

pened and how near she had come to losing her son, she took Stuart in her hand, even though his clothes smelled nasty, and kissed him. Then she sent him upstairs to take a bath, and sent George out to take Stuart's clothes to the cleaner.

"What was it like, out there in the Atlantic Ocean?" inquired Mr. Little, who had never been very far from home.

So Stuart and Margalo told all about the ocean, and the gray waves curling with white crests, and the gulls in the sky, and the channel buoys and the ships and the tugs and the wind making a sound in your ears. Mr. Little sighed and said some day he hoped to get away from business long enough to see all those fine things.

Everyone thanked Margalo for saving Stuart's life; and at suppertime Mrs. Little presented her with a tiny cake, which had seeds sprinkled on top.



## Chapter X

### Springtime

SNOWBELL, the cat, enjoyed nighttime more than daytime. Perhaps it was because his eyes liked the dark. But I think it was because there are always so many worth-while things going on in New York at night.

Snowbell had several friends in the neighborhood. Some of them were house cats, others were store cats. He knew a Maltese cat in the A & P, a white Persian in the apartment house next door, a tortoise-shell in the delicatessen, a tiger cat in the basement of the branch library, and a beautiful young Angora who had escaped from a cage in a pet shop on Third Avenue and had gone to live a free life of her own in the tool house of the small park near Stuart's home.

One fine spring evening Snowbell had been calling on the Angora in the park. He started home, late, and it was such a lovely night she said she would walk along with him to keep him company. When they got to Mr. Little's house, the two cats sat down at the foot



Quickly you make rash decisions. You dismiss your last allies: hope and trust. There, you've defeated yourself. Fear, which is but an impression, has triumphed over you.

The matter is difficult to put into words. For fear, real fear, such as shakes you to your foundation, such as you feel when you are brought face to face with your mortal end, nestles in your memory like a gangrene: it seeks to rot everything, even the words with which to speak of it. So you must fight hard to express it. You must fight hard to shine the light of words upon it. Because if you don't, if your fear becomes a wordless darkness that you avoid, perhaps even manage to forget, you open yourself to further attacks of fear because you never truly fought the opponent who defeated you.

#### CHAPTER 57

It was Richard Parker who calmed me down. It is the irony of this story that the one who scared me witless to start with was the very same who brought me peace, purpose, I dare say even wholeness.

He was looking at me intently. After a time I recognized the gaze. I had grown up with it. It was the gaze of a contented animal looking out from its cage or pit the way you or I would look out from a restaurant table after a good meal, when the time has come for conversation and people-watching. Clearly, Richard Parker had eaten his fill of hyena and drunk all the rainwater he wanted. No lips were rising and falling, no teeth were showing, no growling or snarling was coming from him. He was simply taking me in, observing me, in a manner that was sober but not menacing. He kept twitching his ears and varying the sideways turn of his head. It was all so, well, *catlike*. He looked like a nice, big, fat domestic cat, a 450-pound tabby.

He made a sound, a snort from his nostrils. I pricked up my ears. He did it a second time. I was astonished. *Prusten?*

Tigers make a variety of sounds. They include a number of roars and growls, the loudest of these being most likely the full-throated *aaonb*, usually made during the mating season by males and oestrous females. It's a cry that travels far and wide, and is absolutely petrifying when heard close up. Tigers go *woof* when they are caught unawares, a short, sharp detonation of fury that would instantly make your legs jump up and run away if they weren't frozen to the spot. When they charge, tigers put out throaty, coughing roars. The growl they use for purposes of threatening has yet another guttural quality. And tigers hiss and snarl, which, depending on the emotion behind it, sounds either like autumn leaves rustling on the ground, but a little more resonant, or, when it's an infuriated snarl, like a giant door with rusty hinges slowly opening—in both cases, utterly spine-chilling. Tigers make other sounds too. They grunt and they moan. They purr, though not as melodiously or as frequently as small cats, and only as they breathe out. (Only small cats purr breathing both ways. It is one of the characteristics that distinguishes big cats from small cats. Another is that only big cats can roar. A good thing that is. I'm afraid the popularity of the domestic cat would drop very quickly if little kitty could roar its displeasure.) Tigers even go *meow*, with an inflection similar to that of domestic cats, but louder and in a deeper range, not as encouraging to one to bend down and pick them up. And tigers can be utterly, majestically silent, that too.

I had heard all these sounds growing up. Except for *prusten*. If I knew of it, it was because Father had told me about it. He had read descriptions of it in the literature. But he had heard it only once, while on a working visit to the Mysore Zoo, in their animal hospital, from a young male being treated for pneumonia. *Prusten* is the