

7: *Saturday*

I HATE SATURDAY morning. It's so unsettling, all that fussing and door-banging and "Have you got the purse?" and "Where's the shopping list?" and "Do we need catfood?" Of course we need catfood. What else am I supposed to eat all week? Air?



They were all pretty quiet today, though. Ellie was sitting at the table carving Thumper a rather nice gravestone out of half a leftover cork floor tile. It said:

Thumper
Rest in peace

"You mustn't take it round next-door yet," her father warned her. "Not till they've told us Thumper's dead, at any rate."

Some people are born soft. Her eyes brimmed with tears.



"There goes Next-door now," Ellie's mother said, looking out of the window.

"Which way is she headed?"

"Towards the shops."

"Good. If we keep well behind, we can get Tuffy to the vet's without bumping into her."

Tuffy? Vet's?

Ellie was even more horrified than I was. She threw herself at her father, beating him with her soft little fists.

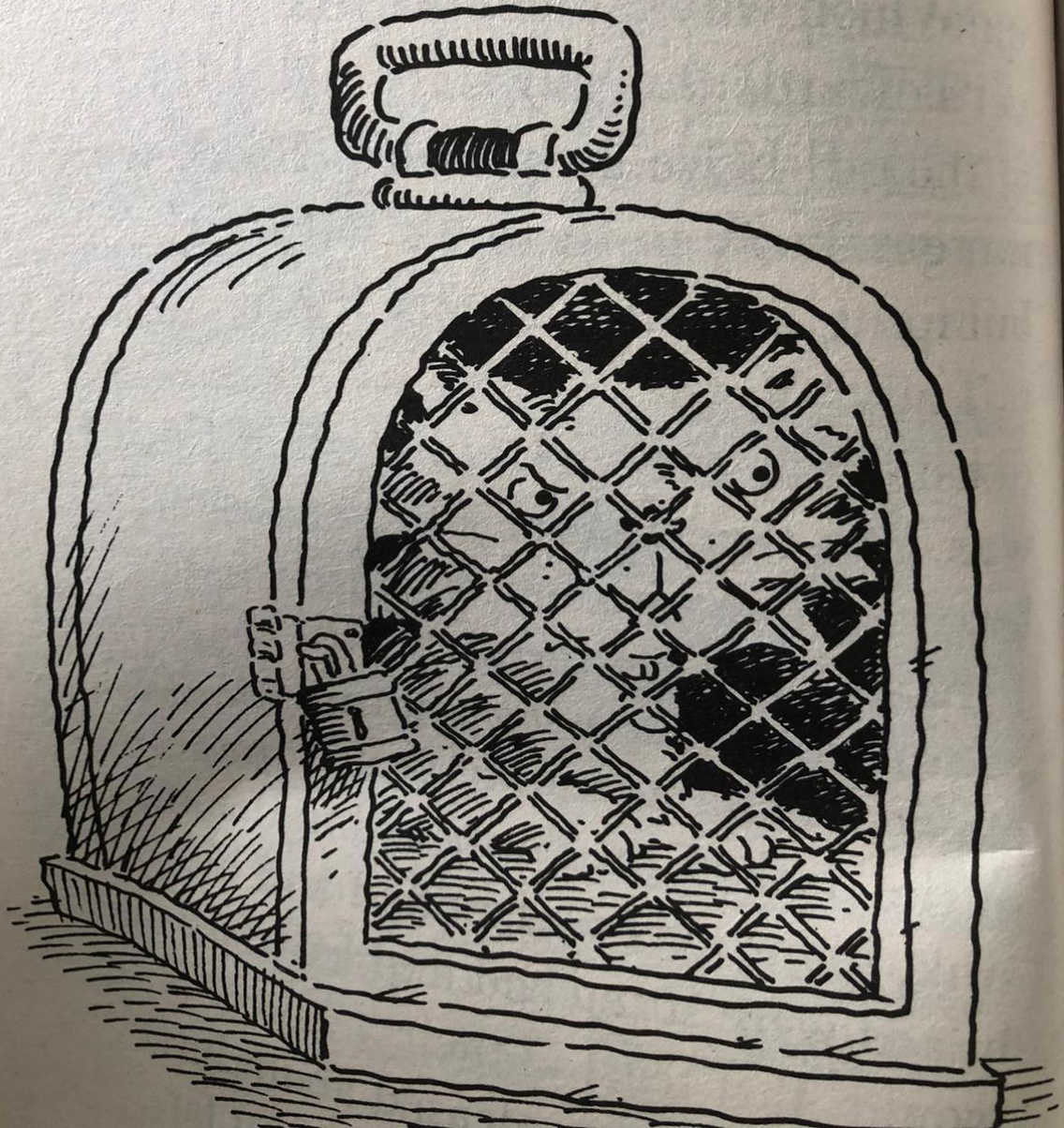
"Dad! No! You can't!"

