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Aunt Eater Loves a Mystery



Doug Cushman

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
by Doug Cushman



HarperCollinsPublishers

*For Rebecca and Jan,
the Best*



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Aunt Eater Rides the Train

Aunt Eater the anteater
loved mysteries.

She took her mystery books
everywhere she went.



One day Aunt Eater decided to
visit her sister, Eliza.

She packed two dresses,
two mysteries,
a sweater, and five bags
of popcorn kernels.

"Eliza loves popcorn,"
said Aunt Eater.





Aunt Eater walked
to the train station.
People hurried this way and that.
“They all look like people
in my mystery stories,”
Aunt Eater thought happily.

A porter said, “Excuse me.
May I take your bag?”
“Yes,” said Aunt Eater.
“I am in car five,
seat twenty-three.”





Aunt Eater bought some candy
for the train ride.

Then she found her seat
and began to read a mystery.

The train rolled on and on.
Aunt Eater felt chilly.
She opened her bag
to get her sweater.
But the bag was filled
with hammers and screwdrivers
and all sorts of tools.





“This is not my bag!” she cried.

“My bag has been stolen.

Who would steal a suitcase
full of clothes and popcorn?

I must tell the conductor.”

Aunt Eater found the conductor
and told him her story.

“We must find your bag,”
he said. “Come with me.”



They talked to a banker,



a magician,



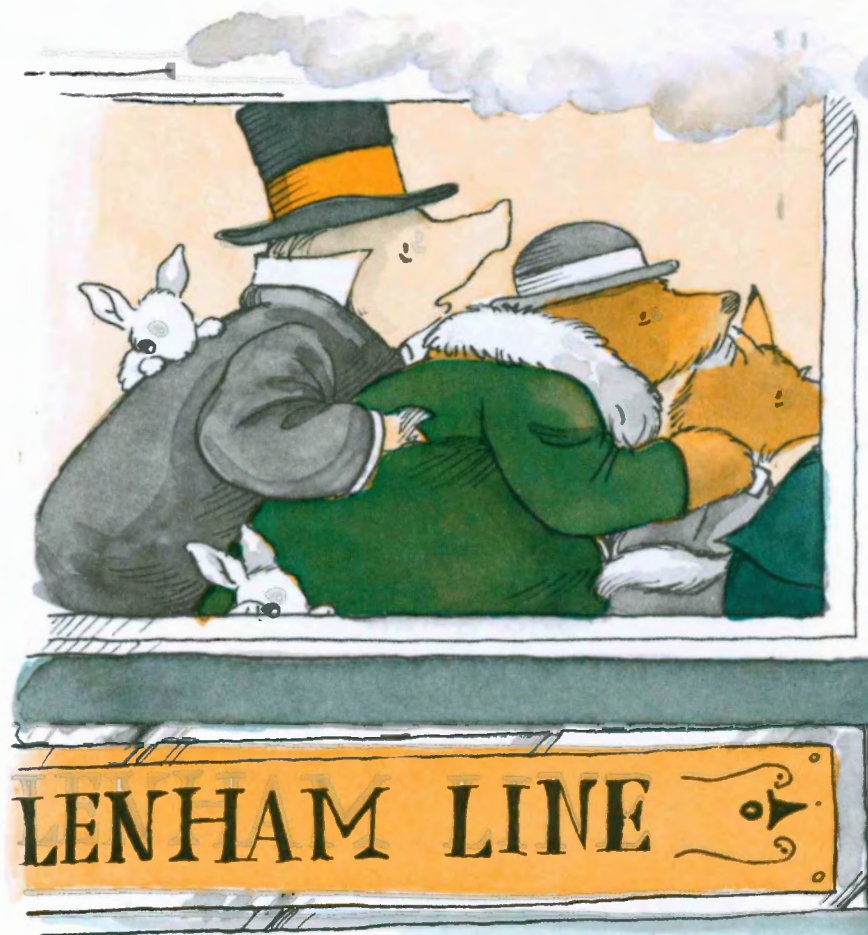
a doctor,



and a butler.



