

# Chapter One

“Look, there’s a dragon!” Tasha mewed excitedly, her tabby tail bushing out as she stared up at the floating clouds. “I can see its wings, and there’s smoke coming out of its nostrils!”

Bianca, Tasha’s white-furred sister, rolled on to her back and opened one eye to peer at the sky. “You really do have the most incredible imagination. It’s a cloud.”

“I can see a dragon,” Peter said, looking hopefully at Tasha. He wasn’t quite sure that he could, but he loved Tasha’s stories. He was warming his black fur in a lovely patch of sun and he quite fancied hearing about a dragon.

The kittens had been sent up to the roof of the museum by their mother, to shoo away any pigeons that thought it was a good place to build their nests. The museum cats’ main job was to protect the precious treasures from rats and mice, but pigeons were a problem too. They were messy – they dropped feathers everywhere and they had a nasty habit of dropping other things too, sometimes on visitors. Grandpa Ivan, who had been guarding the museum for longer than anyone could

remember, said that pigeons were just rats with wings. He also said that squirrels were just rats in fancy coats.

Luckily, the kittens hadn't spotted so much as a stray feather up on the roof – nothing but warm roof tiles and sunny patches, perfect for an afternoon doze.



Boris yawned and stretched in the sun, then he sat up and eyed the racing clouds too. “That’s not a dragon.” He scrambled to his feet, the tip of his tail twitching with excitement. “That’s a sailing ship!”

“You’re worse than she is,” Bianca muttered, wriggling a little to move her ears out of the sun. They were a very delicate pink and burned if she wasn’t careful. “It’s a cloud and nothing else.”

“Oh, Bianca,” Tasha said sadly, staring at her sister. “Can’t you see anything?”

“Clouds...”

“Shhh, you two!” Boris demanded. “This is important.”

Both his sisters turned and glared at him, but Boris was so fascinated by the shapes in the sky that he didn’t even

notice. He was standing on the very ridge of the roof now, the wind ruffling his stripy ginger fur and blowing back his whiskers. “Look at that ship go! Where do you think it’s sailing to?”



Bianca, Tasha and Peter exchanged glances and then sighed. Boris was usually rather lazy, but every so often he would get very excited about something. Most of the time it was food. When the museum café had brought out a prawn sandwich special, Boris had moved out of their cellar home and set up camp outside the café's back door.

Now his golden eyes were sparkling and his tail was whipping back and forth. He was in one of those moods again. And somehow that always meant a great deal of fuss and work for the other kittens...

“I could be a ship's cat ... an adventurer! I'd sail across the seven seas and live on an island!”

“I think you only end up living on

an island if your ship sinks,” Peter said thoughtfully. “It’s not something you *want* to happen.”

But Boris wasn’t listening. “Think of all the fish!” He peered up at the sky and huffed sadly. “I’ll never catch that ship.” Then his eyes widened and he leaped round, the fur standing up along his spine. “There’s a ship in the museum! Come on! No more lazing around in the sun, we’re going adventuring!” He started to scramble down the tiles to the little round window that led into the curators’ office.

“Do we have to?” Bianca mewed crossly. “I’ve only just got comfortable.”

“I think we should,” Tasha replied. “You never know what he’ll do when he’s like this.”

Bianca huffed, and stood up, picking her way down the tiles with finicky paws. Tasha and Peter hurried after her and peered through the round window. They were just in time to see a ginger tail tip vanish out of the office doorway.


“He must be heading for *The Silver Lion!*” Tasha said, galloping over the dusty boards.

“The what?” Peter called.

“It’s the name of the ship – haven’t we shown it to you yet?”

Peter had only come to live at the museum a short time ago, after living on the streets for the first months of his life. He kept thinking he’d explored the whole of the huge building, but then the other kittens would point out a new corridor





full of galleries that he'd missed.

“No... Is it an actual ship?”

“Yes! It's a galleon, and it's about four hundred years old. It's in a dry dock built at the back of the museum,” Tasha called out as they scampered down the back stairs, the ones that weren't used by the museum visitors. “We can get to it through the Maritime Gallery.”

Peter wasn't sure what a dry dock was, but Tasha clearly expected him to know, so he didn't say anything. He would find out soon, he supposed. They scooted across a corridor and squeezed along a narrow gap behind a row of glass cases full of sailors' uniforms. Peter could hear Bianca puffing and grumbling behind him.

“Sun is good for my fur... And it makes



my whiskers curl.

