

# Mister Pushkin Knows Best



Mister Pushkin hated that wicker basket more than anything else in the world. He hated the way those interwoven willow twigs creaked and groaned as Klem carried it, one step at a time, down the stairs from the apartment. He hated the way it jerked and jarred as Klem

clumsily bashed it against the walls. He hated the oblong piece of rough carpet lining the floor. He hated the musty smell. But most of all, he hated that wire door, the door to his cell, the door that was so tightly secured with three small leather belts, that he couldn't even squeeze one paw out. And he hated, he *really* hated the place he always ended up whenever he'd find himself incarcerated in this horrid little space.

It was unusual for Klem to have caught him off-guard. Curled up on the windowsill, he'd been dreaming of Highland rivers flourishing with salmon. Half-asleep, he'd felt Klem's hands gently lifting him and pouring his limp body into that dreadful basket. And before he knew it, the door was closed and he was trapped. Inside, it was neither tall enough for him to stand up, nor wide enough for him to lay down. So he just sat there like a mother hen, his paws tucked neatly beneath, his body

wobbling from side to side as Klem carried the unwieldy basket across the pavement.

Placing the basket onto the back seat of a waiting taxi, Klem slid it across and sat down beside it, slamming the door. Mister Pushkin heard the taxi driver utter the usual, 'Where to, guv'nor?' and waited for Klem's inevitable response.

No cat enjoys being taken to the vet, and Mister Pushkin certainly didn't. Regardless of his ailment, be it dermatitis resulting in dandruff, or a gum infection causing halitosis, the first thing Claude always did was take his temperature. And unlike in humans, it was never done orally.

Mister Pushkin purred, 'Why can't Klem take me somewhere nice for a change?'

Leaning forward, Klem whispered in the driver's ear.

'No problem, guv'nor,' said the driver, accelerating down the street.

Mister Pushkin growled, feeling every pothole judder through his body. There was nothing wrong with him. He neither had dandruff nor halitosis. So why did he have to go to the vet?

If there was no traffic, the journey would usually take ten minutes. Mister Pushkin would hear the taxi's tyres crunching over the gravel driveway, before skidding to a halt outside the eerie Gothic house, the lair of the dreaded vet. Claude would be waiting at the door, wearing a green smock, rubber gloves and brandishing the thermometer.

Mister Pushkin closed his eyes, and tried not to think about the horrors to come.

But the bleeps of the ten o'clock morning news emanating from the taxi's radio told him that the journey so far had taken well over an hour. Gazing owlishly through the grimy window, he was astonished to discover that there wasn't a building in sight. All he could

see was an irregular patchwork of sheep-filled fields surrounded by clipped hedgerows.

Mister Pushkin knew that this was definitely not the way to the vet. Had the driver got lost?

And although he couldn't see him, he could feel Klem's typist's fingers tapping on the basket's handle in time with the music. Something smelled seriously fishy. For a brief moment, Mister Pushkin thought that maybe Klem was taking him to a new vet, a vet without a thermometer. But that was just wishful thinking. He hated being kept in suspense, and his paws were sweating more than ever. Closing his eyes, he fell to a restless sleep.

When the radio bleeped for the eleven o'clock news, Mister Pushkin awoke to a stationary world. The taxi's handbrake had been applied with a click-click-click, and his body no longer juddered. But outside, he could hear a strange surging and whooshing

sound. He looked through the grimy window at a very grey sky. Considering it was July, it looked more like November.

Looking closely, he saw seagulls with enormous curved wings swooping overhead. Some were screeching and squawking, whilst others held what looked like potato chips in their large yellow beaks. Where was this alien world he'd been taken to?

Mister Pushkin heard the tinkle of coins dropping into the taxi driver's hand, and Klem saying, with a hint of sarcasm, 'Thank you for driving so carefully.'

Klem stepped out into the bracing wind. Holding the lapels of his tweed jacket, he inhaled a lungful of invigorating air. He then lifted out the basket, and waved goodbye to the taxi.

Mister Pushkin felt the sharp bite of cold wind ruffling his fur. Where was he? And why was Klem whistling? The salty, rather bacterial

air made Mister Pushkin's eyes sting; those screeching and squawking birds were giving him a headache; and that biting wind ruffled his fur so much that he resembled a big blue teddy bear. He growled. Klem had a lot of explaining to do.

'Welcome to the seaside!' said Klem, placing the basket onto a sheltered wooden bench.

Mister Pushkin narrowed his sulphurous eyes, 'And why do I want to go to the seaside?'

He looked out at a churning green-grey sea, and at distant sailing boats buffeted by strong winds. On the sands below, donkeys with downcast eyes and frowning lips retreated from the incoming tide; and their owner didn't look any happier. And a stocky man in an orange cagoule threw three sticks out to sea, and watched with delight as his three bulldogs blundered into the surf to fetch

them. Three dogs went in, but only two returned.

Mister Pushkin stared up at Klem and growled, 'Take me home *this instant!*'

With chattering teeth, Klem said, 'I thought I'd give you a special treat.'

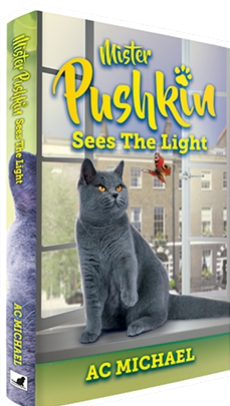
'Special treat?' thought Mister Pushkin. 'I'd have rather gone to the vet!'

'After all,' said Klem, 'it is your birthday.'

The cat purred, '*Today* is my birthday?'

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

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