I put up a far better fight with my claws. When he finally prised me out of the dark of the cupboard under the sink, his woolly was ruined and his hands were scratched and bleeding all over.

He wasn't very pleased about it.

"Come out of there, you great fat

furry psychopath. It's only a 'flu jab
you're booked in for – more's the
pity!"



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Would *you* have believed him? I wasn't absolutely sure. (Neither was Ellie, so she tagged along.) I was still quite suspicious when we reached the vet's. That is *the only reason* why I spat at the girl behind the desk. There was no reason on earth to write **HANDLE WITH CARE** at the top of my case notes. Even the Thompson's rottweiler doesn't have **HANDLE WITH CARE** written on the top of his case notes. What's wrong with *me*?

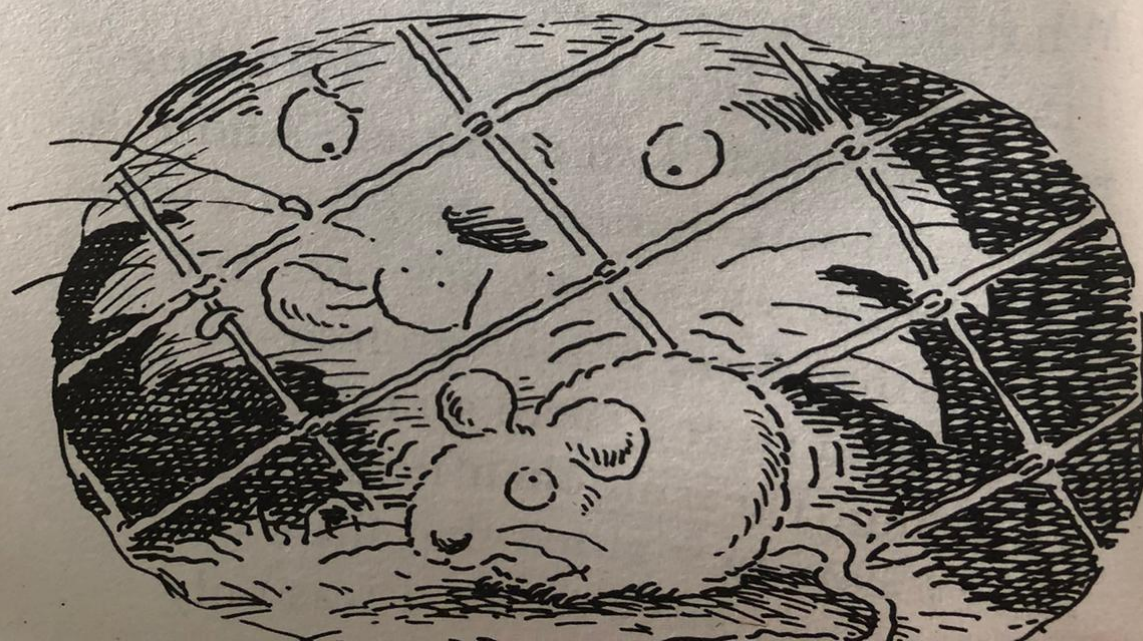
So I was a little rude in the waiting room. So what? I *hate* waiting. And I especially hate waiting stuffed in a wire cat cage. It's cramped. It's hot. And it's boring. After a few hundred minutes of sitting there quietly, *anyone* would start teasing their neighbours. I didn't *mean* to frighten that little sick baby gerbil half to death. I was only

looking at it. It's a free country, isn't it?
Can't a cat even *look* at a sweet little
baby gerbil?

