

# Blueskin The Cat



© Daniel Nanavati 2012

The right of Daniel Nanavati to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© Gabriela Sepulveda 2012

The right of Gabriela Sepulveda to be identified as the artist of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Blueskin The Cat

FootSteps Press First Edition

Typeset by Jackie Pascoe

ISBN 978-0-9566349-3-1

In this work of Fiction the characters, places and events are either the product of the author's imagination or they are used entirely fictitiously. Therefore any resemblance to Persons living or dead is coincidental.

Except for the pirates who are known personally to the writer and are a pretty rotten lot.

# Blueskin The Cat

by

Daniel Nanavati

water-colours by

Gabriela Sepulveda





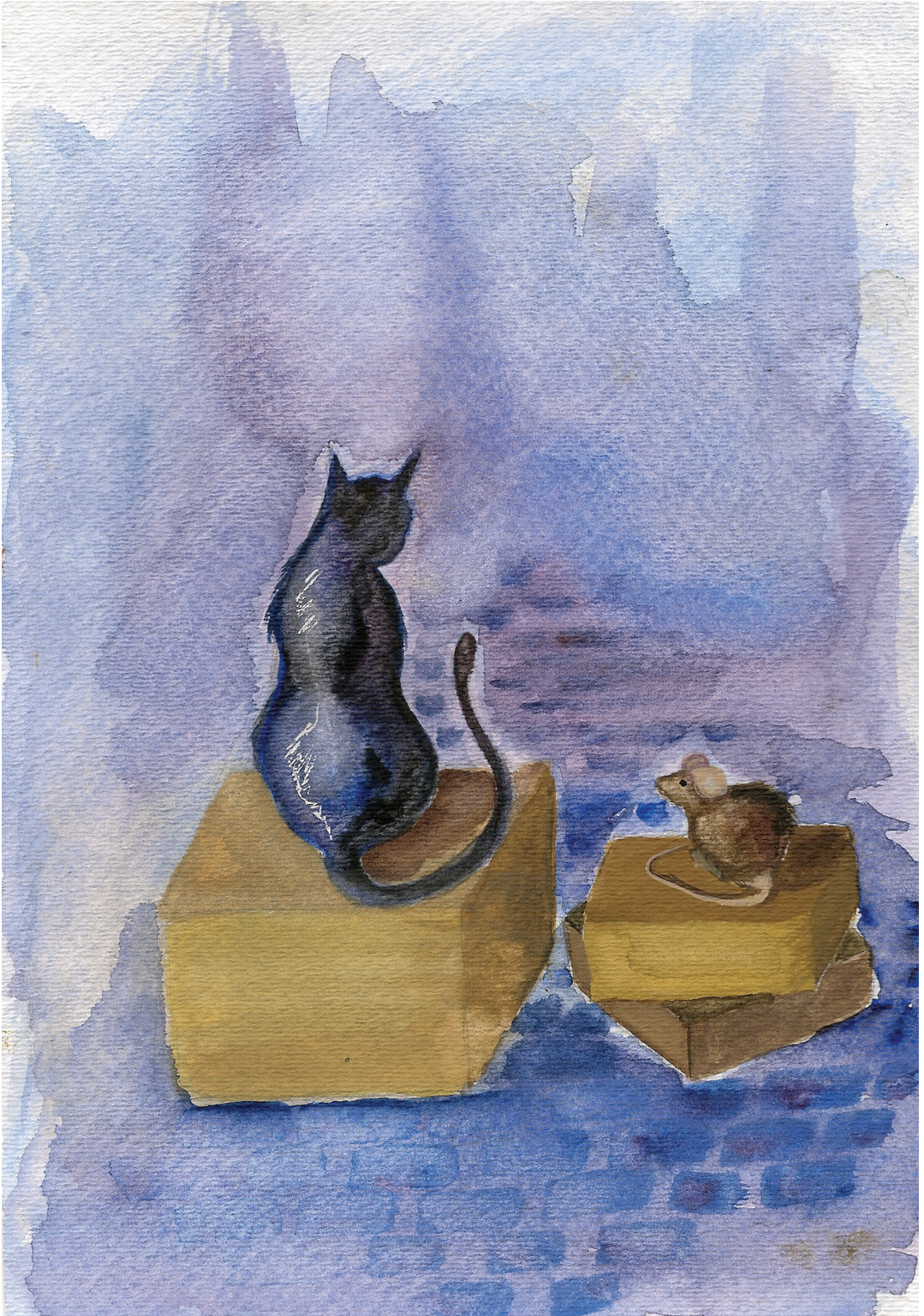
To All Cats



# Chapters

The Cat	3
The Brothers	17
The Ship	31
The Pirates	45
The Storm	59
The Shipwrecked	71
The Medicine-Man	83

*Blueskin and the King of the Netherlands*





# The Cat

Blueskin wasn't bothered by thoughts of an after-life. He couldn't spell reincarnation and hadn't even heard of India where the people believed in such things.

