

Sir Ellery, Lord Pellegree,
(Long live his glory and fame),
Was terribly fond of celery,
For which his mum was to blame.

She sliced it and diced it and chopped it for soups
And salads, both sure to please.
She served it grilled and sautéed, or chilled
And filled with his favorite cheese.

Be assured, it pertains to the story
And one more thing, I'm sure you'll allow,
I simply must add that as a young lad,
He'd kept a contented cow.

I'd be remiss not to mention
That in school, 'though very bright,
He'd lacked some amount of attention,
For he dreamed of becoming a knight -

A knight both brave and cunning,
With a horse both bold and fast,
And, whilst his mates were still 'funning,'
He became a knight at last.

Well, Sir Ellery was a fine athlete.
He excelled at every sport.
King's Champion was he, three times out of three,
The most formidable knight in the court.

Still, there wasn't so much for a knight to do,
Unless an emergency rose,
Suffice it to say, on that foreboding day,
He lay in gentle repose.

But a messenger rode to the king,
With a quest both awesome and grave,
He'd need of a knight not afraid of a fight -
A knight both cunning and brave.

He'd been riding full gallop since daybreak.
Badly shaken, just barely in hand,
He moaned and he sighed 'til at last he cried,
"A Grumpuss is scourging the land!"

Now the king, a sagacious ruler,
(If a bit overfond of a feast),
Consulted his trusted advisors
To determine a course 'gainst the beast.

"I had thought," said the King, "that the Grumpuss
Was a mythical monster of old."
"I'm afraid, sire, it's not." "It will have to be fought!"
"Indeed, if the truth be told,

A Grumpuss is not like a dragon,
Rather more like a large, surly cat."
"With tremendous paws, and gigantic claws . . ."
"And jaws that can crush armor flat."

"They've wide yellow eyes that watch every move."
"They live mostly in rocky terrain."
"It seems that meat is all they eat."
"They sneeze when confronted with grain."

"They inhabit the coast for the most part."
"They're most carefully avoided by men."
"According to fable, the beasts are unstable."
"Worse, when defending a den!"

"Tawny gold is their normal coloring."
"But they turn all to stripes when they're crazed,
And then even a knight might resort to flight,
For they'll fight, sire, and you'd be amazed!"

"Just imagine a mad, ten-foot tabby!"
Said the king, "This does call for our best!"
And he judged that our sleeping hero
Was the most qualified for the quest.

Sir Ellery, dreaming of glory,
Of how proudly he'd answer the call,
How he'd ride one day into battle and fray,
And become a hero and all,

Was just a wee bit bewildered,
When his manservant gave him a shake
And said, in a tone that chilled the bone,
"Your lordship must surely awake."

Sir Ellery, Lord Pellegree, awoke.
With a start, he leaped to his feet
Then the valet, 'though frail, dressed the knight in his mail
And said, in a manner discreet,

"His Majesty bids you come at once!"
"t once? 'Tis the call, at last!
Make haste! Make haste! There's no time to waste!"
"I can only go so fast . . ."

"Tis brigands, no doubt. Or dragons about!"
But his servant could say no more
And so, Sir Ellery munched a celery
And readied himself for war!

In the great hall, a dreadful pall
Had settled over the crowd
And the king paced the floor and watched the door,
'Til Sir Ellery entered and bowed.

"Ellery, good chap!" said the king, with a slap
On the back of his chosen knight.
And 'though the blow stung, the knight bit his tongue
For his lordship was always polite.

And all this time the messenger sat
And trembled as with the ague,
And he moaned and he sighed, 'til at last he cried,
"Please, tell him at once, sire, do!"

Now the king cleared his throat and said (and I quote),
"I remind you, you've given your vow."
And the ladies all sighed as the brave knight replied,
"And I give it again, sire, here and now!"

With a nod of his head and a grin, the king said,
"Heed then, good knight, my command,
And get thee hence to the Armorer,
For a Grumpuss is scourging the land!"

"Whatever the thing, it'll soon feel my sting!
By your leave, I'll be on my way,"
Said the knight. Said the king, "'Tis a bothersome thing,
But I'll give you a week and a day,

By the end of which time, you'll report back to me
With the beast, or its head, in hand.
This creature must be taught a lesson.
I'll not have it scourging my land!"