But no one had seen
the missing bag.



Suddenly they heard a loud *pop!*
Pop! Pop! Pop, pop, pop!



“It is coming from the engine!”
 the conductor yelled.
 Everyone ran to the front
 of the train.



A black bag sat
beside the roaring boiler.
Popcorn was flying everywhere.
“That is my bag!” Aunt Eater cried.

“It looks just like mine,”

said the engineer.

“The porter must have switched
your bags by mistake,”

said the conductor.



“No harm done,” said Aunt Eater.

“Let’s enjoy the popcorn
while it is still hot.”

And that is what they did.



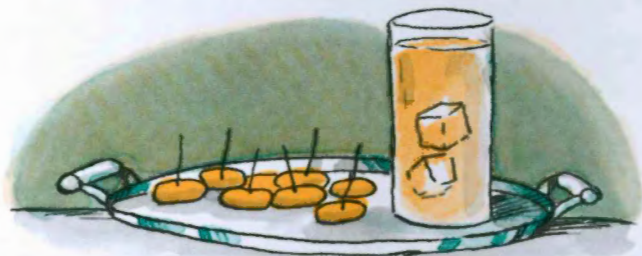
Aunt Eater Sees a Shadow

Eliza was happy
to see Aunt Eater.

“I want you to meet
all my friends,” she said.

“Tonight we will have a party.”

That night
Eliza's house was filled
with her friends.
Alfred the butler
served little hot dogs on toothpicks.
He filled tall glasses
with lemon punch.
Aunt Eater told everyone
about her train ride.
"Exciting things never happen
in this town," Eliza said.





Suddenly,
Aunt Eater saw a dark shadow.
“Look!” she cried.
Everyone gasped.

Eliza’s cat jumped
and knocked over the lamp.
The room went dark.
Aunt Eater found the light switch
and clicked on the light.



The black shadow was gone!

“Who could it have been?”

Eliza asked.

“It might be a jewel thief
looking for diamonds,”

said Aunt Eater.

“We must search the house.”



Everyone ran to find the thief.

They looked behind chairs
and under beds.

No one found a thing.



Alfred served more punch.

“Yipe!” cried Eliza.

The shadow was on the wall again.

The cat fell into the punch bowl.

Alfred dropped his serving tray.

The shadow disappeared.

“Quick!” cried Aunt Eater.

“He may be outside!”

