he tried to ski down the slope. - Because he is a boy, and you are a girl. Boys don't practice yoga and girls don't ski - he said to her seriously, straightening paws. - And that explains it all - he added after a moment.

- That was the wisest statement you could come up with – she said, throwing sticks at him.

- Thanks. I appreciate you saying this – he missed her sarcasm.

- Help! – she screamed suddenly.

Before Lineus figured out what was going on Margarita was sliding down the slope backwards and had no sticks with her.

- Sote! – Lineus screamed – Catch her!

Socrates, who was finishing his nettle tincture, threw the glass away – Are you out of your mind?! She'll kill herself! – he screamed to Lineus and rushed after Margarita.

- What did I do? – asked confused Lineus and set off after them.

- Bend your knees! – screamed Socrates.

Margarita didn't hear him. Her body was bending backwards and forward with every blow of wind - I'll die - she thought.

And at that moment she felt fear and suddenly her life flashed in front of her eyes. She saw herself as a tiny kitten, biting a rubber mouse. Then she saw her Mommy and Daddy playing with her in the Down Palace. And then she saw another image from her life, and the next one, and then she saw Socrates. He was holding her, but why? She couldn't figure it out.

- Is she going to be alright? – asked Lineus.

- I don't know! If you paid attention to her, we wouldn't have to worry about that! – Socrates said angrily.

- What did I do? It's not my fault she lost her balance or that she can't ski. You were there too! – Lineus snapped back.

Socrates gave a long sigh – True – he almost whispered.

- I'm dead - thought aloud Margarita. – Did I die? – she asked, opening her eyes.

- No! – said Lineus with relief – You didn't die, but you got stuck in a snowdrift – he smiled at her.

- I'm sorry – said Socrates. – It's my fault. I insisted on skiing. If you died, I would've never...I mean, I don't know what I would do without you.

- What do you mean? – she asked, standing up.

- Yeah, what do you mean? – asked Lineus, sensing something big is on the way here.

Socrates turned to him – Lineus, can't you see I'm confessing love here, and you're disturbing?! – he asked angrily.

- What did you say? – Margarita's eyes widened.

Socrates turned to her - I fell in love with you – he gave her a long look.

And in that moment Margarita realized that it was time to run away from the Eternal Snow Mountains. In fact, at that very moment she would run away to Nobody - Knows - Where, if only she knew where it was. And the best thing would be if she ran away to a place where there are no cats. Not even one. Because, how was it possible that she ran away from home of Cat the Highest after she rejected a marriage proposal, what according to her father was a scandalous behavior because the cat who proposed was incredibly rich, and she met another cat who she barely knew and who just said he fell in love with her? That wasn't possible, especially that she - Margarita Third the Highest was taller than Socrates at least three heads. And a tall girl should never hang out with short boy, what was well known. So she looked with empty eyes at Socrates trying to calculate how fast to run so he wouldn't catch her. And finally she sighed deeply, took a step back, turned away from him and run ahead as fast as she could.

- You hurt her when you mentioned her bad ski skills earlier – said Lineus completely lost in the situation.

Chapter 8. Hit.

Lineus sat in front of the fireplace, tuning the guitar. From time to time he glanced at Socrates, who was strolling around the cottage anxiously.

- She went to Nobody - Knows – Where – Lineus broke the silence.

- How do you know? - Socrates stopped the walk, which he continued from the moment when he got to the cottage and found Margarita was gone.

- I don't know, I just said so – Lineus shrugged his paws.

- Don't say anything if you don't know - muttered Socrates.

- Sorry – Lineus shrugged his shoulders.

- I think it was a mistake to tell her I loved her. I mean, look at her. She's beautiful, smart and so tall. And I am, you know, short and thin, like out of her league.

- You're right - nodded sincerely Lineus.

Socrates looked at him disappointed – I was counting on your support, not honesty. It's better if you play something and I'll think about my Maggie. Did you notice how quickly she packed?

- Oh, yeah. I mean she took all Eugene's clothes. How did she manage to pack two suitcases at such a short time? Eugene won't be happy about that – he said and played the guitar.

- Oh, Maggie - sang Socrates. – How to forget you? - he sighed loudly.

Lineus took his paws off the strings. - Hum it again - he asked and his eyes lit up.

Socrates straightened his back and cleared his throat loudly - Oh, Maggie, how to forget you? – he sang again.

- It's good – Lineus shook his head and played again.

Socrates listened to him for a long moment, then again cleared his throat loud and sang: Sol, mi, do. Sol, mi, do.

- What's that for? – Lineus sang back.

- I'm tuning my vocal cords – said Socrates - You don't like it? - he asked.

- Fine. You could say you were tuning - shrugged his shoulders Lineus. - Hum it again - he said, and returned to the guitar.

Socrates once again listened for a few moments in silence, and then took a deep breath and sang like that:

Oh, Maggie, how to forget you?

Oh, Maggie, I fell in love with you.

You left without a word.

I didn't know where to find you.

White snow carried you away.

And I stood at the crossroads, all day.

- Wow! – cried Lineus. - Sote! This song is great! We should call it the Song of Margarita.

- It's a good idea. Play on, because I have a rush of words – Socrates said and returned to singing:

I thought you were my dream girl.

I thought you were my soul mate.

You left in a broad day.

You covered the tracks well.

White snow carried you away.

And I stood at the crossroad, all day.

Oh, Maggi, how to forget you?

Oh, Maggi, I still love you.

Years pass and my love will last.

White snow carried you away.

And I stood at the crossroad, all day.

Somewhere in the vicinity of the threshold Eugene was wiping his eyes - Bravo! – he cried deeply moved.

- Manager – Lineus gave him a wide smile.

- Greetings to the first guitarist in the history of modern cats - said in the solemn tone Eugene. He crossed the threshold and slammed the door with a flourish. - I can see you don't waste time. This song will be a hit. We'll give concerts and interviews. We'll be played by all radio stations. We'll be famous – he finished and fixed a hat that slid off on the left eyebrow.

Socrates looked at him amused by his excitement – You really think so? – he asked.

Eugene fixed his hat again – Of course I think so. Couldn't you hear yourself? This song is amazing. Where is your enthusiasm?

- His enthusiasm's gone with Margarita – explained Lineus.

- I see. She stole his heart – Eugene nodded.

- That's right – shook his head Lineus. – She also stole your clothes.

Chapter 9. Decision.

Eugene ran from the wardrobe to the fireplace, back and forth, waving his paws and scattering the words so fast that Lineus couldn't keep up with understanding.

- How could she?! – he screamed. – She’s shameless, soulless, materialistic Briton! I have no words! I rescued her from the warehouse, and she stole my clothes. If I only could predict losing my wonders to her - his voice cracked when he peered into the empty wardrobe.
- She took everything - he went on after a moment, taking a deep breath - Green-and-black plaid coat, and summer suede overcoat. Summer sandals, spring Wellingtons in larks and hand stitched boots from the shoemaker Mellissi. I won’t even mention the head coverings, trousers and blouses. I will find her and when I get her into my paws I will ... - he stopped encountering Sote’s sharp look.

- You will what? – Lineus asked, not noticing Socrates stood in the doorway.

- I will pull out her hair - finished Eugene.

- Be careful when you’re talking about Margarita! – Socrates shouted to him and showed claws.

- Oh, really? You’re going to fight your friend over some girl, who is a thief?

- Watch your language! – shouted Socrates.

- Oh, really? You’re going to fight your friend over some girl, who stole your heart? You’re so naïve, Socrates. She stole my clothes. I got them from the secret warehouse to create our stage image. She knew that. Despite that, she stole them anyway. She’s mean and she’s a thief. That’s it. There’s no point in talking about her, because my hair stands on ends - he waved his paw with resignation and licked hair on his chest.

Socrates stood on two paws, purred, frowned and then asked - Did you call me a naïve cat?

- Yes - Eugene nodded, brushing the hair off the coat.

Socrates swallowed hard and said nothing.

- I felt sorry for you when you fell for the Bengali girl, but not this time. Falling in love with the runaway daughter of Cat the Highest was childish. Margarita drove Cat the Highest mad by her tantrums and demands. Everyone’s heard that. Did you really think you would change her?

- Yes – Socrates said under his breath. – I thought we had something special, you know?

- I know – nodded Eugene.

- I thought it was meaningful to her; you know – Socrates said.

- We know – nodded Lineus.