And so, Sir Ellery took his leave.
Straight to the Armory, he went,
For he needed all sorts of weaponry
And the crown of his helmet was bent.

"Aha, Sir Ellery, 'tis you I perceive?"
Asked the Armorer, blind in one eye
From a previous strife, when he'd near lost his life,
"So, 'tis you off to do or to die?"

I'm told you're to combat a Grumpuss.
Tell me, what sort of beast might that be?"
Said the knight, "I don't know." Said the Armorer, "Oh?
Well, let's look in our history."

He then pulled from a nook a gigantic book,
An authority proven and tried,
And carefully consulted the index,
Until the word, 'Grumpuss,' he spied.

Then the Armorer read aloud from the text
Of how the first Grumpuss turned bad.
"Though it's been disputed, 'twas celery reputed
To have driven the Grumpuss mad.

An important note," muttered the Armorer.
"Ummm," came the mumbled reply,
But the knight hadn't heard a single word
For the sketch had captured his eye.

His pulse rate increased. A ferocious beast
Glared back at him from the text.
He imagined it dead, with his foot on its head.
What wouldn't he dream of next?

And all the while the Armorer read,
The knight, in a world of his own,
Dreamed how, put to the test, he'd succeed in his quest
And report back before the throne.

Oh, half of the ladies in court would swoon
Just from seeing him march in the door.
Thousands would clamor to hear of his deeds
And more would be coming . . . and more.

The Armorer read that the Grumpuss was swift
And terrible to behold,
And his heart went out to Sir Ellery,
The knight so courageous and bold.

The veteran then read that the Grumpuss was found
For the most part in rocky terrain,
But a shallow stream was as like, it would seem,
When there'd been a lack of rain.

Frequently seen in the water,
It was known that the Grumpuss took fish,
And from all that had yet been discovered,
It seemed trout was its favorite dish.

But the Armorer was surprised to learn,
Long ago, one was reared from a kitten
And was thought to be tame, until, to its shame,
This horrid account had been written.

'Though reared as a pet, this 'tame' Grumpuss
(All the more reason to dread it),
Suddenly had gone stark raving mad
And had turned on the keeper who fed it.

In silence, the Armorer banged out the helm,
Then chose a sword, broad and light,
Then selected a mace and a spear, just in case,
And said, as he armored the knight,

"It's quite dangerous enough on horseback,
With a Grumpuss lurking about,
But to lure it, of course, you must get off your horse
And toss it a few fresh trout -

Which reminds me, you must have gauntlets!
When inveigling one of the wild band,
Often it's found that when they bound,
They bite not the bait, but the hand.

To battle so savage a creature,
One might think that full armor'd be needed,
But mail's just the thing, when with speed one must spring."
To all this, the knight readily ceded,

Alas, Sir Ellery's thoughts drifted.
His sense of reality blurred,
And the Armorer's prattle gave way to the battle
And the solid advice went unheard.

"As I was saying," the Armorer went on,
"We must scrap every unneeded ounce,
But a shield, strong and light, you'll need for the fight,
And a breastplate you'll need, should it pounce!"

The Armorer then draped and arrayed the knight,
Who stood like a mannequin bored,
'Til at last, the knight struck a pose with one hand
On the hilt of the broad, light sword,

And said, "Was there ever in all the world
A knight more awfully arrayed?"
"You'll stand out in a crowd!" said the Armorer, and bowed,
Proud of the part he had played.

So, Sir Ellery, well-armed and armored,
Clattered off to the Provisioneer
Through great oaken doors and rows of stores,
To where the man worked in the rear.

"Good day to you, sir. I'm expected, I see,"
Said the knight. Said the man, "Of course.
I've been packing supplies for your journey. See?
A fresh sack of oats - for the horse!

I've allowed enough food for a week and a day,
By the end of which time you'll be back.
These four water gourds have been filled to their brims.
There are eight loaves of bread in this sack."

And the Provisioneer gave him all of these things
And a small side of beef, besides.
And in case it grew cold in the evenings,
Threw in a bed-roll of hides.

