

King o' the Cats • By Aaron Shepard

Taken from the picture book *King o' the Cats*, told by Aaron Shepard, illustrated by Kristin Sorra, Atheneum, 2004. Copyright © 1995, 1997, 2004 Aaron Shepard. May be copied for any noncommercial purpose. Visit www.aaronshp.com.

“What in the world . . . ?” muttered Peter. “There shouldn’t be anyone there, this time of night. And how’d they get in, anyway?”

Peter pulled on a coat, crossed the yard, and quietly unlocked the back door. As he crept through the vestry, he heard a sound from the church.

Meow, meow

“Sounds like a cat,” murmured Peter. “But I never knew a cat to light a candle.”

He peered around the curtain hung at the church entrance, and what he saw made him gasp. There was not *one* cat, but *hundreds* of cats, of every size and coloring. They filled the pews, and all of them sat upright just like people.

On the steps to the altar, a big black cat—the biggest cat Peter had ever seen—was kneeling with his head bowed. Standing above him with paws upraised was a black cat in bishop’s robes, intoning, “*Meow, meow*”

An altar kitten approached with a velvet pillow on which lay a small golden crown. The bishop lifted the crown and solemnly placed it on the kneeling cat’s head.

The church exploded with cries of *Meow, meow!* Peter didn’t wait to see more. He raced through the vestry and back to his cottage, where he jumped into bed and stayed trembling under the covers till morning.

Bright and early, Peter was over to see Father Allen. The priest was reading in the conservatory, his black cat Tom curled up on his lap.

“Good morning, Peter,” said the priest. “What brings you here so early?”

“Father Allen, I came to tell you about something terribly weird in the church last night. I saw these lights and I went over to check, and I heard a *meow*—”

“*Meow,*” said the priest’s cat, Tom.

“Yes, just like that,” said Peter. “And when I looked, there were hundreds of cats in the church. And there was this one big black cat, and he was kneeling in front, and their bishop was crowning him—”

Father Allen was looking at him sternly. “Peter, do you remember what I told you about wild stories?”

“Of course I do, Father.”

“Then let’s have no more of this, all right?”