What did bother him for a moment was the awful memory of being strangled to death in a hanging and the loss of his beautiful, blue waistcoat with the pearl buttons that had been his pride and joy as a highwayman. He remembered the sound of the drum roll and a great cheer from the crowd as his body dropped and the rope tightened around his neck.

He looked down at his chest and was even more bothered to see fur had grown all over him.

Fur?

Black fur with a definite blue sheen?

One, two, three, four paws?

Paws?

His chin was touching the dirty floor. He must be lying on his stomach. He glanced around at the casks lining the

walls, wooden boxes stacked on top of each other and coal in a large pile. This was a cellar. How had he fallen into a cellar from the scaffold? Had they carried him in here and dumped him on his stomach ready to be carted away to the lime grave as soon as they were ready? He had fooled them. He was still alive. He could still move. He stretched his neck. It didn't hurt. He tried to smile and felt fur on his lips. Something was wrong. The military had hanged too many men to make a mistake.

There were smells in the air he didn't recognize. Things he had never smelled before. He licked his nose which he had never been able to do before. He turned round very slowly and watched with fascination as a tail flicked. A cat's tail. His tail.

His tail!

He was a cat!

A blue-black cat. He scratched his stomach where it itched with his back leg. He sat down and looked at his rump. He could turn his head almost right round. He could see quite well in the dark and heard a few mice scuttling across the stone floor of the cellar. Muscles all over him tensed at their every movement. His mouth filled with saliva when he smelled them and he felt his claws aching to come out and grab them.

He wanted to eat them!

What a ghastly, terrible, catastrophic twist of fate! He jumped onto a box and leapt in a single bound onto the ledge of the barred window. Now he was at street level and could see ladies' petticoats and men's buckled shoes milling around in the square. Gaps appeared in their ranks and suddenly he saw his scaffold! The pads of his front paw lightly touched the bars in his shock.

There it was. His blue waistcoat being auctioned even as his body was dumped into the open cart.

"What am I bid for this infamous coat," called the hangman who doubled as an auctioneer,

"Marv'lous workminship. Six purl buttons. Worth two pounds of money and a right good piece for conversation. Make the ladies' blood run cold an' ready for an 'ug! Sixpence. Be reason'ble 'e was wearing this the day 'e killed Lord Duncan. Look it's a bit o' a celebration the roads being that bit cleaner and safer an' all. Let's 'ave one pound ten shillings? One pound? Come on. This 'ere's a piece o' 'istory. 'Is bounty was two 'undred pound. Worn on the day 'e died and went to 'ell. Fifteen and six? Sold!"

Then his horse was brought forward and he saw the rich amongst the crowd going over to it to see if it was worth a few gold coins. His grey stallion. Gone for ten pounds seven

and sixpence.

“Meow!” He sat down. He had wanted to bellow out, “Stop!” but instead out came a meow. A cat’s sound. He really was a cat. He stood up and turned round again. How had this happened? Why had this happened? If he had been offered the choice he’d have preferred Hell to this!

He remembered the night before. The four drunken soldiers who had chased him. The feel of the precious necklace in his greedy fingers, the scent of the lace ‘kerchiefs. He curled his claws and they scrapped at the stone ledge as he remembered the two brothers who has captured him just after he had given the soldiers the slip. He opened his black eyes as a jeer went up. Someone was holding up the trousers he had been wearing. They’ll sell anything to make some money to pay for the hanging. The crowd spat at his body on its way to be quicklimed.

But he was still alive.

He was a live cat.

Wasn’t that better than being dead. He heard the mice again and his stomach did a somersault.

UGH! The thought of it.

After he had poached venison, eaten chicken, ham and eggs, rabbits and beef pies, to be brought down to mice! Little brown, dirty common mice. Yet how crunchy they

would be.

After being a man to be brought down to being a cat! He used to kick cats. Worse he had enjoyed kicking cats. He inflicted the maximum pain at twenty paces to a cat of any size with his expert choice of stones.

