

Chapter One

Tommy the Cat

TOMMY WAS A MOST UNUSUAL CAT. Not that he was a rare breed or a very strange colour. He had a rich, dark coat, four white paws and a puzzled expression on his white face, as if he was forever asking a question. Perhaps he was – cats are very curious creatures. Tommy was unusual because he was a theatre cat. He lived in a big theatre in the centre of the city, and his job was to keep the place free of rats and mice.



The theatre was a big rambling place with rows and rows of red seats stretching right up to the roof. On either side were boxes with red chairs that Tommy found warm and cosy when cold winds blew through the draughty old place. One chair in particular was soft and roomy, and this was Tommy's favourite. He wasn't know that he shared it with the President of the country! Not at the same time, of course.

The lady who cleaned the boxes tried in vain to keep Tommy from his favourite seat, but no matter how firmly she locked the door he still got in. She didn't know how he managed it – but she had never seen Tommy do his death-defying leap from the adjoining box! Tommy could not understand why the cleaning lady wanted to keep him

out of his favourite box, but then there were many things about his big home that Tommy did not understand.

For a few hours at night it was ablaze with lights and full of noisy people, then suddenly it was quiet and dark except for the creak of some old board settling back into place after all those feet. Then sometimes, on cold afternoons, the theatre would be full of chattering children who would scream and shout at the people on the stage.

On those days Tommy would retire to the comfort of the theatre wardrobe. The ladies there let him stretch out beside the radiator until the silence outside told him that the 'screamers' had departed. Then he would pick his way between the seats, through a carpet of ice-cream tubs and sweet-papers, wondering about this



strange tribe that invaded his home from time to time.

They always came on cold, wet days. Perhaps they were seeking warmth and comfort, like the mice who occasionally trespassed on his territory. But they certainly were not as quiet as the mice. The only good thing he could say about them was that they often left ice-cream tubs that were not completely empty, and Tommy was fond of ice cream. The old lady who worked in the little cloakroom at the back of the theatre often shared an ice cream with him. But, strangely enough, on the days the children came she seemed too fussed and busy to bother with him.

And, of course, the cleaning lady, the guardian of the boxes, she was the most annoyed of all on those days. So angry

and taken up with other things that she would forget to lock his favourite box and he could sneak in and settle down in that big red chair.

And it was while he was snoozing peacefully on the President's chair one day that Tommy first encountered the cat who had a man inside!