And if I was licking my lips (which I
wasn't) that's only because I was
thirsty. Honestly. I wasn't trying to
pretend I was going to eat it.

The trouble with baby gerbils is they
can't take a *joke*.

And neither can anyone else round
here.



Ellie's father looked up from the pamphlet he was reading called "*Your Pet and Worms*". (Oh, nice. Very nice.) "Turn the cage round the other way, Ellie," he said.

Ellie turned my cage round the other way.

Now I was looking at the Fisher's terrier. (And if there's any animal in the world who ought to have **HANDLE WITH CARE** written at the top of his case notes, it's the Fisher's terrier).

Okay, so I hissed at him. It was only a little hiss. You practically had to have bionic ears to *hear* it.

And I did growl a bit. But you'd think he'd have a head start on growling. He is a dog, after all. I'm only a cat.

And yes, okay, I spat a bit. But only a bit. Nothing you'd even *notice* unless you were waiting to pick on someone.

Well, how was *I* to know he wasn't feeling very well? Not *everyone* waiting for the vet is ill. *I* wasn't ill, was I?

Actually, I've never been ill in my life. I don't even know what it *feels* like.

But I reckon, even if I were *dying*, something furry locked in a cage could make an eensy-weensy noise at me



without my ending up whimpering and cowering, and scrabbling to get under the seat, to hide behind the knees of my owner.

More a *chicken* than a Scotch terrier, if you want my opinion.

“Could you please keep that vile cat of yours under control?” Mrs Fisher said nastily.

Ellie stuck up for me.

“He is in a cage!”



"He's still scaring half the animals in here to death. Can't you cover him up, or something?"

Ellie was going to keep arguing, I could tell. But, without even looking up from his worm pamphlet, her father just dropped his raincoat over my cage as if I were some mangy old *parrot* or something.

And everything went black.

No wonder by the time the vet came at me with her nasty long needle, I was in a bit of a mood. I didn't mean to scratch her that badly, though.

Or smash all those little glass bottles.

Or tip the expensive new cat scales off the bench.

Or spill all that cleaning fluid.

It wasn't me who ripped my record card into tiny pieces, though. That was the vet.

When we left, Ellie was in tears again. She hugged my cage tightly to her chest.