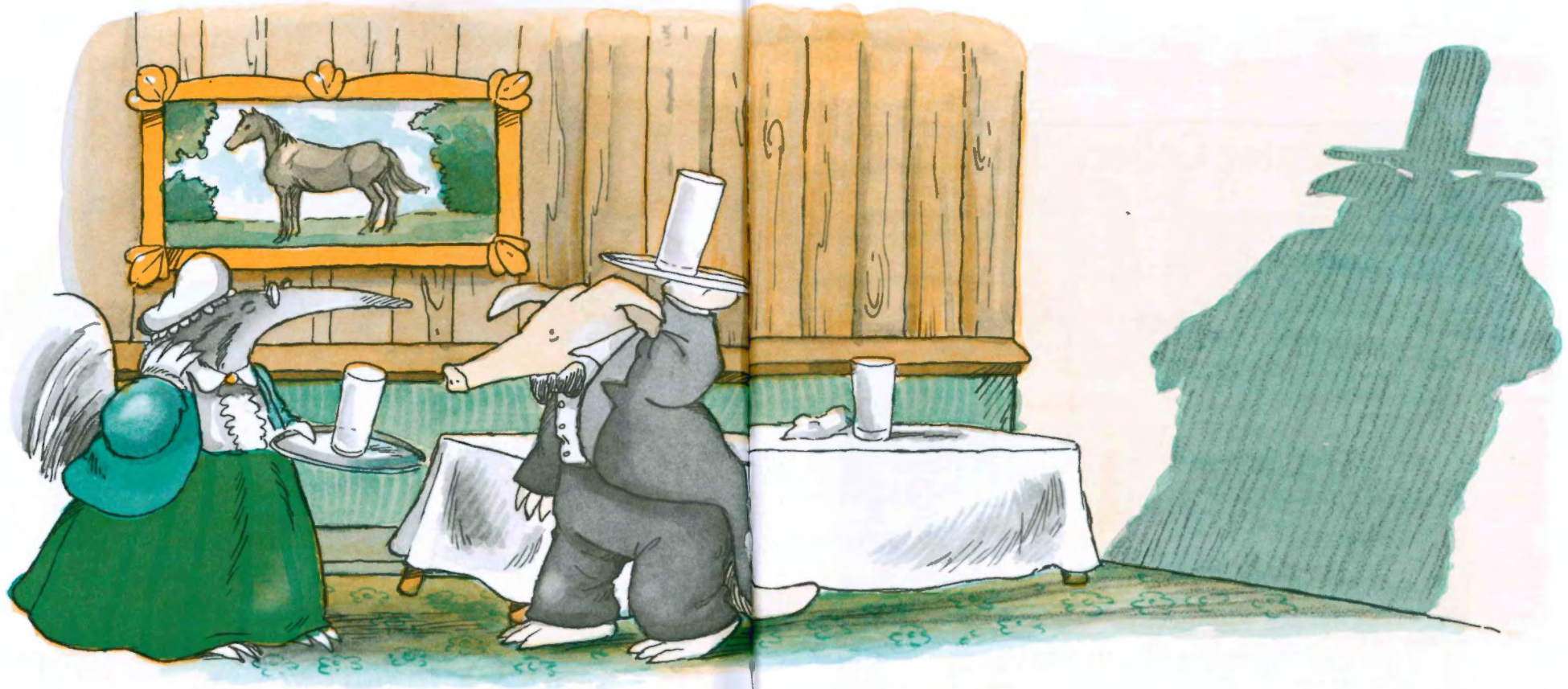
Everyone rushed outside.

They looked under trees
and bushes.

They looked behind the garage
and in trash cans.

But they found no one.





When everyone had gone home,
Alfred began to clean up.
“Who would think
that a mystery could happen here?”
he asked Aunt Eater.

Aunt Eater looked at Alfred.
Then she began to laugh.
“Look at your shadow,” she said.
“This mystery has been solved.”

Aunt Eater Collects Her Mail

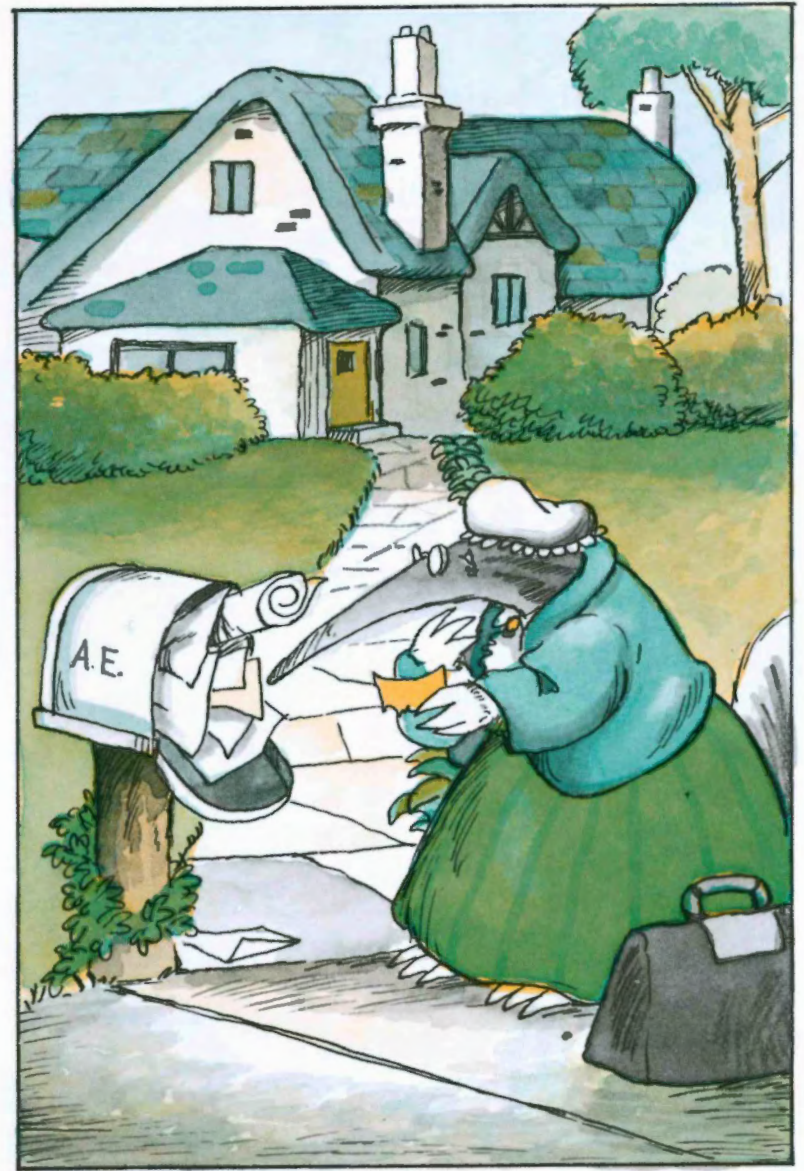
Aunt Eater returned home.