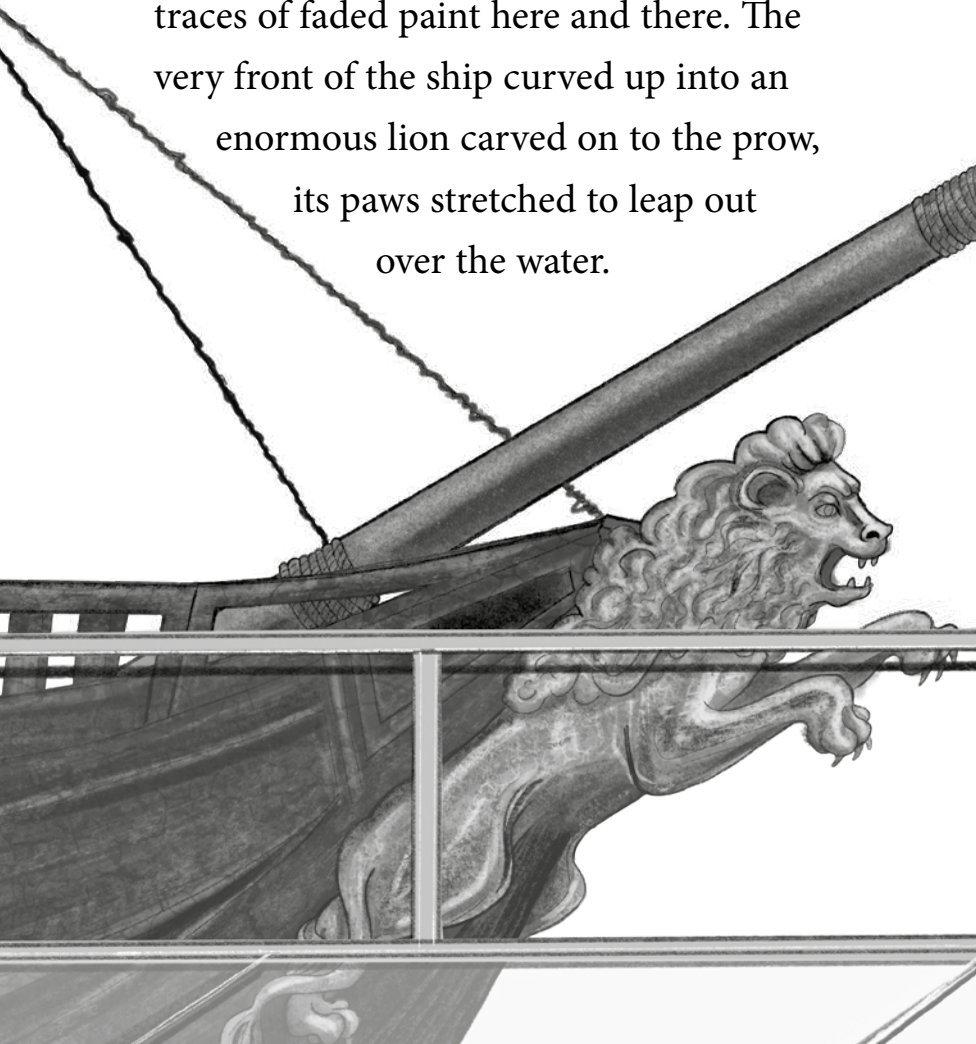
I don't want to go and  
hang around ancient boats..."

"There, look!" Tasha peeped  
round a huge doorway, and Peter gasped.  
*The Silver Lion* loomed above them,  
filling a huge gallery that was several  
storeys high. She was surrounded by glass  
walkways and bridges with railings on  
either side, so that the visitors could see  
close up without damaging the fragile  
woodwork. Since the kittens had come out



on the first floor, they were about level with the main deck.

The ship was built of wood, but it had aged to a silvery grey, with faint traces of faded paint here and there. The very front of the ship curved up into an enormous lion carved on to the prow, its paws stretched to leap out over the water.