- I thought we could sing together. She has got a good voice, you know.

- I don’t think it’s going to happen – said Eugene and sighed loudly.

- I decide to fall out of love and not to fall in love again – Socrates said firmly and looked at Lineus.

Lineus smiled approvingly but thought - I don't think it's going to happen.

Chapter 10. Search.

Cat the Highest had a bad feeling. A few weeks have passed since Margarita disappeared and his agents haven't brought good news. Some cat has seen her. Some cat had heard about her, but the search wasn't successful.

Kahelus the Highest blamed himself thousand upon a thousand times for the loss of his only daughter.

She would be now by his side if he hadn't tried to force her into the marriage with Fabius Goldenhair. So, he wandered every night around the Down Palace, causing anxiety of the guards.

The news about Socrates Great brought him more sorrow. Kahelus felt hurt that Socrates notified his parents about his escape while Margarita ran away in the middle of the night, deceiving the best guards of the palace. He would give everything now for the view of his daughter.

But nothing suggested that Margarita is ever found. As a grieving father, he felt for Angelus's loss and decided to help in Socrates's search.

If only he knew that Socrates Great and Margarita enjoyed a few weeks in the Eternal Snow Mountains, his sympathy for Angelus would disappear in an instant.

What would happen if he learned that the organizer of the trip in the mountains was Eugene Mixed? One thing was certain – the Mixed family wouldn't get away with this.

Angelus Great as same as Cat the Highest didn't have the best feelings. For three weeks he was doing everything what was in his power to find his son, but all his efforts went in vain.

He blamed Eugene Mixed and his gang for the escape of Socrates, although he had to admit he had no idea, who belonged to the gang. Therefore, after Socrates disappeared, he went to talk to Eugene's father. But Pompey Mixed had no idea where was Socrates. More than that, he had no idea where was Eugene. He explained briefly that his son came and leaves home as he pleases, so he comes when he comes.

So Angelus went to Lineus's mother. As it was widely known, she was a single mother, who got gray hair and heart palpitations due to Lineus's disappearance.

Lineus's father, as it was widely known, had died a tragic death after eating berries in the Poison Forest. What took him there no one had an idea, because everyone avoided the Poison Forest. So after a short conversation with Lineus's Longpaw mother Angelus came to the conclusion that no one, including the agents of Cat the Highest knew where Socrates and the rest of the runaways were.

So, he put all hopes in the chasing pigeons sent to all cities across and along, because as Angelus knew, sooner or later a chasing pigeon will spot every cat. With this hope he lay down every night to sleep, but as same as Cat the Highest since the escape of Socrates, he wasn't able to get a wink of sleep.

Chapter 11. Change.

Socrates was suffering too, but from a lack of inspiration. He wrote ten songs, and then the flow of words has dried up without notice.

- I think we should leave the Eternal Snow Mountains - Eugene said.

-Why? – asked Socrates, lying in front of a burning fireplace.

- I think we should start concerts. Your creative vein will come back then – he explained.

- Where do you want to start? – asked Lineus.

- I want to start in the city Nobody – Knows – Where.

- But nobody knows how to get there – Sote protested.

Eugene smiled from ear to ear and pulled out of a coat pocket a crumpled piece of paper. He stretched it on the table – I've got a map! – he cried.

Lineus and Socrates exchanged a quick glance and stood by him in a second.

- I want to see – Lineus stared at the map.

- Have a good look because we are going be there very soon. In fact, I have already been to Nobody – Knows – Where.

Lineus gave him a surprised look – How did you get this map – he asked?

- That's a secret – Eugene whispered.

- It won't be a secret when we get caught by the agents. They're searching for us.

Well, at least me – reminded Socrates.

- Don't worry. The agents don't go there. The city is not fond of Cat the Highest so we can concert there freely. Besides, when we come to fame even Cat the Highest won't

be able to stop us. The bill of law he signed this year, says he can't sentence entertainers to the Cat's Dungeon.

- So, the first concert will be in the Nobody- Knows – Where? – Socrates asked.

- Yes – Eugene confirmed. – I think we should also play in Catfield, then in Catland, and then in Everybody – Knows – Where, and the last one in The City of Liberty. -
What do you think about my tour plan?

- Great! – Socrates and Lineus said at once.

Chapter 12. The City of Liberty.

Margarita Third the Highest was indescribably tired. Since the escape from the Eternal Snow Mountains, she could count only on herself. She was circulating from town to town, wandering the streets of unknown places. And wherever she appeared she was stirring up an interest not only because of her beauty, but also by two suitcases she carried on her back.

In Catland she had a moment of a breakdown; she wanted to throw the suitcases away, but the view of Eugene's hats stopped her. She has never seen hats of such mesmerizing shapes and decorations. She was trying to fight her weakness as hard as she could; that is, from time to time she was taking out a thing or two from the suitcase to leave them somewhere, only to come back to them a few hours later. This way, her journey took extremely long, and Margarita has already lost count of how many days have passed since the escape from home.

And many days have passed. So many that Cat the Highest has stopped counting them. His agents and chasing pigeons have suggested the end of the search. It happened extremely rarely to find missing cats after a few months. If they were found alive, it wouldn't be for a long time. Runaways were sentenced for the Cat's Dungeon. Kahelus never listened to their excuses, he didn't go into the details of their motives, he hasn't engaged in argumentation. Just like that, he decided they didn't deserve it.

Such was his role; sentences for the Cat's Dungeon those who broke the law. The same role held his father, grandfather and great-grandfather and the same rule was to hold a future husband of Margarita.

But Margarita had no husband, plus she was a runaway. And who will be the next Cat the Highest, when he dies? Kahelus had no idea. So he wandered around the Down Palace, constantly muttering: Margarita, Margarita, where are you my love?

- Margarita, Margarita, where are you my love? – muttered the same thing Socrates, every time he found a moment alone. He couldn't help it. His thoughts constantly returned to her.

Margarita thought neither of Daddy nor of Socrates. First, she was to go to Nobody - Knows - Where, but after the first few days of wandering in circles, she came to the conclusion that without a map she'll never succeed. So she decided to go to the only city that wasn't under her father's rule. And that was the City of Liberty. But there was one thing she had to consider. As it was widely known, to live in the city one must swear an oath on their own life that one never, ever get involved with a cat - none. If one breaks the oath, one dies tragically, dropped from a high slope directly into the ocean. So after thinking this through, what took her all day, she decided to go there.

Margarita has arrived at the city gates tired, resigned, but with suitcases on the back.

- What are you looking for in our city? – asked one of the guards.

Margarita gave her a long look, admiring her beautiful, leopard hair, and then she sighed loudly and sat on the ground - Shelter - she managed.

- From whom? - asked another of the guards, sitting next to her companion.

Margarita gave her a gentle smile and stood up - From cats – she said.

- You found the right place – they both smiled.

- What do I need to do to enter the city? - asked Margarita.

- You must tell us what city you come from, what's your name, what kind of family you left and how long you plan to stay here. If you stay longer than two weeks, you have to take an oath on your own life.

- What oath? – asked innocently Margarita.

- You have to swear that you never, ever and ever get involved with a cat - explained the first of the guards.

- After taking the oath you can stay in the city forever, but remember you break it even once and you will be thrown into the ocean - added the second of the guards.

- I understand - nodded her head Margarita. - And what would happen if I took the oath, but after a few years decided to leave the city? - she looked at them.

- After taking the oath you belong to this city, you can't leave. You have two weeks to think about it. It's enough time for you to decide if you want to stay or leave the city - explained the first guard.

- Agree – smiled Margarita. - I'm coming in.

- Alright – smacked her lips the first guard and she pulled out of her vest pocket, a notebook and an ink-bottle. - What city you come from? – she pulled out a claw and dipped it in ink.

- I come from the city of the Highest Cats - replied quietly Magi

- Oh, wow – sighed impressed the second guard.

The first guard ignored her and went on to the next question - What is your name? – she asked.

- Margarita - Maggie said casually.

- M-A-R-G-A-R-I-T-A – spelled the guard scraping in the notebook. - And your second name?

- Well ... Margarita and that's it - lied Margarita.

- There must be something more - said the second guard.

- Well...

- Listen – the first one got annoyed. - These data are classified slashed by very destructive. Once they are written, they are put into an envelope which is sealed by my saliva. Later, they are transferred to the archives and kept under rocks until your death. If you decide to leave the city before taking the oath, we return the envelope to you without opening it.