She had lots of mail
in her mailbox.

There was a short note
on yellow paper.

“What is this?” she asked.

The note said:



“Part of the note is missing,”
said Aunt Eater.

“What does it mean?

Perhaps it is for Mr. Chumly
next door.

Sometimes he has strange people
in his house.”



Aunt Eater began to wash
her windows.

She also watched
Mr. Chumly's house.



At three o'clock
a large, black car
drove up to Mr. Chumly's house.

A tall figure in a dark coat
got out of the car.
He had a scarf
around his neck.
He carried a large bag.



“Who would wear a scarf
in this hot weather?”

Aunt Eater asked.

“Maybe he is a thief.

He does not want people
to see who he is.”

Aunt Eater grabbed the note
and a measuring cup.

“Well, *I* must find out!”

She ran across the yard
and knocked on Mr. Chumly’s door.



Mr. Chumly opened the door.

“What a pleasant surprise,”

he said. “Please come in.”

“I...ah...need a cup of flour,”

Aunt Eater stammered.



“Of course,” said Mr. Chumly.

“But first meet my brother Lester.

He just brought back my laundry.

He runs a Laundromat.”

“Nice to meet you,” Lester whispered.

“You must excuse my voice.

I have a bad sore throat.

I need to wear this scarf

to keep my neck warm.”



“Oh, dear,” Aunt Eater thought.

She was very embarrassed.

Lester was not a thief.

“I am pleased to meet you,”

she said.



“Did you leave this note
for your brother
in my mailbox by mistake?”

“No,” said Lester.

“This is a real mystery,”
said Aunt Eater.

Just then, the doorbell rang.

It was the mailman.

“Hello, Aunt Eater,” he said.

“I thought I saw you come in here.

Did you get my note?”



“*You* wrote the note?”

Aunt Eater asked.

“Yes,” said the mailman.