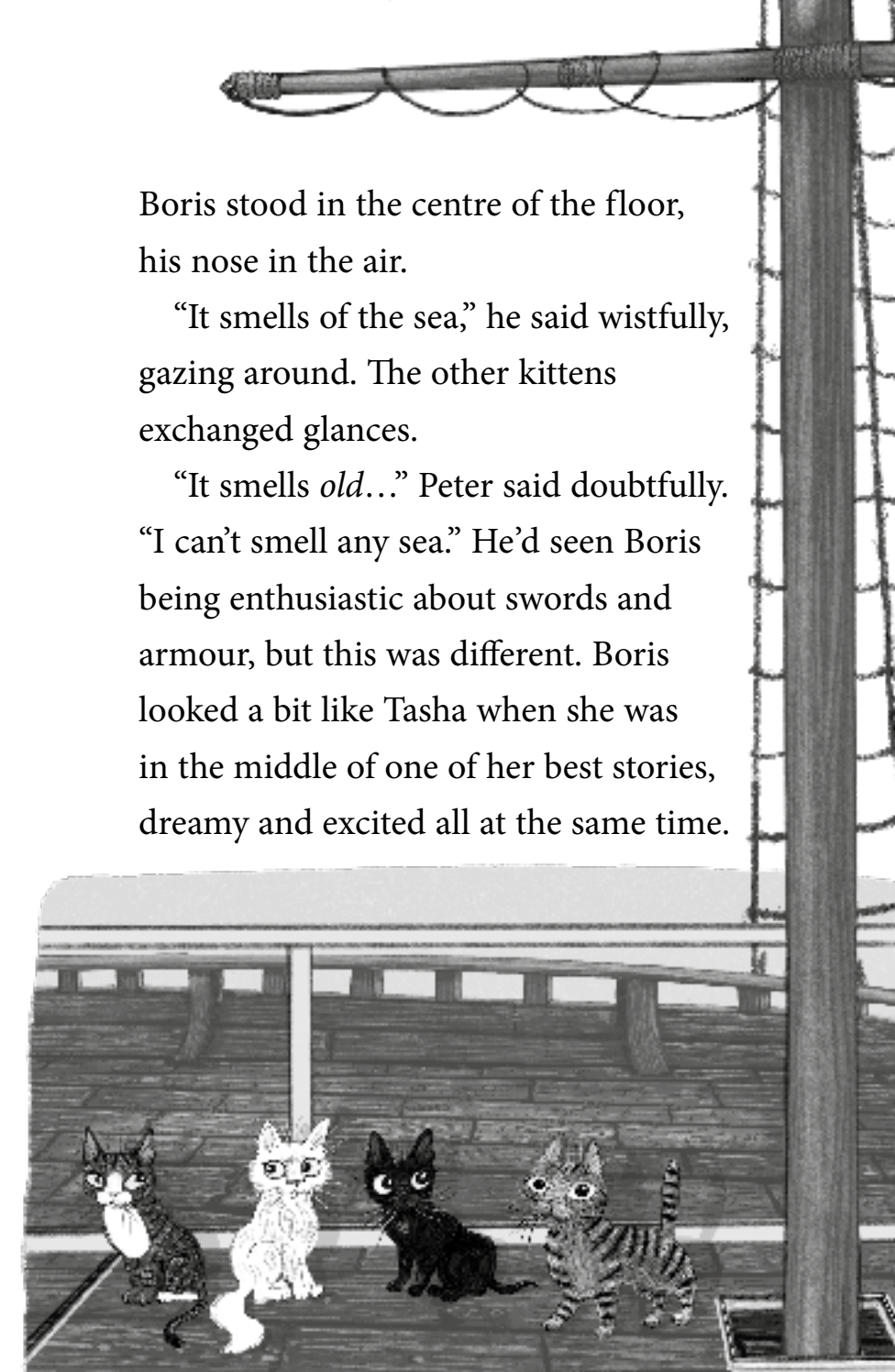
Boris was lurking behind a display board, trying not to let the visitors spot him, and the three other kittens nudged in too.

“Isn’t she beautiful?” he sighed.

Bianca looked round jealously. “Who?”

“The ship! *The Silver Lion!* I wish she still had her sails. She ought to be out on the river, not stuck here in a dry dock.” He peered round the board. “There’s no one looking. Come on!” He shot out from their hiding place and raced up the walkway to the main deck.

“Get after him!” Bianca hissed, dashing along the walkway with Tasha and Peter close behind. The three kittens skidded after Boris, keeping an eye out for visitors – but luckily the huge gallery was empty.



Boris stood in the centre of the floor,  
his nose in the air.

“It smells of the sea,” he said wistfully,  
gazing around. The other kittens  
exchanged glances.

“It smells *old*...” Peter said doubtfully.  
“I can’t smell any sea.” He’d seen Boris  
being enthusiastic about swords and  
armour, but this was different. Boris  
looked a bit like Tasha when she was  
in the middle of one of her best stories,  
dreamy and excited all at the same time.

“It smells like adventure... Hey, what was that?” Boris demanded, whirling round. “Did you hear it?”

The other kittens pricked their ears and twitched their tails, listening hard.

Down in the depths of the ship there came the *tap-tap-tapping* of little ratty paws.