- Alright - said much calmer Maggie. - My name is Margarita Third the Highest.

- T-H-I-R-D T-H-E H-I-G-H-E-S-T - she stopped spelling and looked at Margarita surprised. - From these Highest? - she asked and her eyes widened.

- Yes - nodded Margarita. - I'm the daughter of Kahelus, the Highest, the current ruler.

- On the cats relics! - screamed with shock the second guard. - You're the daughter of Cat the Highest – she gave a quick leap around Margarita and stood in front of her.

- Yes! - screamed annoyed Margarita. - I'm his daughter, but have no contact with him anymore. So what? Are you going to let me in or not? - she said in despair.

- Margarita Third the Highest, welcome to the City of Liberty – the first guard bowed before her - It's a pleasure to the city to have you with us - she added with a great courtesy and opened the gate.

Margarita threw stripes on the neck, and then got up slowly with her suitcases on the back - Farewell Daddy - she murmured under her breath and walked through the gate.

Chapter 13. Concert.

The city Nobody - Knows - Where captivated by wooden architecture that Socrates saw for the first time in life. He hasn't seen anything like that in other cities. And he's seen many cities because Daddy used to take him to his archeological conferences, where Socrates out of boredom was writing lyrics.

Lineus, who, unlike Socrates hasn't been in the world at all, found the wooden city as normal as stone city, and as soon as he arrived there he felt at home. Moreover, as the rest of the Catband noticed, Lineus Longpaw was one of the cats that feel everywhere at home.

Eugene shared Lineus's attitude only because he's seen the city before.

As soon as they entered the city, they became an attraction. Their posters hung on every tree and bush.

There was a picture of three of them on the poster. In the picture Lineus was madly playing the guitar, Socrates was singing and dancing at the microphone, and Eugene was playing trumpet. There was a full moon behind them.

The city was buzzing with curiosity as loud as possible. After all, the oldest cats couldn't remember any concert, and certainly not a rock one. Those who managed to get tickets promised photos to family and friends. And the tickets weren't cheap. A seat near the stage cost seventy stones. Not every cat was able to carry that on their back. The weaker cats could count on hearing seats, and those that didn't have any stones could only count on reading the reviews in the local newspaper.

When Socrates looked from the back of the stage, he saw cats of all breeds, colors and ages standing on two paws, waiting for their performance. And then he felt something he has never felt before. Namely: his body shivered, his paws shook suddenly and in a second his hair stood up. He looked like he was thunder stroked.

Eugene, next to him, couldn't believe his eyes - What's wrong with you? - he asked. Socrates didn't move.

- Lineus?! - Eugene called for the guitarist who was putting a shirt on - We have a problem here - he announced gravely.

Lineus looked at him scandalized that he was disturbed while changing clothes, but after a moment he asked - What is it?

- It's him - Eugene pointed at Socrates.

Lineus sighed heavily, that he had to some problems sort out just before the gig, then turned his gaze to Socrates and screamed - Wow! What happened to him?

- He made it, just a minute ago - explained Eugene, swallowing hard. - And if that wasn't enough, he's shaking like a jelly and can't speak.

Lineus sighed loudly - He has stage fright.

- Now of all times?! - Eugene lamented.

- We have to do something - said Lineus.

- Like what?

Lineus came closer to Socrates and put his paw on his shoulder – Sote, it's alright to be nervous. Everyone gets nervous before going out on the stage.

Socrates swallowed hard – Really? – he asked in a trembling voice.

- Yeah – nodded Lineus. – Look at my paws. They are shaking.

- I can't do it. I can't go out there – panicked Socrates, seeing that Lineus's paws weren't shaking at all.

- Let me try – said Eugene and moved Lineus away. He took Socrates by the shoulders and shook him twice – Pull yourself together, or you'll have to go to college! – he shouted.

Socrates opened his mouth in shock – Ok, I'm good. We can start now – he said.

Eugene gave a big smile – That's how you do it – he winked to Lineus.

Socrates cleared his voice, took a deep breath and said – Lets sing.

- I'm glad you're back - said Eugene and went to the stage. - Madams and Messieurs of the city Nobody - Knows - Where! - he said euphorically into the microphone, and the crowd in front of him held breath. Everyone stared at his huge hat, falling down on the left eyebrow, purple trousers and brown high boots. And at that moment, everyone in the crowd admired his clothes.

- Madams and Messieurs of the city Nobody - Knows – Where – repeated Eugene, seeing that he drew their attention. - I welcome you to our first rock concert. My name is Eugene, and in a moment, I'll be joined by my two great friends and extremely talented musicians, Lineus and Socrates. The three of us would like to madly welcome you at the concert of the Catband! - he finished joyfully, and then disappeared from the stage.

At the same moment the curtain rolled up and the audience saw Socrates standing in front of a microphone. He was wearing white trousers and a blue blouse. His blue eyes were sparkling - Hi girls – he said nicely to the first row of the crowd. – Do you want to hear some good music? – he asked them and they gave a murmur of delight . So he gave them the widest smile he could.

At this smile, half of rows gave a loud “Oh”sigh.

- I'm going to sing a special song – he said into the microphone and looked at the rest of the band. – Ready, boys? – he asked.

At his words Eugene and Linues started to play.

- Oh, Maggi, how to forget you? Oh, Maggi, I fell in love with you – sang Socrates and the audience gave “Oh” sight. He smiled and continued the song of Margarita. And when he finished, the crowd looked like enchanted.

- Once more! – cats shouted to him . But Socrates began the next song, and everyone started dancing, forgetting the ballad. Then came the next song and the next, and so the concert lasted until late into the night.

And in the morning, when the cats woke up, the city has announced the concert as the best event in the city since ancient times. Headlines were screaming from all newspapers – “The Catband rocks!” The street dealers of antiques were pushing up the price of the Catband’s photos from hour to hour. Finally, the city streets were so covered with stones and photographs that the guards had to close the street stalls.

That was the way the Catband has come to fame.

Chapter 14. Breakthrough.

Cat the Highest sat down on the Rose Throne exceptionally without screaming. And while some of the roses seemed to be a little withered, which didn’t escape his attention, he decided not to make a big deal of it. Normally he would whirr, jump up and down, and purr scary, but today - three months after the disappearance of Margarita he decided to let go of the palace entourage.

Maybe one of the cats overslept and didn’t have time to pick fresh roses to the Throne. Today, he didn’t care even for a few dead flowers. Because today, Cat the Highest received two pieces of information, and each of them was hair - raising. The first piece concerned Margarita and the other Socrates Great, and both of them were in some incomprehensible way linked.

So, now Kahelus was sitting on the Rose Throne and questioned his agents - So you're telling me here, Rockus Fastpaw, that you think Margarita is in the city of Liberty? – he frowned and looked sharply at the golden-hair agent, who was lying on the floor like he was crucified.

- With a great regret, the Highest, I confirm - Rockus raised his head and muttered quietly.

- Maybe she had gone there just to see the city, out of curiosity? - thought aloud Cat the Highest.

- With a great regret, the Highest, I disagree - raised his head again Rockus.

- Did she take the oath on her own life? - asked Kahelus.

- With the greatest regret, the Highest, I confirm - said the agent.

- On Holy Relics! Why this misfortune happened to me! - screamed in despair Kahelus, giving a great leap towards Rockus, who stood up on trembling paws.

- Maybe we could get her out of there? - suggested another agent, seeing a friend in danger. Every cat knew that many agents lost their lives for bringing bad news to Kahelus.

- You say? - Cat the Highest stepped back and sat on the throne. - How do you want to do it, Nicos Medium? – his eyes pierced the red- black cat, who was grinning slyly.

- Yes– smacked his lips loudly Nicos Medium. - As I said earlier, Socrates Great with his gang gave a concert in Nobody – Knows - Where. All cats have gone crazy about them. Apparently the band is more popular than you, the Highest.

- No way! After my dead body! - yelled Kahelus.

- I only repeat what cats say - smiled innocently Nicos.

- Yes, yes. I know – Kahelus suddenly came to his senses and licked hair on his chest.

- Go on - he muttered impatiently.

- I've received information that the Catband wants to give concerts in a few more cities, including the city of Liberty. During the concert the vigilance of the city guards may be weakened. We could then abduct Margarita.

- And how do you want to weaken their vigilance when even I, the smartest of all cats, if only I wasn't Cat the Highest, wouldn't be able to outsmart them? - asked Kahelus and purred scary.