And Sir Ellery quietly lent a hand
At packing these things on his saddle,
A menial task for so brilliant a knight,
So he dreamed, once again, of the battle.

And while, once again, in his daydreams,
He vanquished his foe, several ways,
The man explained that the trout he had packed
Would only keep a few days.

Now the Provisioneer was an old, old man,
And he'd read a great deal in the stores.
In fact, he'd become quite learned
By simply locking the doors

And refusing to answer until he was through
With reading the book that he had.
He'd studied quite all that there was to be known
So he knew why the Grumpuss went mad.

For he'd not overlooked meteorology.
He knew how a weather map looks
And, of course, he'd studied geography
And history, in his books,

So he knew that the Grumpuss suffered from grain
And pollen blown through the air
And so, by applying his knowledge,
He'd determined to pinpoint its lair,

And, by passing his information along,
Share a part of the glory, at least,
Since, for active duty he was too old
And he couldn't, himself, fight the beast.

"Sir Ellery," asked the Provisioneer,
"I've been wondering how you propose
To track the cat - to find its lair?"
And he nervously rubbed his nose;

For he wasn't quite certain that he dared
To speak, as it were, out of hand,
For 'though court discipline was generally lax
And he wanted to offer his plan,

He wasn't quite certain that he dared
Tell a knight, so to speak, what to do,
And so, was relieved when Sir Ellery said,
"I hadn't much thought. Had you?"

Said the Provisioneer, "I have, indeed,
And I do wish you'd look at my chart."
And he blushed as he unrolled his hand-drawn map
And could scarcely control his heart.

"What says milord? Do you think it's well done?"
Asked the Provisioneer, enraptured.
"Oh, yes! I dare say!" said the knight. Cried the man,
"It is here that the beast shall be captured!"

But while the old man bent to the task
Of explaining just what must be done
And wherefore and how, the knight dreamed again
That the battle'd already been won.

Aye, and minstrels were singing of his great deeds
And poets, throughout the land,
Recounted his fabulous adventures.
Oh, his daydreams were ever so grand!

And whilst Sir Ellery fantasized,
The learned man strove to explain
How the easterly winds drove the Grumpuss mad
And how it was saved by the rain.

"Prevailing winds are from the northwest
And the malady's brought on by grain.
So, it's on the west coast the Grumpuss dwells
For the wind, on the central plain,

Blows the grain to the east, which allows the beast
To live, for a time, unaffected.
But when, as sometimes does occur,
The wind from the east is detected . . .

Well, everyone knows that the Grumpuss dwells,
For the most part, in rocky terrain,
And on the west coast, beyond the hills,
Where it's often wont to rain . . .

You see, the mountains do provide
A natural barrier to clouds
And dense fog, rolling in from the sea,
Often completely shrouds

Its most plausible natural habitat . . .
Well, milord, it would seem to appear
That if ever a Grumpuss was meant to be,
It was definitely meant to be here!

You do see, milord, how I've reasoned it out.
There's no grain, and the mountain barrier,
And prevailing west winds, being what they are
And the east wind being the carrier . . ."

But the knight never heard a single word.
Lost in a world of his own
He'd already published his memoirs
And, again, stood before the throne.

And again, several ladies in court had swooned
Just from seeing him walk through the door.
And again, an awesome multitude had gathered
And more were coming . . . and more!

Said the Provisioneer, "Remark the wind.
If a westerly sea breeze blows,
The beast should be found both quiet and tame.
It's the east wind that bothers its nose.

For the easterly winds carry grain from the plain
And the Grumpuss, afflicted and wild,
Will lash out in fury at all who pass,
Be it knight, fair lady or child!"

"Ummm," sighed the knight, still lost in his dreams,
But the Provisioneer couldn't know.
Thinking the sigh meant the knight understood,
He happily watched the knight go

Off to his folly, his fortune, his fame,
To battle, by royal decree,
The Grumpuss, whose lair lay to the north,
Through the hills, in the rocks, by the sea.

When Sir Ellery was all of three hours hence,
'Though well aware of the time,
He entered the dangerous highlands pass,
On foot began the climb.