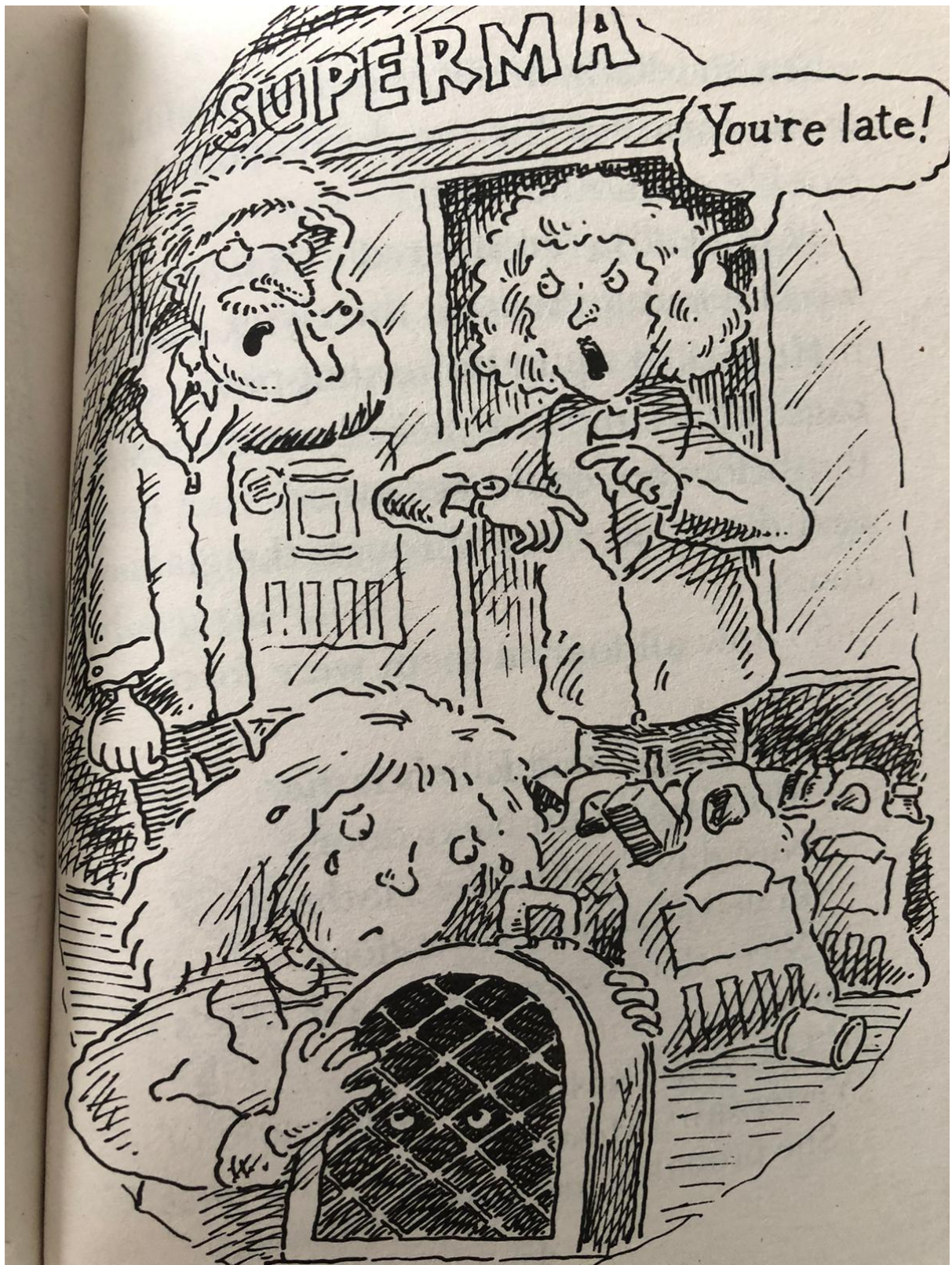
"Oh, Tuffy! Until we find a new vet who'll promise to look after you, you must be so careful not to get run over."

"Fat chance!" her father muttered.

I was just glowering at him through the cage wire, when he spotted Ellie's mother, standing knee-deep in shopping bags outside the supermarket.

"You're very late," she scolded. "Was there a bit of trouble at the vet's?"

Ellie burst into tears. I mean, talk about *wimp*. But her father is made of sterner stuff. He'd just taken the most huge breath, ready to snitch on me,



when suddenly he let it out again. Out of the corner of his eye, he'd spotted trouble of another sort.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Next-door is just coming through the check-out."

He picked up half the shopping bags. Ellie's mother picked up the rest. But before we could get away, next-door had come through the glass doors.

So now all four of them were forced to chat.

"Morning," said Ellie's father.

"Morning," said Next-door.

"Nice day," said Ellie's father.

"Lovely," agreed Next-door.