- The Highest - said Rockus, standing on two paws. - We've been informed that during the concert in Nobody - Knows – Where cats passed out from an impression.

- From an impression? - Kahelus prepared to jump. - And what made on them such an impression?

- A song about Margarita - explained Nicos.

- Margarita?! My daughter?! - thundered Cat the Highest.

- With a great regret, the Highest, I confirm – Nicos shook from fear.

- Unbelievable! - yelled Kahelus with anger. - My daughter in some song! What was she doing with Socrates Great?! Why was he singing about her?! Bring Angelus Great and imprison him in the Cat's Dungeon! – he continued screaming and waving at them. - Unthinkable! Some song more popular than I am! I forbid! I sentence to the Cat's Dungeon! Do you hear me?!

And he was screaming and screaming long after the agents vanished. He purred scary all day and all night until he lost his voice for four days.

And after four days he received another message regarding the Catband. This time, they gave a successful concert in Catfield.

After a week the same horrendous news came from Catland. A week later the same news came from – Everybody – Knows – Where, and at this stage Cat the Highest knew he couldn't forbid the singing.

Chapter 15. Shock.

Socrates loved fame. Since the first concert his life has turned upside down. He felt now like a world hero.

He was loved in every city. In Nobody - Knows - Where he had a crowd of admirers who followed his every step. In Everyone - Knows - Where a holiday has been established in his honor. In Catfield, Eugene had to hire a bodyguard for him because cats wanted to tear him apart – out of love.

So now he was lounging in front of the fireplace and watched the journalist scraping notes enthusiastically.

- What do you think about your last concert? - asked young journalist, adjusting glasses on his nose.

- I think it was successful. I've seen many fainted cats - answered confidently Socrates.

- Do you realize the Catband has been hailed as the greatest event since the Revelation of the Seven Cats? – the journalist adjusted his glasses.

- Yes, I've heard that, but I think that's not what we are. The Revelation of the Seven Cats had a religious character, and we are a rock band. There's no point in comparing - Socrates said and yawned.

- Well, yes- nodded the journalist and scraped the note. – I want to talk with you about the song of Margarita.

- Ok.

- Who is the girl from the song?

- She's a girl I met quite a long time ago. I liked her name, so I decided to use it in the song. That's it.

- And there was nothing between you two?

- Of course not - Socrates lied and stood up.

- There are rumors that Margarita from the song is the daughter of Cat the Highest – said the journalist.

- The rumors are wrong – Socrates lied but this time with more conviction.

- The last question – said the journalist, standing up. - How did you react when you heard about your father's sentence to the Cat's Dungeon?

And at this point Socrates felt like he had the ground cut out from under his paws and he saw thousands of twinkling stars, and then he fell on the ground.

And when he opened his eyes, he saw Eugene staring at him intensely.

- Cat the Healer says you got a shock – Eugene explained.

- Why?

- The journalist slipped his tongue - Eugene became angry.

Socrates remembered the interview – What newspaper was that? – he asked.

- The Cat's Constellation.

And only now, Socrates remembered what the journalist told him. – Eugene! My Daddy's in the Cat's Dungeon!

- I know - sighed Eugene.

- What?? - Socrates stood up. - You knew?!

- Well... - stammered Eugene. - You said that you break diplomatic relations with the family.

- I didn't mean that! Not when Dad's in the Cat's Dungeon! - he shouted, throwing himself on Eugene. - How long Daddy's there?! Tell me! - he shouted again and caught Eugene's neck.

- I can't - choked Eugene.

- What you mean, you can't?!

- You're strangling me - Eugene moaned in despair.

- I'm letting you go - Socrates came to his senses, released his grip and jumped on the bed.

Eugene stood up slowly on shaky paws, cleared his throat and licked the fur on the neck – You almost strangled me. I'm going to need weeks of treatment now - he announced finally and looked disapprovingly at Socrates. – This way you thank me for my hard work. You should try to be a manager, and you'll see it's not easy - he murmured with regret and again cleared his throat.

- Are you going to tell me what you know about Daddy? - asked Socrates, unmoved by his lamentation.

Eugene walked over to a table by the window. He poured a full glass of a tincture. He drank all in a one gulp, and then he turned to Socrates and belched loudly - Pardon – he said. - My sources report that Cat the Highest went furious when he learned that "The Song of Margarita," is about his daughter - he muttered quietly, clearing his throat between the words.

Socrates sighed heavily, jumped out of bed and walked over to him - And how did he learn that I was singing about his daughter? - he asked, frowning

- Well, you know.... It's just slipped off my tongue.

- Really, Eugene?! Just slipped? - Socrates yelled and showed claws.

- Guys? What are you doing? - Lineus stood at the threshold.

- Nothing – said angrily Socrates and headed for the door. - I'm going to help Daddy.

Cancel the concert in the city of Liberty.

- Socrates – said hoarsely Eugene. - I'm sorry. I've gone too far, but I didn't mean to. I didn't think that things would go so bad. Don't go alone to the Cat's Dungeon.

- You're going to the Cat's Dungeon? – Lineus asked, wide-eyed - What for?

- To get Daddy out of there - Socrates explained.

- No cat has come out alive from there - said Lineus.

- I'll be the first one – Socrates said and purred confidently.

- We're going with you - Eugene leaped up to the door. - You'll need help.

- You've done enough - whirred Socrates.

- Eugene's right. You can't go alone. We're going we you - patted him on the back
Lineus.

- Alright – said Socrates. - But we are going there in a great secrecy - he looked at them sharply. - And no clothes - he said to Eugene, who already was packaging his suitcase.

Chapter 16. The Cat's Dungeon.

Socrates looked to the right and then to the left. Having assured he had a clear path, he gave a great leap to the stone protruding from the ground. He clung to a cold rock and looked around. Having assured the road was empty he waved his paw three times. At this signal Lineus and Eugene were beside him in a minute – Ok. We go to my signal - he said softly and then waved his tail three times and gave a yawn.

At this signal Lineus slipped through under a tree, standing in the middle of the road. As the oldest legend of the city of Highest Cats said, the tree was planted by the families of cats sentenced to the Cat's Dungeon to give a little shade in the summer to the dying convicts.

A moment later Lineus was joined by Socrates. They looked at each other knowingly then turned toward the stone and meowed together once.

At this signal Eugene started his walk. And at this point, not knowing why, Lineus sneezed. But it wasn't just a sneeze. It was a sneeze like a lion's roar. At this sound Eugene screamed loudly, and gave such a leap that he passed the tree.

- Come back! – Socrates said, but it was too late.

Eugene was already standing in the full light of a lantern of the guard and looked not too good. His black hair stood on the ends so the hat he wore was above his ears now. And although he looked hilarious neither Lineus, nor Socrates felt like laughing.

- Welcome, dear cat– said Eugene after a while with confidence.

- Who are you and what are you looking for after dusk? – asked the guard.

- What do you mean, who am I? – Eugene pushed the lantern away. - It's dazzling a little - he explained and gave the widest smile he could manage.

- It was made to dazzle. Give me your name, right now - said the guard.

- What a shame! - whirred Eugene. - You ask me about my name? My dear cat, you don't recognize me, although everyone knows who I am. Well, everyone but not you, here, met on a walk – he said in one breath. - It's such an overwhelming despair to not be recognized in my own city. The whole world heard about me, but not this one here ... How shall I call you, my dear cat?

- Lucius Strong – introduced himself the guard.

- A beautiful name, really enviable. My dear Lucius, you have no idea how useful you could be in my artistic circles. I was just thinking during my night stroll that my art needs a bit of freshness, some kind of awakening, as it has become lately a bit drowsy – he was babbling.

- Art? Awakening? – asked, confused guard.

- Yes - confirmed Eugene and took him by the arm. - Well, just imagine, when I lost hope to get my inspiration back, when the utter creative block has enveloped me, I got a sign from heaven.

- Sign from heaven? – repeated without emotion the guard.

- Yes - confirmed Eugene. - And what's that hole doing there? – he pointed to the crater in front of him, the size of which was outlined by a faint light of the lantern. - It's so huge! - Eugene's eyes widened.

- It's the Cat's Dungeon - explained calmly the guard.