He led his horse up the rocky vale.
Determined he was to press on,
But he'd only traveled an hour more
When the last glow of daylight was gone.

Then dark clouds swept in o'er the mountainside,
Blocking even the moon's pale light,
And although Sir Ellery was cunning and brave,
Each new sound in the eerie night,

Echoing left, right and center,
Became multiplied in his ears,
And soon rocks and trees only dimly seen
Took the forms of his darkest fears.

Still, he pressed on, up the woeful gorge,
Over rocks and assorted debris,
But the path he climbed was so perilous
That twice he'd slipped to one knee,

And twice had felt that his time had come
And he cursed the lack of a light.
So when suddenly, horribly close at hand,
A raspy voice croaked, "Sir Knight?"

He almost perished on the spot.
His horse, in terror, reared,
And Sir Ellery, trembling, drew his sword,
For a Grumpuss was much to be feared.

And it seemed that the voice rasped in his ear,
"Stand where you are, Sir Knight.
One step to the left and you'll fall to your death.
Please, do take a pace to the right."

"Who are you? Wherefore come you here?"
Demanded Sir Ellery, boldly.
"Rashpur is my name, milord.
I dwell here," the voice answered, coldly.

"What sort of creature," demanded the knight,
"Would dwell in this desolate place?
Make yourself known! Show yourself to me!"
"But I stand right before your face!"

Answered the voice, in a mocking tone.
"Would you have me stand on your chest?
Or gnarl my fingers through your beard?
Or tweak your nose, which is best?"

"Do you see me so clearly, then?
How comes that to be?
Be you friend or foe?" demanded the knight.
"Step closer, that I may see!"

"Closer? Methinks milord is blind,"
Rasped the voice, so incredibly near.
"Mayhap the affliction stems from the mind?
No matter – it's plain that you hear.

Is milord confused, befuddled, bemused?
These are maladies well-known to me!
Come along. Be my guest. A few moment's rest . . .
My best hospitality!

You may tell me what fool's adventure
Sends you picking your way through the dark.
These gorges and cliffs are unhappy toil
In the day, with the trail to mark."

Sir Ellery heard something move in the dark.
He tightened his grip on his sword,
But he followed the sound to more level ground,
And a sight not lightly ignored!

Where but moments before it had been pitch dark,
Suddenly, there appeared
A cave and a blazing campfire.
This was magic and much to be feared!

And the light from the fire revealed the creature –
A dwarf! The knight's heart skipped a beat,
For dwarfs dwelled underground and often were found
To be creatures of guile and deceit.

They were said to possess great quantities of jewels
And huge amounts of gold,
But unlike the elves, kept it all to themselves,
Or so the story was told.

They were known to live long, were surprisingly strong,
And were careless to hide their treasures.
Neither force nor stealth threatened their wealth,
Safeguarded by magical measures.

Now a highwayman may be defeated
In battle, hand to hand,
And a Grumpuss, 'though wild and ferocious,
Still allowed for a man to stand

And fight for his life, but a wizard
Was not a man to provoke,
For the man who aroused the wizard's ire
Might be gone in a puff of smoke

And so, it seemed it behooved the knight
To seek to make amends,
To be wary of unintended slight,
To try, at least, to be friends.

Said the knight, with a smile and a chuckle,
"Why look, what have we here?
No wonder you see so well in the dark!"
But the dwarf only said, "Come near!"

"Oh, of course," said the knight, "now I see you're a friend.
What an interesting place you've got!
And those lovely bones, over there, by the stones,
Are they yours?" Cried the dwarf, "No, they're not!

Think you that I a foul sorcerer be?
A desecrater of bones?
A two-penny conjurer?" the little man shrieked,
"A craven caster of stones?"

That collection belongs to another -
A wonderful creature quite rare,
My friend, you might say, 'though not here, today.
This great cave was once its lair.

But do tell me about your adventure.
What quest, so awesome and grave,
Demands you so recklessly imperil your life?
'Tis folly to be too brave."

"I think not," shuddered Sir Ellery.
"For I ride, by royal decree,
To vanquish the terrible Grumpuss that dwells
Through these hills, in the rocks, by the sea."

