

All text © James Steptowe 2019

All illustrations and cover design © Cristina Vigano 2019

Free Chapter sample only not for resale

RAID OF THE RATSKULL RODENTS



JAMES STEPTOWE

All text © James Steptowe 2019

All illustrations and cover design © Cristina Vigano 2019

Free Chapter sample only not for resale

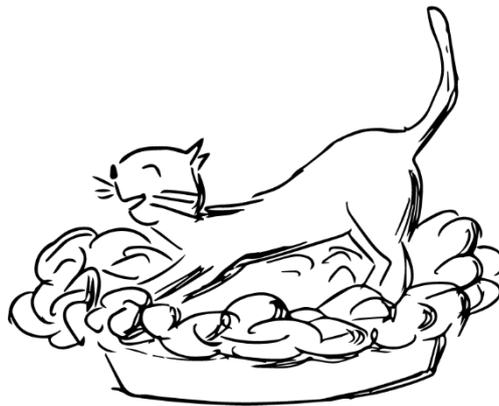


Chapter 1

Gus stretched himself out in his custom-made basket with a satisfied purr. The smell of his freshly-washed pillow filled his nostrils as he smacked his lips together with the taste of his delicious, fishy dinner from the night before.

Gus had a life that every cat dreamed of, and every part of it was purrfectly in order. The only danger to this purrfect order was in the form of Gus' **pesky**¹ adversary named Ember – a purring ball of feline fur who would love to turn his dream into a real nightmare. But she wouldn't. Not today, not tomorrow and certainly not anytime soon.

Gus raised himself onto his four paws and stepped out of the basket. His muscular, **slender**² frame was covered with light-grey fur, which he kept in **immaculate**³ condition.



In fact, he'd heard friends of his owner say that stroking it felt like you were stroking silk. He'd allow that, though he personally thought his fur was *much* nicer. Stepping onto the carpet, Gus made his way towards his owner's bed.

Kaiden, his wonderful owner, was a sleeping boy of nine years old. He had a

¹ annoying

² skinny, but in a graceful way

³ perfectly clean/tidy

sweet, dark face, **shaggy**⁴ hair and awesome Batman pyjamas. His soft, rhythmic breathing raised and lowered his duvet, while the sweet smell of his cherry-flavoured shampoo filled the air with a delightful perfume. Kaiden was just the best.

So too, though, was Gus. He was just about the most loyal cat an owner could ask for and as a bonus, was also a cat who had a keen mind for mystery solving. A skill which came in very handy for an owner like Kaiden. Often, Kaiden would need help finding lost socks or misplaced bits of homework minutes before he needed to leave for school.

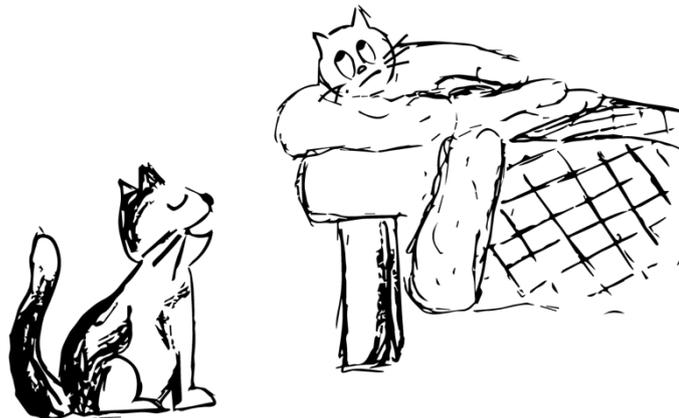
Gus agilely hopped up onto Kaiden's bed, showing just how swift and elegant a cat he was. Gus knew Kaiden didn't ever mind him going on the bed, but he didn't want to wake him.

Tiptoeing cautiously over his owner's back, Gus glanced at Kaiden's matching Batman alarm clock on the bedside table – *06:46* it read. Purrfect! Another fourteen minutes until the alarm goes off. Just enough time for him to wiggle into Kaiden's arms and get a quick cat nap on his – yep, you guessed it – Batman-themed pillow.

Reaching his destination, Gus relaxed in between Kaiden's arms and lowered himself down onto his pillow.

'Ahhhhhhhhh... purrfect,' Gus whispered to himself contently. "Purrfect" was Gus' signature catchphrase and something he got to use daily (mostly thanks to Kaiden).

'You're not supposed to go on the pillows, Augustus!' a **shrill**⁵ voice hissed up.



Gus hopped up on to all four paws instinctively as the unmistakable voice continued. 'If mum walks in and sees you there, she'll move your bed outside into the hall again, and that would be a disaster, wouldn't it?'

⁴ long/messy

⁵ a high-pitched, piercing sound

It was Ember, the cat belonging to Kaiden's younger brother, Akhee. She was a tortoiseshell cat, meaning she had overlapping patches of white, orange and black all over her fur linked together like the parts of a tortoiseshell. Her face always made her look like she was up to no good, and her **mischievous**⁶ eyes were a constant source of annoyance.

Mostly, though, Gus **despised**⁷ the fact that she clearly thought she was superior, even down to how she insisted on using his full name, Augustus (which no one else ever did). Tortoiseshell cats can be very tricky and naughty to live with; Ember definitely lived up to that label.

'Oh, will you go away! You're not supposed to be in here!' Gus whispered as he looked down at Ember. He was annoyed as it wasn't the first time she'd entered uninvited.

'I may go where I please, Augustus. It's a free house, you know!' Ember replied.

'I know you're a real pain in my tail,' snapped Gus, 'and it's Gus, not Augustus. Now go away!'