- On Cat the Highest, Lucius, the Heavens sent you to me! - he screamed with joy to him. - If you didn't come I would lay there now. You see, when I think about my art, I can't see anything else. But the Heavens watch over me. They sent me, Lucius Strong – he grinned and pulled him away from the crater. – I prayed for such Lucius all life. I'll make you a real cat of art.

Socrates couldn't hear the rest of it because at that time he was already halfway down the crater. Tied to a rope which the other end Lineus tied to the tree, he was slowly descending into the dungeon. Plunged in total darkness he could only count on his instincts. When he finally found himself at the bottom, he jerked the rope three times to signal he was alive and well.

He untied the rope, lit a lantern and moved slowly ahead, looking around. Every step brought him shocking images; dead cats and dead mice swam in the muddy slurry, overlying the bedrock. The stench hovering around made him sick. But he walked farther with hope to find his father. It seemed to him that the corridor stretches on forever and when he lost the hope of meeting a live cat he saw two tunnels. From one of them came groans, and from the other came shouting. He decided to go to the other.

When he saw the light at the end of the tunnel, he extinguished the lantern.

- Are you new here? - he heard suddenly.

He turned around. In front of him, stood a silver cat with a very sparse hair, drooping ears and huge, bulging eyes. - I'm Caius Silvery - introduced himself cat. - What have you done to end up here?

- I, I ... - stammered Socrates.

- Everyone has a shock at first. Some agree with the fate immediately, and some fight to the end. If you want to fight stay here, if you want to live to the end alone go into the second tunnel.

- Who's that cat, talking to them? – Socrates asked, showing a cat standing in the distance.

- Ah – rolled his huge eyes Caius. – He used to be an archeologist. His son is famous now, and because of that he ended up here – explained Caius.

Socrates swallowed hard – I came to rescue him and the others. Come with me.

Caius gave him a serious look – Everyone thinks about the rescue at the beginning – he said and left.

Chapter 17. Escape.

Socrates sighed heavily and moved towards his father, who was standing and speaking quietly.

- We can't kill each other over a mouse. We have to keep it together – Angelus said sadly to cats surrounding him. Some of them were standing, some of them were lying, and all of them looked cold, hungry and hopeless.

- Dad? – interrupted Sote.

Angelus turned around and stared at him, but said nothing.

- Dad? – repeated Socrates. – Dad, it's me.

- Sote? – Angelus widened his eyes.

- Yes! – shouted Socrates.

- Oh, no – Angelus said. – He sentenced you too.

- No! No, no – Socrates said. – I'm here to take you home. I came to the rescue to you and the other cats.

- There is no rescue from here - said one of the cats.

- There is with me – Socrates said confidently.

- We tried to escape several times - said the other cat - Five cats were killed.

- Today no one dies. The guards are busy, and I have a rope – Socrates said. - We don't have much time. Stand up – he said, but no one moved.

Socrates turned to Angelus – Convince them – he asked.

- I can't. I've tried many times. They don't believe anybody.

- They'll believe when we make it – Socrates said confidently. – We have to go now.

I'll leave you the rope – he said to the other cats.

The way up was much more difficult, mostly because he had Daddy on his back.

Angelus was too weak to climb up himself. About two strides from the top Socrates tugged the rope twice. At this signal Lineus stopped drawing. Socrates purred once and after a minute Lineus purred twice. The signal meant there was no guard around. Socrates took a deep breath and then gave such a leap that he landed straight under the tree. Angelus had no time to blink.

- It worked – Lineus whispered, pleased.

- Where's Eugene? – asked Socrates.

Lineus showed toward the canteen. And there, in the dim light of a lantern, Eugene was dancing salsa with one of the guards.

- Let him know it's time to go – said Socrates.

Lineus took a deep breath and made “Hoo, hoo” sound like an owl. At this signal Eugene bowed low before the audience and slowly, on two paws, began to retreat toward the tree. And when he was exactly half way and when Socrates was counting seconds to retreat, the air pierced a loud sound. And it was the sound that Eugene and Socrates heard a second time. It was a sneeze like a lion's roar.

At this sound, the guards jumped up and surrounded Eugene - Pardon - Eugene laughed. - I had to eat something bad - he said, and farted.

The guards jumped off him with disgust, and then Eugene threw off the hat and ran fast - Run! Now! - he yelled, having reached the tree.

At this yell the other two followed him.

- We have to launch the net! - thundered Lineus, looking back.

- Too early! - Eugene screamed, seeing no guards behind them.

- I say, now! – Lineus shouted.

- If you didn't sneeze like that...

- Guys! – interrupted Socrates. – We have to do something now. I have Daddy on my back!

- So we fire up the net! - Lineus stopped. He pulled out of a pocket a bamboo straw. He blew it a few times. At this point from the straw flew spherical, brown masses. In the moonlight Lineus saw them spreading over the rocks, leaving traces everywhere. In a moment the masses fired from Eugene's straw lined up another section of the rocks.

- These snails should stop them. Wishing you broken paws - he said, thinking of the guards and gave a wide smile.

Chapter 18. Plan.

Cat the Highest was jumping like he was on a trampoline - Where were they?! How they were watching my Dungeon?! What I pay them for?! – he screamed furiously.

- With a great regret, I inform the Highest that if not the mucus of snails the prisoner wouldn't have escaped – said softly one of the agents, standing on wobbly paws.

- Mucus of snails? - Kahelus sat on the throne and looked at him in disbelief.

- The Highest, if you allow, I'll explain what happened - said the second agents in a trembling voice.

- Speak, Marcus Small - Kahelus waved his paw in permission.

- We believe - started Marcus, settling on the ground. - That this mucus that caused the skid of the guards is a weapon of the rock cats.

- The rock cats? – asked, surprised Cat the Highest.

- It's a movement started by Socrates Great and his band. Since their concerts more cats talk about the power of music. They demand the freedom of living, the abolition of the Cat's Dungeon and the unification of all cities.

- Well, the last one is good – Kahelus smiled with satisfaction. - I will reign throughout the world.

- The Highest – said the first agents. - The rock cats say you'll be the last on the throne because you don't have a successor.

- Over my dead body! - Kahelus screamed and shook with anger.

- With all due respect the Highest, the rock cats count exactly on that - Marcus Small noted.

- Do they want to kill me? – Kahelus asked and goggled his eyes.

- They won't go that far, but they are anxious to see you dead. I'm afraid they know about Margarita's staying in the city of Liberty, and without her... - stopped Marcus.

- And without her, no one will inherit the throne - finished Kahelus and sighed with regret. - What to do? - he worried.

- The Highest, may I say something? - Rockus Fastpaw stepped out from the second row of agents.

- Speak - Kahelus allowed and licked his paw.

- I believe we have to abduct Margarita during the concert.

- There will be no concert because the chasing pigeons are after the Catband - threw in Marcus.

- We can cancel that and declare the Catband's immunity – suggested Rockus. - Let them play as long as they don't disturb us.

- It's a good idea - nodded his head approvingly Kahelus. - Scaper! - he screamed.

In response to that a skinny cat with a roll of paper appeared - At your service, the Highest – he bowed low.

- Scrape a letter to all cats about my decision to cancel the warrant for the arrest of the Catband and their families. Say, I forgive them for releasing Angelus Great from the Cat's Dungeon. Also add that out of kindness and goodness of heart, and out of deep concern for the happiness and fun of all subjects I allow rock cats to perform freely in every city – he dictated and muttered under his breath at the same time. - When you're done, take it to the newspapers. Also, remember to hang on every tree and bush.

- I run right away – said the cat confidently and jumped through the open window.

- Bring Fabius Goldenhair and prepare wedding ceremony, but in a secret – Kahelus said.

- The Highest - said Marcus. - Perhaps you should change the fiancé? Maybe Margarita escaped because she didn't like him.

- No way – Kahelus dismissively waved his paw. - Fabius Goldenhair is the most beautiful cat in the city and comes from a decent family.

- With respect the Highest, I acknowledge - Marcus cleared his throat. – Fabius looks gorgeous, but he's not smart. Maybe that discouraged her to the marriage.

- So what should I do? – Kahelus asked with despair. - When I do need son in-law as soon as possible.

- With the greatest respect the Highest, may I suggest a different solution? - said Rockus.

- Speak.

- Maybe you should allow Margarita to choose a husband – he bowed low.

- Unlawful - waved his paw Kahelus.

- The Highest – Rockus bowed even lower. – You've established this law, so you can change it.

Kahelus stood up, walked back and forth, muttered something under his breath, and then screamed - Scrapper!