"Vanquish? Indeed," said the wee little man.
"Now, that would be a shame.
Must it be killed? After all,
The ones that I've known have been tame."

"Those bones in the stones belong to the beast?"
Asked the horrified knight, aghast.
"Indeed," said the dwarf, "it happened by
Just this week – not three days past!"

Oh, it's true that this is a desolate place,
But I prefer it this way.
Here, I'm able to indulge myself
And do just what I may.

Still, in all, 'though I'm a hermit,
And self-proclaimed I might add,
I find some company soothing,
For fear of going mad.

Then, lo, but certain, the Grumpuss appears,
As if in reply to my wish,
And I feed it some rabbit or pheasant or squirrel
Or grouse or best of all, fish.

Now, what I'm wondering mainly is
Why must you strike it dead,
When it's ever so easy to bid it come
As a friend, to court, instead?

Just imagine the court in an uproar
At seeing you both at the gate,
The terrible Grumpuss on your lead,
Aha! You smile. 'Twas fate

Who brought you wandering, thus, to me,
Through the perilous pitch-black night,
For, champion of justice that you be,
I'm sure you'll do what's right!"

The wizened dwarf watched intently,
As Sir Ellery pondered his sayings,
For at imagining, Sir Ellery was tops
And the 'yea'-ings did out-weigh the 'nay'-ings.

"Do you really suppose," the knight mused aloud,
That the creature would come along, meekly?"
"The beast's been tamed!" the gnarled dwarf claimed,
"Indeed, I see it weekly!"

"When, then, do you expect it next?"
Asked the knight. Said the dwarf, "Oh, dear!
It's already been by once this week.
If you're rushed, you mustn't wait here.

But I'm sure that it lives not too far away,
'Tis but one day's ride to the sea.
Indeed, I can walk there, myself, in two,
Or, if I stop frequently, three.

But soft! Here comes the moon at last.
'Though you're welcome to spend the night,
If you must, in fact, push on,
You must be gone with the light."

"If it's not too rude, I am wide awake,
And eager to be on my way.
I'm so glad we met and much in your debt,"
Said the knight, "but I dare not stay."

"So be it!" said the dwarf and both he and his fire
Disappeared in a puff of smoke,
Which impressed and distressed poor Sir Ellery,
Who found it an unnerving joke.

For now it appeared that the dwarf, indeed,
Was a creature of awesome powers.
As the uneasy knight led his steed away,
His thoughts strayed to enchanted towers,

Where he might yet, in fact, languish and die,
Should the sorcerer be provoked.
Or might he not perish in this waste,
Or even worse, be 'smoked?'

He'd really no thought of where one went.
When 'smoked,' one just disappeared!
But he'd no desire to discover where,
Or how! 'Twas much to be feared.

Worse, still, for it could easily be,
He might not survive it at all,
For until one was 'smoked,' how could one know
If the dangers were great or small?

Sir Ellery traveled the rest of the night,
Pondering some horrible doom,
Invoked by a curse of the dwarf, or worse -
A spell of perpetual gloom!

When, suddenly, it occurred to him
That the light he perceived was dawn,
And his spirits rose and his burden of woes,
In the bright light of day, was soon gone.

Our hero stopped to water his horse
Then made sure that the steed was fed.
Then, he stacked his supplies in the shade of a tree,
And helped himself to some bread.

And then, while his charger munched on its oats,
Sir Ellery sat down to rest
With his back to the tree, from whence he could see
Far and wide, north, south and west.

In moments, of course, he was fast asleep,
Dreaming of his victory parade!
What a figure he'd make! Oh, the hearts he would break!
He'd no doubt that his fortune was made!

Now the Grumpuss had seen a few humans before
And knew that they were an odd lot,
But had never before seen one with a shell,
Or, if it had, it forgot.

But the sweet scent that had brought it hence,
Of the trout, in the shade of the tree,
Overcame its natural caution
So it crept still closer to see.

Sir Ellery never so much as blinked,
'Though his horse bolted off in fright,
For while our hero slept ever on,
The Grumpuss inspected the knight.

The poor beast was vexed, confused and perplexed
By the shell-man, a creature quite queer,
But the still fresh trout smelled delicious
And the bundle lay so near.