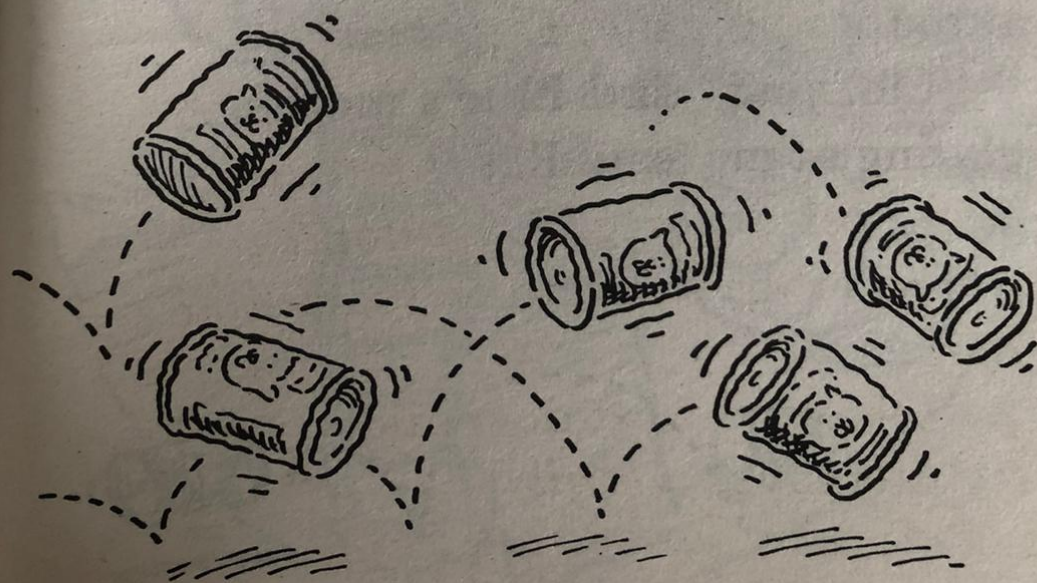
"Nicer than yesterday," said Ellie's mother.

"Oh, yes," Next-door said.

"Yesterday was *horrible*."

She probably just meant the

weather, for heaven's sake. But Ellie's eyes filled with tears. (I don't know why she was so fond of Thumper. *I'm* the one who's supposed to be her pet, not *him*.) And because she couldn't see where she was going properly any more, she bumped into her mother, and half the tins of catfood fell out of one of the shopping bags, and rolled off down the street.



Ellie dumped down my cage, and chased off after them. Then she made the mistake of reading the labels.

“Oh, noooo!” she wailed. “Rabbit chunks!”

(Really, that child is such a *drip*. She'd never make it in our gang. She wouldn't last a *week*.)

“Talking about rabbit,” said Next-door. “The most extraordinary thing happened at our house.”

“Really?” said Ellie's father, glaring at me.

“Oh, yes?” said Ellie's mother, glaring at me as well.





“Yes,” said Next-door. “On Monday, poor Thumper looked a little bit poorly, so we brought him inside. And on Tuesday, he was worse. And on Wednesday he died. He was terribly old, and he’d had a happy life, so we didn’t feel too bad about it. In

fact we had a little funeral, and buried him in a box at the bottom of the garden.”

I’m staring up at the clouds now.

“And on Thursday, he’d gone.”

“Gone?”



“Gone?”

“Yes, gone. And all there was left of him was a hole in the ground and an empty box.”

“Really?”

“Good heavens!”



Ellie's father was giving me the most suspicious look.

"And then, yesterday," Next-door went on. "Something even more extraordinary happened. Thumper was back again. All fluffed up nicely, and back in his hutch."

"Back in his hutch, you say?"

"Fluffed up nicely? How strange!"

You have to hand it to them, they're good actors. They kept it up all the way home.

"What an amazing story!"

"How on earth could it have happened?"

"Quite astonishing!"

"So strange!"

Till we were safely through the front door. And then, of course, the pair of them turned on me.

"Deceitful creature!"

"Making us think you killed him!"

"Just pretending all along!"

"I *knew* that cat could never have done it. That rabbit was even fatter than he is!"

You'd have thought they all *wanted* me to have murdered old Thumper.

All except Ellie. She was *sweet*.

"Don't you *dare* pick on Tuffy!" she told them. "You leave him alone! I bet he didn't even dig poor Thumper up. I bet it was the Fisher's nasty, vicious terrier who did that. All Tuffy did was bring Thumper back to us so we could make sure he was buried again properly. He's a hero. A kind and thoughtful hero."

She gave me a big soft squeeze.

"Isn't that right, Tuffy?"

I'm saying nothing, am I? I'm a cat.
So I just sat and watched while they
unnailed the cat-flap.