He looked down at himself. He was an above average size blue-black cat. At least he still had something blue about his person. He peered at his backside. He was a tom cat. At least that hadn't changed.

The crowd had begun to disperse and he realised he had thought so much about himself he had missed the price they had raised for his belongings. His? They weren't his anymore. The waistcoat would hardly fit a cat, even a vain cat of above average size had little use for a waistcoat with pearl buttons. He flicked his tail and watched his confined, old body being driven to be dumped and forgotten forever. Well, maybe not forever since he was now a cat maybe he would be a man once again one day and ...

He was now a cat!

Blood pounded in his small brain at the thought. No more riding across the highways. No more kissing women in keeper Filyrank's inn. No more robbery with violence, drinking with other men until he couldn't stand up straight. No more fighting with his fists and using bad language.

No more rich and tasty meals followed by wines of the finest vintages bought with the sale of other people's best jewels. All that was being carted away with the two men sent to see his body legally disposed of as the colonel in chief had ordered. All he had to look forward to was eating mice and rats and helping the cats have kittens.

What kind of a life was that for an adventurous, tough and hardy highwayman!

He felt cold and bedraggled. He didn't even have a name anymore. He didn't have a home...well he had never had a home so that wouldn't make much difference. He didn't have a horse. Who had his horse. He looked up but whomever had bought his horse had gone. He wasn't feared by travellers any more; wasn't respected by robbers and thieves; wasn't hunted by soldiers. He was just a cat. To all intents and purposes he was dead.

He had an awful feeling life as a cat was going to be boring.

Why hadn't anyone ever told him if he died he might become a cat? Maybe no one he had talked to knew? Maybe it was only hanged highwaymen who became cats. No, there are too few highwaymen and too many cats for that to be true. Maybe not all cats have been people? He flicked his tail. At least he could still remember even if he could

only mew. His stomach tightened. He had to eat. To eat, sleep and decide what to do. If there was anything to do. He decided to make his way to the market and see if he could pick up a few scraps of old food.

‘You’re new around here,’ observed a voice. **Blueskin** turned and saw a mouse sitting on one of the boxes below him.

‘Who are you?’

‘Now? A mouse, but once I was King of the Netherlands.’

‘You too?’

‘I’m afraid so. I’ve been running around for ten minutes and you haven’t moved a muscle. That’s a sure sign you’re new to this game.’

‘I ... I never thought of it,’ lied **Blueskin** restraining his desire to leap onto the poor rodent.

‘I know how you feel. Imagine me. I had servants, carriages, palaces and lots of food and these days I have to get used to cellars, pantry scraps and avoiding cats.’

‘Is it hard?’

‘To begin with. How are you finding it?’

‘I’m...confused.’

‘Always the way of things. What were you?’

‘I was called **Blueskin**.’

‘My! That’s a quick one. You’ve only just been hanged.’

‘You saw?’

‘I like to see what’s happening in the square.’

‘Does this sort of thing usually take longer?’

‘I didn’t turn up for a week. I met a mole once who didn’t make an appearance for a whole year after being a sheriff.’

Blueskin looked down

‘I never thought anything like this would happen.’

‘None of us do. I’ve met two rats who wanted to commit suicide over it but once they realised how the system worked they decided to stay as rats. No telling where they’d end up being next. A real shock to the old mind I can tell you.’

‘It certainly is,’ agreed Blueskin.

‘Well I wish you luck. I just thought I’d tell you aren’t alone. It might help.’

‘Thank you ... your highness.’ The mouse twitched its whiskers.

‘Thanks for that,’ it ended and slipped away.

Blueskin left the ledge and walked across the square very much as he would have done if he had been a man. Except he was wondering just how long cats lived instead of wondering when the next coach was due.

His eyes watered at the foul smell of urine mixed with the mud which didn’t leave the cobbled streets until it



rained. No one knew about sewers and still less about street cleaning. His feet stank! No wonder cats walked about with their heads in the air, the smell was unbearable! As he was dawdling a girl pulled at his tail and he flew up in fright and pain spitting as if he had been spitting all his life only to receive a stone in his side thrown from a black-toothed, ugly boy standing nearby!

There was laughter and a hail of other stones as Blueskin turned and ran into an alley. His side was sore, his pride hurt and his mind angry. People shouldn't be so cruel! Ignorant! Hurtful!

