



COLUMBUS

Runner Up: "Columbus –
Swimming With The Fishies"
by Emma Cole

- 1 year old – 4 months in shelter
- Wants to be the centre of attention
- Has been known to bully other cats

"I was nowhere, I swear. Just lost track of time is all!" The tabby cat stands alone, trembling. Columbus, the black cat waiting beside his boss, tries to read her expression.

"Really?" The tuxedo cat atop a milk crate swishes his tail rhythmically. "So, these rumours of you breaking mice with the Bowring colony, that's just old cats telling tales?"

"Honest, Mittens." Columbus has seen many cats lie to Mittens – Tabby is not convincing. "But the twins on Hanley Place? They're in good with the Bowrings. They're the ones to talk to."

Columbus anticipates an order he's been given many times before.

Instead, Mittens shifts back. "Columbus, show this street trash to the door."

Columbus leaps onto Tabby, carrying her by the scruff of her neck.

"Hey!" Tabby squirms. Columbus spits her out by the dumpsters. "Still doing Mittens's dirty work, huh? Pathetic." With a shake of her head, she clambers away.

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"Thanks, friend." Mittens is pacing when Columbus returns.

"I've seen Bowrings skulking around the harbour. Tabby knows more than she lets on." Columbus stares daggers at Mittens.

“Perhaps.” Mittens ignores the hostility. Columbus can see the Bowring cats’ plan coming together, right under their noses. And yet, all he’s good for is taking out the trash. “Go see if those twins will squeal.”

“Boss, I don’t know that’s the best way to – ” Before the words leave his mouth, Mittens lashes out, grazing Columbus’s whiskers.

“You think I don’t know what’s best for us?” Mittens hisses. “I’m in charge here! Got it?”

“Yes, boss.” Columbus coughs.

“Glad we understand each other. Go see about those twins. And take Maeve home, first. If the Bowrings are up to something, she shouldn’t be out alone.”

“Whatever you say, boss.” Columbus bows his head, a rotten smell in his nose.

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Maeve’s sleek white coat sparkles like moonlight. Columbus shadows her, on alert.

“Oh, Colly, relax. My husband worries too much.” Maeve purrs.

“Not enough – the Bowrings are planning a serious move. And Mittens seems...apathetic.”

“He’s just being careful.”

“Going soft, more like it,” Columbus huffs. Maeve stops walking, having reached her patio. Beneath the floorboards, Columbus spies the tangle of small, squirming kittens. Columbus feels his little cat heart beating inside his little cat chest as Maeve looks into his haggard eyes.

“You used to be soft too, Colly.” Swishing her tail, Maeve disappears.

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When Columbus finds the twins, fighting over a piece of raw fish, he needs only to growl, “Alright boys, here’s how this is gonna work...”

Columbus waits, perched on the bridge railing.

“Had to drag me all the way out here, huh? If those Bowrings find us we’re both ground tuna, my friend.” Mittens hops up alongside Columbus, surveying the raging river below them.

“Thanks for coming, boss.”

“Anything for my right-paw cat. Get anything from those Hanley twins?”

“I got something alright. The Bowring colony is planning a move on downtown. They’ve been scoping our patrols. They’re not playing around, boss.”

“That’s some big news, there, friend. Could be nothing but chatter.” Anger bubbles inside Columbus, rushing like white water.

“So the Bowrings wipe us all out, and you’ll roll over and let it happen?” Columbus braces on all fours, tail bristled.

“Don’t question my authority, kid. I’m not risking everything on hearsay. You’ve got no brains, Columbus. You’ll always be a grunt.” Mittens crouches to jump down.

“I thought you might say that.” Columbus intercepts his momentum with a strong swipe of his paw. Mittens reacts instinctively, taking a notch out of Columbus’s ear as he tumbles backwards, whisked into the roiling water below.