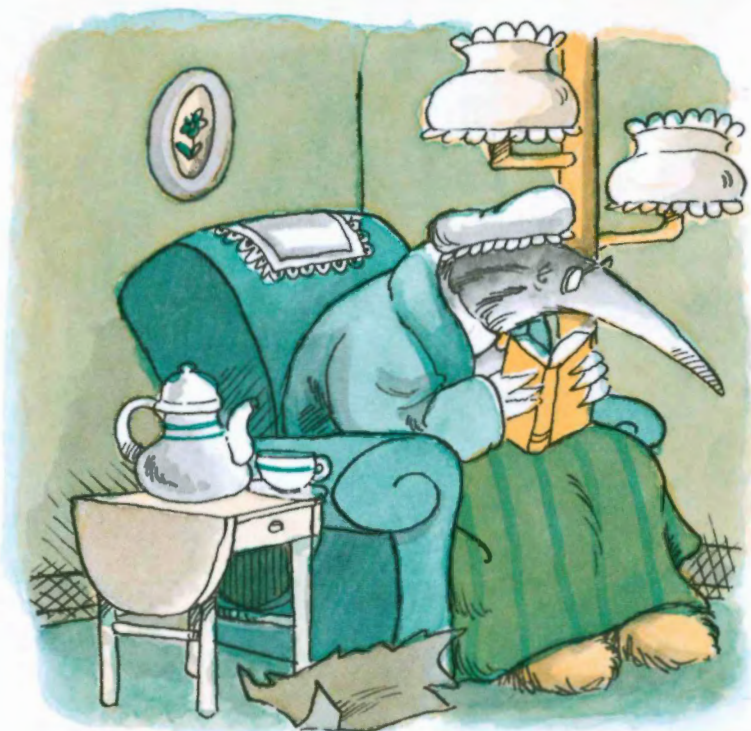
“I have a package for you.”

“Thank you,” said Aunt Eater.

“Solving mysteries makes me tired.

I think I will go home.”

Aunt Eater went home
and opened her package.
Then she sat down in her cozy chair
and began to read
her latest mystery book.



Aunt Eater Solves a Mystery



Mr. Chumly knocked
on Aunt Eater's door.
“I am going to visit Lester,”
he said.
“Will you take care of Sam
while I am gone?”

“Of course,” Aunt Eater said.

“I love cats.”

“Thank you, Aunt Eater,”

said Mr. Chumly.

“Good-bye, Sam.”



“You look hungry, Sam,”

said Aunt Eater.

“Here is some fish for you.”

Sam sniffed the plate
and turned up his nose.



"Maybe you would like some milk,"
said Aunt Eater.

Sam lapped up the milk.



Suddenly the sky turned dark.

It began to rain.

Thunder roared

and lightning flashed.

All the lights went out.

"Oh, dear," Aunt Eater muttered.

"Where did I put the candles?"

She found some candles in a drawer
and lit them.

Sam was gone!

"Sam!" she called.

"Where are you, Sam?"

She looked under the sink
and behind the stove.

No Sam.

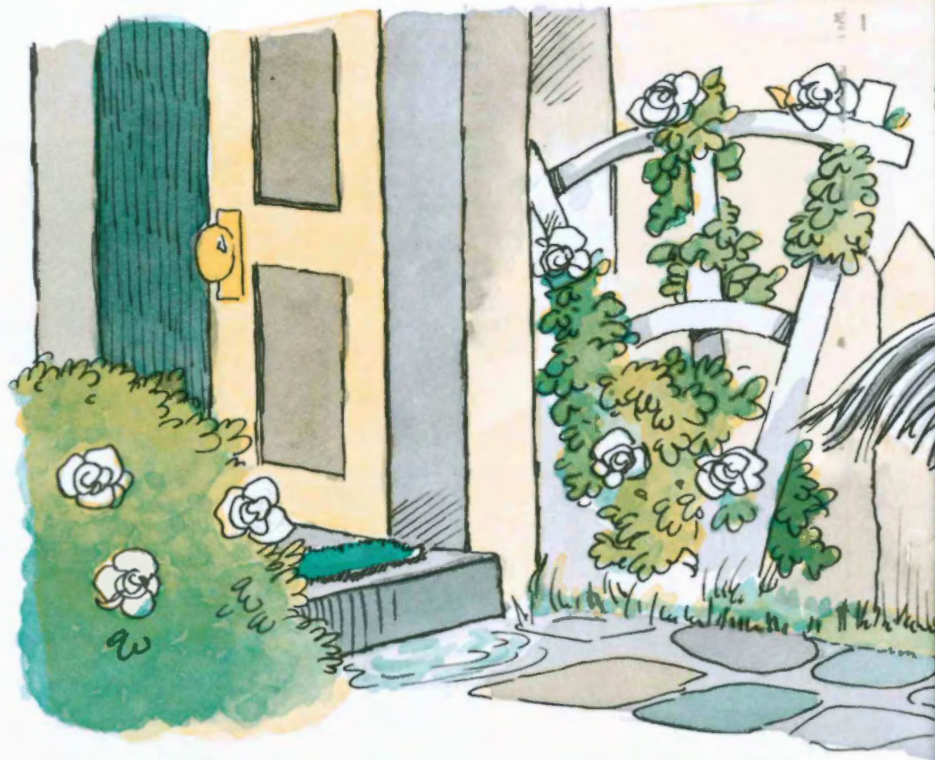


She looked upstairs and down.