At his scream a well-built cat, of medium height and leopard hair appeared immediately - At your service, the Highest - he said and bowed low.

- Scrape for me that I thought over the law of marriage concerning my daughter, and I - Kahelus the Highest currently reigning cat, announce a change in legislation and authorize my daughter and future daughters ... or not - he hesitated. - No future daughters. So, I allow my daughter to choose her husband – he finished.

- Shall I send it to the newspapers? – asked the cat having finished scraping.

- Right away. And hang it on every tree and bush - he said and sighed heavily. - And now I have to take a nap - he added and yawned loudly.

And at this signal all those present silently left the Hall of the Rose Throne.

Chapter 19. Margarita Third the Highest.

Margarita stood in front of the bush, decorated with the Catband's poster that said they had "The Song of Margarita" in the repertoire. - He couldn't do this! He couldn't write a song about me! - she thought angrily. Common sense and that Margarita had a lot, told her the song was about someone else. But her instinct screamed: He wrote a song about you!

- How could he sing about me in public? – she thought. – And everyone will find out that I was hanging out with such a scraggy cat. What a shame! - cried her ego.

So she walked down the street, wearing a dress and Eugene's best hat – What to do now? – she thought and looked at another bush.

And there hung announcement sealed with her father's paw. She came closer and started to read: I thought over the law of marriage concerning my daughter, and I - Kahelus the Highest currently reigning cat, announce a change in legislation and authorize my daughter and future daughters ... or not. No future daughters. So, I allow my daughter to choose her husband – she finished and screamed in horror.

How was it she asked her father to abolish the law so many times and he didn't agree, and now when she couldn't get involved with a cat he lets her to choose a husband? – What an injustice! - she thought and looked at another bush.

And there hung another announcement. She came closer and began to read: To all cats. I cancel the warrant for the arrest of the Catband and their families. I forgive them for releasing Angelus Great from the Cat's Dungeon. I also out of kindness and goodness of heart, and out of deep concern for the happiness and fun of all subjects allow rock cats to perform freely in every city. Cat the Highest – she finished and screamed again.

How was it that Socrates Great sang about her without her consent or knowledge, and Daddy let him humiliate her like that in front of the world?

So she walked and shook her head in disbelief every couple of minutes until she arrived at the edge of the city. There, not knowing what to do, she curled up and fell asleep.

And just when the sleep started to take away the torment of day, she heard something strange. So she opened her eyes and listened.

- Madams and Mademoiselles of the city of Liberty! I have a great pleasure to welcome you to the concert of the Catband. My name is Eugene, and in a moment I will be joined by my great friends and very talented musicians. Dear ladies, I have the honor to announce Socrates and Lineus! - Eugene shouted, and in that moment Margarita realized that he was behind her.

So she stood up and looked. And there, in the moonlight, Eugene Mixed, not aware of her presence, was practicing his speech.

- Well, and after that my dear ladies, you won't let us leave the town - Eugene added confidently.

His last words made her laugh so she took off her hat and covered the mouth. But she couldn't hold it for long. She burst into a laugh so loud that Eugene turned towards her in a second.

- It cannot be! - he yelled, giving a leap in her direction. - My hat!

- Not really. I found it, so it's mine – she said innocently.

- And where did you find it? – he showed claws.

Margarita rolled her eyes, looked to the right then to the left, and then gave him the most innocent of her looks. - You know, it was all dusted in the closet so...

- You stole it! – Eugene screamed and put his paws on her throat.

- I borrowed - she said and moved back. - Do you remember what happened the last time when you wanted to fight me?

Eugene sighed and stood on four paws, which he did extremely rarely - There's no point in fighting someone like you - he said.

- I beg your pardon?

- I said there was no point in fighting someone like you – Eugene repeated and walked away.

- What do you mean someone like me?! - she asked, but he didn't answer. He was marching with the head up and proudly wagged his tail.

- What do you mean by that? - she blocked his way.

But Eugene, as if nothing happened, walked her around and continued his gait.

- Coward - she said.

At this word Eugene stopped suddenly, turned around, stood on two paws and meowed like he was in a combat.

And then Margarita felt fear. And she's never felt fear like that before because she's never seen so many agents at once before. They appeared suddenly behind Eugene in full armor. Their polished claws were shining in the moonlight.

So, she swallowed hard, stood on four paws, screamed - Help! - and then turned and run.

Eugene had to admit he's never seen anyone so fast - And who's a coward now? - he asked and did a pirouette. And at that point he saw the agents, who at his sight burst into a laugh, and then passing him run after Margarita.

Chapter 20. Kidnapping.

Eugene rushed to the dressing room where Socrates was trying new clothes.

- Margarita! - Eugene yelled, gasping for breath.

- I thought I would sing it at the end - Socrates said and put on brown boots.

- Margarita ... Agents ... On the hill ... A lot – Eugene panted.

- What are you talking about? Socrates asked, eye-winded.

- My hat with the agents on the hill – Eugene said.

- Did you smoke a pepper pipe? – Socrates asked.

- Margarita chased by the agents on the hill! - Eugene finally screamed. - We have to help her! Plenty agents there!

- Which Margarita? - Socrates asked quietly, unable to understand what he meant.

- Yours! There! - Eugene waved his paw in the direction of the hill.

- Why didn't you say straight away?! - Socrates yelled, shocked. - I run to her! You find Lineus. We may need his snails - he said and jumped through the open window.

He ran to the hill as fast as he could. And although after a while he got short of breath he didn't slow down even for a second. Margarita needed him now and he was going to help her, despite the way she behaved towards him. He cared for her and couldn't let anyone hurt her, even if that was her father.

The moon was high in the sky, when he, terribly tired, reached the summit. And just at that moment he saw the agents, carrying slowly a wicker basket. There was a silenced cry coming from it, and he recognized the voice immediately - Margarita - he thought and wept in despair.

Lineus and Eugene joined him when the agents were almost gone from the hill.

-We have no chance to rescue her. There are too many of them - Lineus said.

- I know - Socrates sniffed and wept again.

Cat the Highest was jumping with joy like a madman. Margarita has finally come back home. It didn't matter that she screamed and scratched even Cat the Healer. The important thing was; she was home and she couldn't escape.

- Margarita, my love. Daddy will have done a new throne for you - he said, seeing her destroying the Rose Throne.

Margarita whirred with disgust and sat down - I belong to the city of Liberty now. You have no rights there. It will be a war when they find out about my kidnapping - she said confidently.

- Nothing of the kind - he waved his paw dismissively. -You've scraped this so there will be no war - he showed her a roll of paper.

Margarita approached him, took the roll and began to read: I hereby declare that I, Margarita Third the Highest, after thinking the matters over, decide to leave the city of Liberty immediately. Signed, Margarita Third the Highest.

- I didn't scrape this - she protested.

- I know. My scrapers did very well - Kahelus laughed.

Margarita looked at him scandalized - You won't get away with it. Escape from the city of Liberty is a violation of the oath I took. They'll find me and throw off the slope.

Kahelus sighed loudly and said - Margarita, my love. My advisors have studied the books, all the way from the ancient cats and every book says that when you leave the city of Liberty and seek protection of Cat the Highest, the oath is annulled.

- You're lying! You are a terrible liar! I'm ashamed to be your daughter.

- Margarita! – he stamped his paw in frustration. - I don't have time for your tantrums. I need a successor. You must get married.

- No way! - she screamed and in one motion of the paw she swept from the throne the rest of the roses.

Kahelus swallowed hard and sobbed loudly - If your mother was here, she wouldn't survive your behavior. She would be heartbroken to see how ungrateful you've become. I changed the law for you.

- Oh, yes. I can choose a husband – she said unmoved.

- Exactly- he nodded. - And who are you going to choose? Andrew Medium and Peter Silver have already brought engagement gifts.

- Neither of them – she waved a paw dismissively. - I was thinking about someone else, and frankly, I can see only him as my husband.

- Who is he? Say only who and I'll send for him.

- Really? - she smiled.

- Really - nodded Kahelus.

Margarita rolled her eyes, looked up and down and said - I choose Socrates Great.

At her words Kahelus gave loud "Oh" and fell to the ground.

Margarita jumped off the ravaged throne and leaned to him - He has a concert in the city of Liberty. You can send him my proposal - she whispered softly to him. - I'll be in my chambers - she added, leaving the room.