He stopped himself.

He had done the same. Was he superior now he was a cat? Yes! He wiggled his body gently. He had better get to the market. He carried on, only now he was slinking stealthily along the walls keeping a sharp look-out for groups of children glad his body was very lithe. He wasn't so hurt.

The market was doing poor business. Stalls were half-stocked as farmers were having to bring the food in with fewer workers every day. Plague was claiming many lives. Nevertheless Blueskin could see quite a few decent scraps about the place which might be appetizing. The only problem was every other cat and most of the dogs in the

town saw the same scraps. They were all fighting furiously beneath the stalls and around the people in a chaos of fur, claws, barks and bites. If you think a food-fight means custard pies and lemonade over your best friend forget it! A food fight means being a cat facing a dog over a hog's foot and blood being shed.

**Blueskin** had been reincarnated with movements only a cat can perform. How to scratch a dog on the nose where its softest, flick the tail to distract its attention whilst you get a claw or two in position, twist before another dog bites your back and jump with claws extended and scratch whilst running away.

Each and every one of which he used in the first minute it took to collect a piece of rotting fish from the bin beside the fish seller. He wanted some fresh fish but the man at the counter was using a fierce looking axe to keep away animals and thieves.

**Blueskin** crept along the back of the market whilst people called out their wares and swore at urchins who stole an apple here, a choice vegetable there. He could smell a faint aroma of cooked meat probably coming from the officers' quarters at the end of the square. The soldiers knew how to eat and officers had plenty of money.

He stopped for a moment in surprise.

Ahead of him he could see one of the two brothers who had saluted him as he was being hanged. One of the two men who had caught him the night before. For a moment thoughts of revenge fled into his mind and he reached down for his pistol but he ended up scratching himself. He spat. How can an angry cat avenge itself on a human being? It didn't seem possible.

Then again **Blueskin** wasn't the kind to give up easily once he had decided upon something whatever he was! He swallowed his piece of fish, avoided the hostile attentions of a male cat covered in scars and licking away the blood of some dog's nose from its claws. **Blueskin** ran to the far end of the square where the man was talking and placed himself close to his boots.

"That's right. I was one of them. A close thing it was too. My associate in the business and brother has a cut across the back of his shooting hand to prove it." **Blueskin** recognised the voice of the man who had jumped on him from the trees.

"It was a fine job though a dangerous one," responded the old baker he was talking too. "Needed doing and the military weren't too hot on his trail. Well worth the two hundred to be rid of him."

"Dark it was. He rode up right under the tree but it was

a near thing. Still there were no dangers we hadn't expected. We tracked that highwayman for three weeks since his robbing of Lord St. John Thackery. Slept out most nights but we got the fox in the end. Though he was more like a cat with his wiles and craftiness. I've never seen a shot like it. Pitch black and it went straight as an arrow taking the pistol right out of my brother's hand. We made him walk all the way into town to take the wind out of him."

"There was talk he came from another place," said the old man in a hushed whisper suggesting [Blueskin](#) was a devil.

"There was nothing like that about him. He didn't change into an animal or disappear into a mist. And that neck was as leathery and human as yours or mine," he grinned. "Nay he wasn't a devil. Far from it, a man like that could have been one of the best shots in England. Perhaps the best, mark my words."

"Well that's as that is. Now he's dead and we'll get on better without him."

"That you will. Thank you kindly for the bread old man. How much is it?"

"One and half-penny."

"Take two pence and welcome to it."

He stopped talking and looked down as a cat rubbed its

blue-black back against his foot.

“Scab! Get out!” cried the old man picking up a stone from a pile he kept for just such use.

“Leave it old man. It’s a hungry cat. You’ve got quite a few here.”

“Pah! Its always the same. Like peasants they breed and breed and little else. We’re still infested with rats and mice despite the lot of ‘em. Useless mangy animals.”

He put the stone back not wishing to offend a customer.

“Well a little good fortune can stretch from man to beast can it not. Let me have some of that cheese.”

The man bent down and gave **Blueskin** some cheese which was almost like thick creamy milk. **Blueskin** licked his whiskers. **Blueskin** could make use of him whilst he planned his demise. After all he needed to eat and fighting other animals all the time would sap his strength. Besides now he had had the fortune to find one of his captors he wanted to track down the other one. He would be nice and follow this man to his lodgings and bide his time. Maybe he could get them both killed at the same time!

Things weren’t going to be so boring after all.