Still no Sam.

"What will I tell Mr. Chumly?"

Aunt Eater asked.



Aunt Eater thought a minute.

“I should look for clues

like a real detective,”

she said.

She saw the open door.

“I bet Sam went outside.”



The rain had stopped.

Aunt Eater saw a cat's paw prints

in the soft ground.

“A clue!” said Aunt Eater.

She followed the paw prints
down the street
and around the corner.

There the paw prints stopped.

“What would a detective do now?”
asked Aunt Eater.



She thought some more.

“Well,” she said.

“Sam is an alley cat.

Maybe he went into that alley.”

The alley was dark.

Aunt Eater's neck tingled.

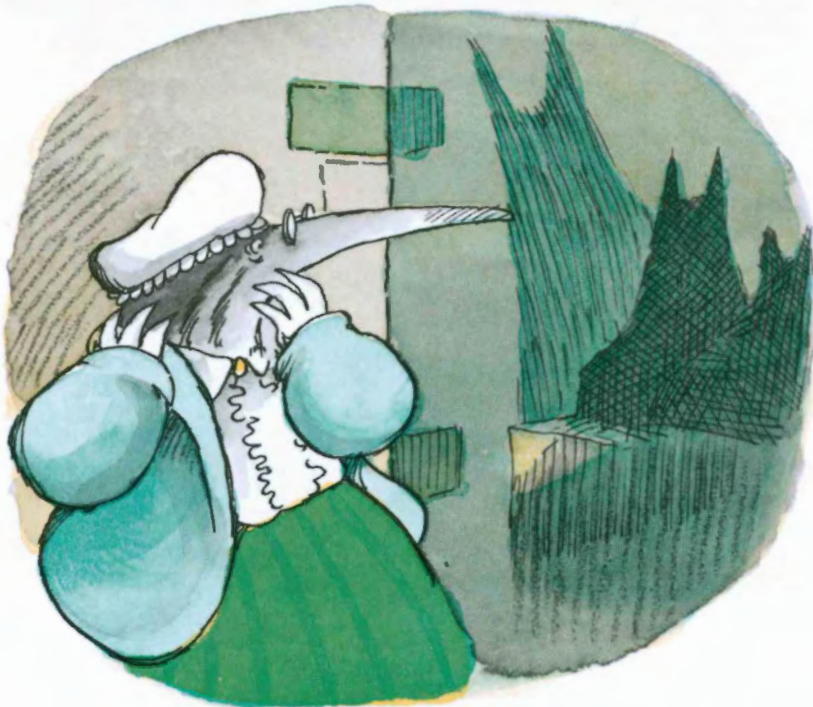
"Maybe I should come back tomorrow," she said.

Then she heard a meow.

"Sam!" she cried.

She rushed into the alley.

"Oh, my!" she gasped.



There were hundreds of cats.

They all looked like Sam!

"Sam!" she called. "Sam!"

Which one of you is Sam?"

All the cats meowed.

"Oh, dear," she said crossly.

"How will I ever find Sam?"

Then Aunt Eater had an idea.
She ran down the street.
She came back with a package.
“Look, cats,” she called.
“I have some nice fish for you.”



Hundreds of cats
ran to Aunt Eater.
They all wanted the fish.



All except one cat.
Sam.

Aunt Eater carried Sam
back to her house.

She poured a bowl of milk for him.
She made a cup of cocoa
for herself.

“Let me read you
my new mystery,”
Aunt Eater said.





Aunt Eater sat down
and opened her book.
Sam drank his milk
and listened
late into the night.

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