It crept still a little bit closer
And tentatively stretched out a paw
And, since the knight dozed contentedly on,
Unsheathed a long, sharp claw.

Ever so gently, it hooked the twine
With which the bundle was tied,
And ever so stealthily pulled it away
From the shell-man who snored and sighed.

Then, snapping the bundle up in its jaws,
The Grumpuss made good its retreat,
And when Sir Ellery finally awoke,
His surprise was profound and complete.

"Am I to believe that my horse wandered off
With a bundle of trout? I say nay!"
Bellowed the knight, as he pondered his plight.
"'Twas the dwarf," he thought, with dismay.

"Aye! Dwarf, you were never a wizard at all,
Just a scoundrel, a rogue and a thief!
A brigand! A loathsome highwayman!
A despicable outlaw chief!

Ratsputz! That's it! I'll remember that name,
And when the king's battle is won.
I'll come back this way, and one fine day,
We'll see the king's justice is done!"

Now it's true the knight was a bit confused.
The dwarf seemed a strange sort of thief.
A villain, of course, to have taken the horse,
But he'd left the bread, water and beef.

Sir Ellery, true to his purpose,
Marched on a half hour or more,
When a disturbing clue came into view
While still not in sight of the shore.

"These are clearly the bones of some fish,
'Though it's still quite a way to the sea,"
Mused the knight as he knelt to examine his find,
"I wonder how comes this to be?"

'Twas uncommonly still and he felt a strange chill,
When he spied the torn bundle nearby,
With the label and seal of the Provisioneer.
Then he felt his mouth go dry,

For there, before his incredulous gaze,
Was the track of a giant cat,
From the length of its stride, large enough to ride.
A Grumpuss, no doubt about that!

With only his helmet, breastplate and sword,
With only his gauntlets and mail,
And with just the provisions he'd slung on his back,
He set out to follow the trail.

All thought of the dwarf fled from his mind.
His attention turned to the beast
And he felt all his nerves becoming aligned
As his sense of the danger increased.

Cautiously, the bold knight moved on.
He followed the trail through the sand.
When the den came to view, our brave knight knew,
That his terrible foe was at hand.

He discarded the ripening side of beef,
The water gourds and the bread.
Then he unsheathed the broad, light sword
With which he still hoped to behead

The huge and ferocious creature
Lurking somewhere inside its dark den,
So terribly near. Oh, his duty was clear!
At least, it was, up to then.

Standing outside, his heart swelled with pride,
And his thoughts drifted off to the text,
Of the tale he would tell: 'How the Grumpuss Fell!'
What wouldn't he dream of next?

But this daydream was shattered by a growl,
From somewhere inside the dark den,
That sent icy horror through every inch
Of this bravest of all the king's men.

Even so, he mustered his courage
And with a fierce look in his eye,
Showing great self-control, strode up to the hole,
Prepared to do, or to die.

"Monster, come forth and meet your fate!
To surrender or death, you are doomed,
For here stands a knight not afraid of a fight!"
Well, so great his voice echoed and boomed

That even Sir Ellery came to believe
That the beast, trapped inside, was afraid,
Scared all to bits, frightened out of its wits
By his challenge. Still, he stayed

Outside the dark den and he bellowed again,
"Come forth and surrender, or die!"
When the echo ceased, the craven beast
Still dared offer no reply.

So, the knight hacked a limb from a nearby tree.
With a flint, he set it aflame,
But, while Sir Ellery was thus engaged,
The Grumpuss entered the game.

Its wide, yellow eyes watched Sir Ellery turn.
They stood, face to face, at last,
And the knight, in a fright, dropped his torch at the sight
And thus the moment passed.

Then the heat of the torch began to scorch
Sir Ellery's armor-clad toe,
So he howled, dropped his sword, grabbed his foot, spun around,
And hopped quickly away from his foe!

Well, the startled Grumpuss sniffed at the flame,
Which singed its whiskers and nose,
Which made it sneeze, which blew out the torch,
And compounded Sir Ellery's woes,

For now, the curious Grumpuss advanced
To examine the helpless knight,
Who, 'though he was armored from head to foot,
Had no weapons left for a fight!