- Scrapers - Kahelus called softly, but no one showed up. So he swallowed hard, cleared his throat and stood up slowly. - Scrapers! - he exclaimed, but with a voice that sounded like someone else's.

- At your service, the Highest - appeared a tall cat.

- Scrape a letter from my daughter to Socrates Great – Kahelus asked bitterly.

- What letter? - asked the tall cat.

- An invitation to the wedding - explained Kahelus.

- Whose wedding?

- Socrates's and Margarita's - said Cat the Highest and whirred in disgust.

- Shall I hang on every tree and bush? - asked the cat, pretending he wasn't impressed by the news.

- No! – Kahelus shouted. – It's classified slashed by very destructive. Deliver it directly to Socrates Great with a confirmation of receipt.

- What kind of confirmation?

- And what kinds do we have? - Kahelus sat down heavily.

- Well – smacked his lips the cat. - It can be an imprint of a paw, pheromones mark, or a return letter.

- Make the imprint of a paw – Kahelus said.

- Is that all, the Highest?

- Call for Cat the Healer, because I think I have a problem with my fur - he said, looking at his paw, which suddenly changed color from gray to white.

- At your service, the Highest - said the cat and pulled out slowly, trying not to stare at Kahelus, who seemed to be unaware that he became all white.

Chapter 21. Code breakers.

Socrates was exhausted after the show, which he played reluctantly. In the light of Margarita's kidnapping, everything else has lost meaning for him. But Eugene, although worried himself, convinced him that immediately after the show he'll use his father's connections to find out where Margarita was taken.

So the Catband played a successful concert in the city of Liberty, but none of the three musicians felt like a celebrity.

On the contrary, Eugene blamed himself for leaving Margarita on the hill and running to Socrates. Maybe he would have managed with the agents on his own? Socrates blamed himself for not doing any hunting since they started the tour. Maybe if he was in a better shape, he would've got to the hill faster. Lineus probably felt the worst, because he had no idea what the other two were thinking. Since they came down off the hill, nobody talked.

So, the next morning the three of them sat in the dressing room in a gloomy mood. And as soon as they yawned and fell asleep at once, there was a knock at the door.

- We don't give away meows today! – Eugene shouted.

- A letter from Cat the Highest to Socrates Great with a confirmation of receipt – came from the outside.

- Come on in - Eugene jumped up and slapped the other two.

- What? – Lineus asked sleepily.

- A letter from Cat the Highest - he said and slapped him again.

Lineus quickly opened his eyes and jumped to his paws - What does he want? - he asked.

- I don't know, he didn't write to me – Eugene answered, and slapped Socrates - A letter from Cat the Highest - he said directly into his ear.

At these words, Socrates yawned and opened his eyes wide - What does he want? - he asked.

- I don't know. He wrote to you – Eugene explained and opened the door.

- Hi, I'm Elisa. Pleasure to meet you – she said and bowed low.

Eugene cleared his throat and said – Hi. I'm Eugene. Thank you for the letter.

- I need a confirmation of receipt by Socrates's paw.

Socrates jumped off the couch and slowly approached them. He sighed heavily, that if it wasn't enough to receive a letter; he had to make an imprint of his paw.

- Where do I stamp? – he asked.

Elisa unrolled paper, took out a sponge filled with ink and said – Here, in the middle, please.

Socrates sank his paw in the sponge and made an imprint in the middle of the roll.

Elisa folded it and handed him a letter – Here you go – she said and smiled.

- Thank you - Socrates smiled back, then, to her great joy he purred to her softly.

- Nice to meet you - she said, embarrassed and left.

- What did he say? - Eugene asked impatiently.

Socrates broke the seal and unfolded the letter - To Socrates Great - he began to read. - From currently reigning Kahelus the Highest, who on behalf of his daughter, Margarita Third the Highest, invites Socrates to appear at his wedding with Margarita. Thus, Cat the Highest considers Socrates Great as a fiancé of his daughter, and agrees to the marriage, and ensures about his joy of gaining a son and heir to the throne. Signed, Kahelus the Highest - Socrates finished and screamed with shock.

Eugene, standing next to him, snatched the roll - It must be bad scrapings. I'll read it - he said and began to read aloud - To Socrates Great, blah, blah... invites Socrates to appear at his wedding with Margarita. Thus, Cat the Highest, blah, blah ... and ensures about his joy of gaining a son and heir to the throne - he finished reading and screamed.

Lineus, standing by the sofa, leaped toward them - This is some kind of code - he said and snatched the letter from Eugene - I'll decipher it - he said and began to read - Kahelus the

Highest, signed. Heir to the throne and a son gaining joy ensures and agrees to the marriage, as a fiancé of his daughter considers Socrates Great – he finished and screamed.

- On the Holly Relics, what is it? - Socrates said dully. - He kidnapped her yesterday, and today he wants her to marry me?

- It looks like that – Eugene said.

- He kidnapped her to get her married – Lineus said casually.

Eugene and Socrates stared at him - How do you know this? - they asked at the same time.

- I don't know – Lineus shrugged his paws. - The thought came to my head.

- He's right – said Eugene and began to pace around the dressing room, what meant he was spinning the machine of thinking.

- But why does he want her to marry me? - Socrates asked.

- Exactly - Eugene nodded.

- Margarita told him so - Lineus said casually again.

Eugene stopped pacing - And how do you know this?

- Yesterday, before the show, I read the announcement in which Kahelus allows his daughter to choose a husband. And at the stall, where I was giving meows away, I overheard someone who claimed Kahelus gave us immunity because he's afraid the movement of the rock cats will deprive him of his throne.

- Why didn't you say this earlier? – Eugene asked angrily, and Socrates dropped on the ground.

- What is it? – Lineus asked, concerned about the view.

- You're right – Socrates said. - This letter is a code, but from Margarita. This way, she lets me know she is in the Down Palace, and she needs help.

- You think? - Eugene frowned.

- I'm pretty sure. Margarita doesn't love me - he said sadly. - I think she doesn't want to marry at all. She wouldn't come to this city if she wanted to get married. This letter is a plea for help.

- Well, in that case we need a plan – Eugene said and smiled.

Chapter 22. Margarita's Rescue.

Margarita circulated around the chamber without pausing for breath. Nothing she's done so far, and she's done a lot; she destroyed bed, scratched the walls, and overturned furniture, couldn't extinguish smoldering thoughts - Will Socrates understand her encrypted

message? What if he won't understand? Will he help her to get out the Palace? What if he won't? Has he forgiven her the disappearance from the Eternal Snow Mountains? What if he hadn't? And so, over and over the same questions were coming to her mind.

And when she finally got tired of them, and when she regained hope for a moment of sleep, there came promises. So Margarita swore that once Socrates releases her, she'll forgive him for singing about her. She swore on the Holly Relics and Cat the Founder that when Socrates releases her, she'll do for him whatever he wants. She can even go for hunting just for him. There was even a moment when she promised that as soon as Socrates releases her, she'll give Eugene back all his clothes. But she quickly changed her mind, because after thinking it over she concluded that Socrates will release her, not Eugene, so there's no point in being too generous in pledges.

And just when she finished promising all promises, Cat the Highest jumped into her chamber.

- He wrote to you - he waved a roll of paper.

- Who? - she asked unmoved.

Kahelus took a deep breath and let it out in one shot - Socrates Great.

- What did he write? - she asked indifferently, while boiling with anxiety inside.

Kahelus unrolled the letter and glanced at the scrapings - To Kahelus the Highest, currently reigning cat and his daughter Margarita Third the Highest, known to me as Maggie. From Socrates Great, the rock cat – he read and whirred in disgust. - I accept with great joy the invitation to my wedding sent from the Down Palace. At the same time I inform you that I'll come to the Palace after the concert of the Catband, which will be held in the city of the Highest Cats tomorrow evening. I send my warm invitation to the future members of the family to the concert. Signed, Socrates Great – he finished.

- That's super - she said.

Kahelus swallowed hard and licked white fur - What kind of a fiancé sends an invitation to a concert instead of sending engagement gifts?

Margarita smiled from ear to ear - Loving, Daddy - she said nicely, and to his surprise, she yawned loudly and fell asleep while standing.

