**Bringing up Baby**

**The latest from Maximilian the Magnificent,**

the tiny black cat whose small size ensures he has lots of problems in life.

Being a parent is tiring. My little grey sweetheart has had quite a time of it, preparing our youngsters to go out into the wide world. She’s succeeded with five of our six. One by one they’ve been adopted into households prepared to give them a comfortable life . . . all except for Gus.

 Gus is a problem. He calls himself the Emperor Augustus and considers that the world hasn’t yet offered him a suitable home. One by one carers come to inspect the litter and he turns up his nose and stalks away. He says this one smells, that that one wears slippery clothing, and a third has a voice like a crow. If they try to pick him up, he spits at them. Can you believe it?

 My sweetheart is in despair. She’s looking forward to a quiet future as soon as Gus has been disposed of. But Gus won’t play ball. In fact, he doesn’t seem to care for anything in this world except for a squeaky toy that he carries about with him.

 ‘Squeak! Squeak!’ The sound drives me crazy.

 I pin him into a corner and once again attempt to teach him the Cats’ Catechism. Keep yourself clean, do your duties outside, and don’t scratch the furniture. Despise your carers all you like, but to get the best out of them, wind round their ankles, tickle under their chins and purr. For heavens’ sake, Lad! turn on the charm and they’ll be your slave.

 He doesn’t listen. ‘Squeak! Squeak!’ he goes, and stalks away with his tiny black tail sticking up like a brush from his backside.

 My little sweetheart cries out in distress. Gus is climbing the fence, which is way too high for him. He teeters along the top and drops down onto the road outside!

He doesn’t know how dangerous roads can be! I follow him over the fence onto the pavement, only to see the stupid boy set out across the road through the traffic. He doesn’t notice the cars, the bus bearing down on him from one direction, and the motorbike roaring along behind. I streak across after him, losing at least one of my lives, the biker shouting at me, and a car standing on its brakes. I’m across, panting, sweating . . .

 Where’s the little whatsit gone?

 I look left and I look right. There’s my own fence some way along, but he doesn’t know where I live, does he?

 ‘Squeak! Squeak!’ To the left. Now the man who lives there often leaves food out for the birds so he’s been plagued by mice, which I’ve been dealing with for him. But, has Gus any idea what to do about a mouse?

 I follow the squeak and drop into a nightmare. Gus is there, his squeaker still firmly in his mouth as he confronts not just a mouse, but a rat! A fully-grown rat, twice his size!

 The rat snarls at Gus. Gus fluffs himself out to twice his size – which is not saying much. This rat is a formidable foe, one that I’d not care to take on. Gus is going to get crunched if I don’t do something to rescue him.

 The rat catches sight of me. Now he doesn’t know which of us to deal with first.

 What can I do? I set up a yowling, hoping the man will come out of the house and rescue us . . . but no.

 Gus backs away. The rat is distracted. I see my chance. I power up and leap into the air, coming down on the rat’s back. I scream at Gus to get lost. I can’t hold the rat for long. If he shakes me off, I’ll be at his mercy and . . . the rat darts for cover and I tumble off as he disappears into a tunnel he’s made in the roots of a tree.

 I’m shaken and stirred, but tell Gus to follow me . . . over the fence into the next garden. There’s a nice lady with a big lap living here. She doesn’t get out much and always welcomes my visits. I can have a little rest here and maybe be given a titbit to eat till I take Gus home.

 And there she is, looking out of the window.. She opens the door to let me in. I pause to check that my fur is sleek and . . . blow me down! . . . Gus takes one look at her, drops his squeaker and leaps onto her lap. He looks up into her face, and reaches up to pat her cheek.

He purrs. He sounds like a mowing machine. She melts with love for him. To crown it all, he rubs his head against her chin.

 ‘Oh, you lovely little puss,’ she cries. She inspects the tag on his collar. ‘Have you come to visit me?’

 She doesn’t realise it yet, but he’s chosen her for his forever home. She’ll ring his home number and ask if they can spare her this charming little black kitten. He settles down on her lap, still purring.

 I’m disgusted. Deflated. Worn out. She hasn’t a single glance to spare for me now she’s got him.

 I attend to my toilet and then make my exit. Duty done.

 I am Maximilian the Magnificent, Tutor Terrificus and . . a Doting Dad.