He couldn't be bothered to get into an argument with Ember (AGAIN), so he **merely**⁸ turned his back to her and lay back down on the pillow between Kaiden's arms. 6:51am. 'Ahhhh! Still nine minutes for cat napping – purrfect,' Gus sighed happily to himself as his eyes gently closed.

Nine minutes later, he was awoken by the all-too-familiar Batman theme that he heard every morning **pulsating**⁹ from Kaiden's alarm clock. He'd completely forgotten about the irritating Ember, who'd nearly ruined his minutes of purrfect cat napping with Kaiden and concentrated on making sure that his most devoted and loving owner got himself up and ready for school.

This was a big week for Kaiden. Tomorrow was his Religious Education presentation to his class, and he was going to talk to them all about his Kara – his steel bracelet that he wore around his left wrist. It was from his father, and he'd given it to Kaiden shortly before he passed away nearly a year ago now. It was Kaiden's most valued possession and was his way of showing he was a true Sikh. For Kaiden, though, it was also a symbol of his father who had worn it before him.

Gus knew how important this presentation was, and he also knew that today was Kaiden's last chance to perfect and practise his presentation in school. He had to get in and be ready on time. This was where Gus stepped in.

'Two more minutes,' the still sleeping voice of Kaiden called out to his non-responsive alarm clock.

Gus rolled his eyes. Every morning, he thought to himself as he started to gently, then not so gently, poke his claws into the sleepy left arm of his owner.

⁶ likely to and enjoys causing trouble

⁷ hated

⁸ only

⁹ a strong, regular sound

After three or four goes, where Gus progressively increased his hardness of clawing, Kaiden shot up.

‘OW! Gus, will you cut it out? I’m up. I’m up. Ok?’ he said as he scratched Gus under the chin (his favourite scratching spot).

Kaiden looked tired. Big, black bags hung under his eyes, so it was obvious he’d stayed awake late last night thinking about his presentation. It must be stressing him, **contemplated**¹⁰ Gus, and he must feel exhausted. As if reading Gus’ mind, Kaiden stopped the scratching and gave a giant yawn before collapsing his head back down onto his pillow. Yep, he’s exhausted, decided Gus. But it was time to get him up and washed.

Gus hopped onto Kaiden’s pillow and ran his tail **affectionately**¹¹ over his face. This always worked. Gus loved it; Kaiden hated it.

Up shot Kaiden once more.

‘Ok, I’m up. I hate when you do that, you cheeky little mister,’ he smiled at Gus as he pushed his tail away from his face. ‘And you know I do!’

Kaiden gave his eyes a firm rub, hoping to rub some of the sleepiness out of them. He then dragged himself out of bed, stepped into his slippers and headed out the door down to the bathroom. He had to be quick; otherwise, his annoying younger brother would get in first. Gus bounced to the end of the bed and peered around the bedroom door to see if Kaiden had got there first. He had. The door to Akhee’s room appeared to be shut, something that further **confounded**¹² Gus’ confusion of how Ember had exited that room, entered this one and then somehow returned to her room.

‘How does she do it, that **dastardly**¹³ devil?’ Gus said out loud as he bounded back to the Batman pillows at the head of the bed.

Gus settled back down to relax, but only a couple of minutes could’ve passed when he heard something that made his ears **prick**¹⁴ up.

‘HOW can it not be there anymore?!’ Kaiden **frantically**¹⁵ shouted from the bathroom.

Gus knew something was wrong – time to move. He sprung from his pillow, down to the carpet and sprinted down the corridor to meet Kaiden’s tear-filled eyes at the bathroom entrance.

‘Gus, my Kara is gone. Where has it gone? I can’t have lost it!’ Kaiden cried as he **slumped**¹⁶ to the floor, only sitting upright with the help of the door. Gus hopped into his lap, doing the only thing he could do at this moment – offer him

¹⁰ thought (deeply)

¹¹ showing love and tenderness

¹² emphasised with anger/annoyance

¹³ wicked and cruel (but often used in a lighter way)

¹⁴ raise/be alert

¹⁵ in a hurried, fearful way

¹⁶ fell heavily

All text © James Steptowe 2019

All illustrations and cover design © Cristina Vigano 2019

Free Chapter sample only not for resale

comfort. Be there for him.

Kaiden lowered his head into Gus' body and started to weep. He could feel Kaiden's tears tumbling from his eyes onto his back.

'I have to have it for tomorrow. I have to find it,' wept Kaiden.

Gus stared at him warmly and got a clear understanding of what he had to do. And what he had to do was to find Kaiden's Kara. Find it today. He'd found things for Kaiden before, admittedly not so sacred and dear to him (although Gus once did have to find his favourite pair of Batman socks), and Gus knew this time would be no different. To start with, they'd search his room: the Kara was a little loose on his wrist, so it might have slipped off. But if it wasn't there, Gus was fully prepared to go into full cat detective mode to find it. He'd never failed Kaiden, and he wouldn't be starting today.

If you enjoyed this free sample, you can purchase **Raid of the Rastkull Rodents** from a number of places.

1. Why not visit your **local independent bookshop** and ask them to order it in?
2. It is also available from Amazon in paperback and kindle form (available for free with kindle unlimited)
3. It can be ordered to deliver from Waterstones' website

Also, you can meet James and buy his book at some of his **summer events**:

- **Castlegate Books**, Knaresborough (Friday 9th August)
- **Book Corner**, Saltburn (Saturday 10th August AM)
- **The Guisborough Bookshop**, Guisborough (Saturday 10th August PM)
- **Once Upon a Time Bookshop**, Alston (Saturday 17th August)

Thanks for reading,

James