Still as a statue, Sir Ellery stood,
But slowly he started to sway.
Scared half to death, the poor knight held his breath,
'Til he fainted dead away!

It was midnight when Sir Ellery awoke.
At first, he thought he was dead.
Then, some trick of the mind made him think he was blind,
Perhaps something the dwarf had said.

As his eyes adjusted to the dark,
He saw he was still near the lair
And all around was a roaring sound
And the cat smell was in the air.

Now, this roaring sound waxed and waned
In a rhythm so steady and true,
It seemed more like a snore than a mighty roar
And taking this for a clue,

Sir Ellery guessed that the beast was asleep,
So he stealthily moved toward the sound.
'Til the pale moonlight, revealed to the knight,
Stretched out on a low-lying mound,

A giant, golden pussycat.
Oh, a Grumpuss, in fact and in deed,
But, although a bit disproportionate
('Twas nearly the size of a steed),

It was, still and all, a pussycat,
Somewhat large to take home as a pet,
'Though he'd heard of great pet elephants,
But this was a wild beast, and yet,

He had been at the creature's mercy
And here he was, sound as could be.
'Though totally disarmed, he hadn't been harmed,
So the knight went down to one knee

And removing one gauntlet, stroked the fur
Of the Grumpuss - and it stirred!
And rubbed its whiskers against his leg,
And rolled on its back and purred!

For the Grumpuss, replete with the fish and the meat
(Having eaten the small side of beef),
Was lying awake with a bellyache,
And found that it felt some relief

When the shell-man rubbed its tummy,
For it really had eaten too much
And, unused to the feast, the poor wretched beast
Was soothed by the knight's gentle touch.

Sir Ellery was astonished.
To think, he'd misjudged the beast.
It was never as dangerous as he'd been told -
Not this one, he'd venture, at least.

And he mused, "Had I not lost my weapons,
By now, one of us might be dead!
It's lucky I fainted, for now we're acquainted,
We've wound up friends, instead!

It's obvious to me, that you're friendly,
For all your enormous size.
And you've lovely fur, and just hear how you purr!
And just look at those beautiful eyes!"

And in the meanwhile, the Grumpuss
Grew quite fond of the shell-man's technique
And took great delight, when the clever knight
Brushed its whiskers back over its cheek.

The dwarf's suggestion intrigued the knight.
Oh, wouldn't the court be amazed,
If he tamed the Grumpuss, for all to see?
And oh! Wouldn't the ladies be dazed?

The effect would be simply fantastic!
And, thus, the die was cast
And the knight grew enthusiastic,
Like the boy he had been in his past,

Well, he always did like animals.
Surely, you recollect how
As a young lad, Sir Ellery had
Once kept a contented cow.

"See here," said the knight, "I've a splendid idea.
Would you like to come visit the court?
If I put you 'on show,' why, then they'd all know
That you're not a beastly sort!

Oh, I mean no offense. Of course, you're a beast,
But a friendly one, don't you see?
And once the king knows, why, anything goes.
A generous ruler is he.

He'll probably grant you a pardon.
Oh, I do hope you understand.
Look, I'm willing to strive to keep you alive,
But you can't go on scourging the land.

I can teach you all that you need to know
Of court manners and discipline,
But you've only six days to learn civilized ways,
So at first light of dawn, we'll begin.

And you'll have to learn quickly to do what you're told
And no matter what, never shirk.
But for now, I suggest we could both use some rest.
Tomorrow, we'll start in to work!"

The knight awoke first. In his head, he rehearsed
What to do, but had reason to pause,
When promptly at dawn, the cat gave a yawn
And stretched out its dagger-like claws!

The creature seemed larger by light of day
And its teeth seemed incredibly long
And although it still acted friendly enough
He could see that the beast was quite strong!

So, the whole first day he spent in play
And learning the moods of the cat
And being a teacher and teaching the creature
To respond to a word or a pat.

And the Grumpuss was quick to pick up the trick
When the knight taught the creature to sit
And to hold out its paw, and grab at a straw
And when to begin; when to quit.