And when she woke up, she saw sapphire wedding dress and a big hat with a feather, hanging in front of her. She sighed loudly and said with regret – I'll never wear it. When Socrates rescues me; I'll go back to the city of Liberty and never get involved with a cat. And all of a sudden she shed a little tear. That tear was followed by the next one, and then another one. And this way Margarita Third the Highest cried for the first time in her life; that she was

alone, that any cat, including her father doesn't understand her, that she was Cat's the Highest daughter and lived in this Palace like in the Cat's Dungeon, that she was so smart and everyone acknowledged only her good looks. So she sobbed and sobbed and couldn't stop.

And when she stopped crying, she walked to the window and looked into the distance. And there, on the Hill of Seven Cats she saw a stage and a crowd of cats around it – The Catband's concert - she thought and walked away from the window. She lay down and closed her eyes. And then she heard Socrates singing like that:

Oh, Maggie, I can't forget you.

Oh, Maggie, I still love you.

So she got up and stood in the window. And there, on the stage, she saw Socrates singing to the crowd:

You left without a word.

I didn't know where to find you.

White snow carried you away.

And I stood at the crossroads, all day.

And then Margarita felt something strange. That is; her heart pounded twice and she almost collapsed.

I thought you were my dream girl.

I thought you were my soul mate.

You left in a broad day.

You covered the tracks well.

White snow carried you away.

And I stood at the crossroad, all day.

Socrates sang, and Margarita's heart pounded again because he sang like he really meant that.

Oh, Maggi, I can't forget you.

Oh, Maggi, I still love you.

Years pass and my love will last.

I come to your rescue.

I...

At this same moment Margarita saw Eugene in the window, hanging on a rope. He rocked twice, and knocking her down flew into the room.

- What are you doing?! - she yelled, standing up.

- Rescuing you – Eugene explained, getting up from the end of the room.

- Where's Socrates? – she asked, clearly disappointed.

- He's singing to distract the guards.

- Oh. But I thought he would come to rescue me.

Eugene gave her a suspicious look – Why would you think that?

- I sent him a letter. I mean, I wasn't sure if he would help me because of, you know, the way I left. I didn't handle it too well. I mean, I like him as a friend, but his love confession was overwhelming and... - she broke off.

- I see – Eugene nodded. – Well, I must say he decided to help you after all. Sorry to disappoint you he's not here, but we made a rescue plan I can't change now.

- How did you get in here? - she asked.

- I climbed that tree – he pointed at the cherry tree behind the window. - Then, I jumped from the highest branch to the roof, and by the way I lost my shoe. I tied a rope to the roof and jumped into the chamber. But there's no time for a chat. We have to get out of here before Sote finishes the song – he said, tied a rope to her belly and without notice pushed her out of the window.

Margarita held her breath, and before she knew she was standing on the ground. She untied the rope and waved to Eugene. Before she could count to five he stood by her side - Run toward the fence – he said, and then pulled out of a coat pocket a straw and blew out the snails.

For the first time Margarita obeyed somebody without questioning because she ran to the fence as fast as she could. Eugene caught up with her after a minute. As soon as they got to the hedge Maggie froze. She remembered the hedge very well. It was made of ivy and roses with plenty of thorns. She tried to escape through it twice, and each time she ended up at Cat the Healer's - I can't do this. There are too many thorns here – she shook her head.

Eugene nodded just as if he's already tried the hedge himself, then purred, and then sneezed. At this signal, Lineus appeared on the other side of the hedge and dropped a rope ladder.

- Be careful - Eugene warned and looked around. - All clear – he said and letting her first they both climbed.

This way Eugene Mixed and his gang rescued Margarita Third the Highest.

Chapter 23. Talk.

The sun was already behind a hillock, when Socrates knocked to the gate of the Down Palace.

- Who wants to come in and for what? – asked a ginger cat on the guard.

Socrates gave him a smile from ear to ear, and then approached him – Socrates Great, the fiancé of Margarita Third the Highest – he said proudly.

- Oh, yes - jumped the cat. - Please, come on in Socrates Great. Cat the Highest is waiting for you – he opened the gate wide.

Socrates marched proudly, directly to the Rose Throne Hall. There, on the throne, although very withered, sat Cat the Highest. Socrates remembered him from the childhood as a British cat. Meanwhile, in front of him was sitting a white cat - The Highest? - he asked uncertainly.

- No one else - the white cat growled. - Great?

- In the flesh – he gave a wide smile.

- I thought you were taller - Kahelus said, remembering his father's height.

- Hmm – Socrates felt awkward. - Margarita doesn't mind, I'm short.

Kahelus purred grimly and stood up from his throne - First, you kidnapped my daughter then you started some meows, and now you want to become Cat the Highest?! - he yelled at him.

Socrates swallowed hard then raised his paw up - With your permission, the Highest – he said softly. - There was a misunderstanding. I didn't kidnap Margarita. We've met outside the palace, but it was just a coincidence.

- I'm listening – Kahelus said interested and sat back on the throne.

- So it was like that - Socrates sat and waved a paw. - When I ran away from home. Due to personal reasons - he explained, seeing the Highest frowning. - I met Margarita in a deserted warehouse, where she allowed me to sleep - he smiled to himself at the memory of it then looked at Kahelus. - Nothing happened between us - he added quickly. - So, we traveled together for a while. It seemed to me it was kind of an internal journey for Margarita. I think she ran away from you to find her higher self. She was lost, when I told her that I loved her.

Probably that scared her so much that she went to the city of Liberty - he looked pensively into space.

- Guard! – Kahelus couldn't stand it a minute longer. - Guard! - he yelled again.

- At your service, the Highest - appeared black cat.

- Inform my daughter about the arrival of this one... here and make preparations for the wedding. Fast.

- Right away, the Highest – bowed the cat and disappeared immediately.

- You're going to live in the Down Palace Number Two, until my death. Let the Seven Cats protect you from the next meeting with me! - shouted Kahelus to astonished Socrates, and then dropped to the throne.

- The Highest! - burst into the hall terrified guard. - Margarita's disappeared.

- What you mean disappeared?! - Kahelus jumped up from his throne.

- She's not here - shrugged his paws the guard. - The agents searched the whole palace and found nothing except a wedding dress in her chamber.

- Say it isn't true! - Socrates threw himself on the guard.

- I can't - moaned the cat, suffocating.

- You hid her from me to prevent our wedding! – Socrates screamed.

- Great! Let go of my agent! – Kahelus called him to order.

At these words, Socrates whirred in disgust and let go the guard. He stood up, smoothed his hair, and said - I'll find her even if I had to look for her all my life. Let the Seven Cats protect anybody who gets in my way – he bowed to the Highest and left.

Kahelus swallowed hard and looked at the agent - Send all agents and all chasing pigeons to every town! – he thundered. - Find her and bring her back to me before he does - he added sat down heavily on the throne.

Chapter 24. Farewell.

Eugene jumped up on a chair and looked fondly at his gang. And to the gang belonged: Socrates Great, Lineus Longpaw, Margarita Third the Highest, Angelus and Imelda Great, Philomena Longpaw, Pompey and Anastasia Mixed, and of course Eugene Mixed, currently standing on a chair.

- Dear parents. The time has come for us to leave the city, but don't worry about us. We managed to escape the agents before, so will manage this time – he said and jumped off the chair.

Angelus Great took his place – I just want to say I'm sorry I misjudged you, boys. I am also sorry you have to run away again – he said and sighed heavily.

- It's alright, Dad – Socrates said and looked at the rest of the Catband.

- We'll be ok mister Great – Eugene said.

- I have a map of ancient cities excavated by my Agency no one knows about. You can always hide in these places – Angelus said and handed the map to Socrates.

- Thanks a lot, Dad – Socrates shed a tear.

- Hmm- Margarita cleared her throat. - I wanted to thank the Catband for rescuing me. I know they have to flee because of me, but I promise that I'll look after them – she said.

At these words, Socrates gave her a wide smile.

Lineus wiped his eyes and came over to his mother – I promise to come back soon – he said to her and gave her a hug.

- I made a nettle tincture for you – said through tears his mother and handed him a bottle.

Eugene's father took a deep breath – I give you a list of all my friends and business connection in the world. If you need help of any kind, you can always turn to them – he said and showed the list.

- Thank you, Dad – said Eugene and took the list.

And this way they ended the first farewell. Later, there was another one and more gifts. And after the third one, when nobody had the strength to cry, Socrates took his suitcase and said - We have to go now.

A minute later he was followed by Eugene, Lineus, and Margarita.

And this way the Catband with Margarita fled the town.

THE END