The next day, the knight was particularly pleased
When he took a bit of rope
And teased the cat over rock and dale
For although he hadn't a hope

Of ever outrunning the agile cat,
It proved a jolly good sport!
It would cover the ground with a single great bound
But its leap always fell just short!

And then it would pout and pounce again
And tumble and romp and cavort.
The likes of it had never been seen
By anyone at the king's court.

The Grumpuss was ever much more than clever,
And soon knew just how to behave,
To please its new friend, until, in the end,
Said the knight, so cunning and brave,

"You're no sort of a threat. You're a wonderful pet,
A chum, by your nature so mild,
It's perfectly clear, that there's nothing to fear
For knight, fair lady or child!"

So the time passed, as time, it must,
'Til at last all the bread was gone.
And at the end of the week and a day,
At the very crack of dawn,

Sir Ellery gathered up his sword,
His gauntlets, helmet and mail
And, tying the rope to the Grumpuss,
Eagerly took to the trail.

"We'll be climbing back up, through the highland pass
And then, down the gorge to the plain,
Then on past the pair of villages where
The men live who harvest the grain.

It's likely to take us most of the day,
Said the knight, but oh, what sport!
Just you wait and see! What a wonder we'll be,
On parade for the whole royal court!"

Now the truth is, the Grumpuss had no idea
Why the knight had become so excited,
But it sounded like fun and the Grumpuss, for one,
Seemed pleased to have been invited!

The Grumpuss knew the mountain trail
So the knight let it lead the way
All the way up to the cave of the dwarf -
Not at home, so they didn't stay.

It was early in the afternoon,
When they set out across the plain
Where, spread as far as the eye could see,
Grew rich golden fields of grain.

The farmers and peasants working the fields
Were astonished to behold
The Grumpuss tamely strolling along
With our hero, courageous and bold.

Some grabbed up their children and fled to their homes,
But others were too stunned to run,
And frozen in shock, remained to gawk
As Sir Ellery waved to each one!

For Sir Ellery, the knight, took particular delight,
In the idea of being 'on show,'
And he took great pride, in walking beside
The Grumpuss, his erstwhile foe,

But as they passed near a lovely young thing,
(Whom the knight might have liked to impress),
A suspicious quirk made the cat jerk;
The first sign of the creature's distress.

Then the Grumpuss froze, rubbed its nose with its toes,
And then sneezed with a mighty roar!
The girl shrieked and ran. (When they're frightened, they can!)
"No! You're not to do that any more!"

Shouted the knight. "Look! You've scared her away!
I warn you, it's that sort of thing
You must never do! If you only knew!
Why, if this should get back to the king . . ."

Then the knight noticed the Grumpuss looked strange.
Its nose was all swollen and sore.
Its eyes were all red and it hung its head
And something he'd not seen before.

It seemed to be wearing another cat's coat.
It had gone all stripes, end to end,
And its tail snapped and twitched like a thing bewitched.
Said the knight, of the change in his friend,

"Oh, I say! You do look awful.
Is there anything I can do?
Perhaps if we stop and rest for a while.
I'd like some cool water. Would you?"

I don't see a well, but here's something else
That should fix you right up! Oh, you'll see!
We're lucky, indeed! This is just what you need.
It always does wonders for me."

The knight pulled some stalks near the side of the road.
"It even rhymes with Ellery,"
Said the knight, with a pat and he fed the huge cat
A hearty fistful of celery!

Now whether the problem was in the taste
Or the texture we may never know.
Could a celery string caught between its teeth
Have enraged the Grumpuss so?

Whatever the cause, the Grumpuss lashed out
And knocked the knight to the ground.
"See, here! What's gotten into you?
This is no time to fool around,"

Said the puzzled knight as he rose to his feet,
But the cat promptly popped him again.
"Behave yourself! Now, I'm warning you.
I'm going to count to ten,

And if by that time . . ." began the knight,
But the beast gave a terrible roar
And Sir Ellery threw off his helmet and yelled,
"You are not to do that anymore!"

But the Grumpuss hissed and roared again
And fell upon the knight,
Who fended off claws, and swatted its paws,
And ducked when it tried to bite.

"Why, you wicked beast! If I wasn't caught
In this leash, you wouldn't dare
Raise your paws to me! Show your claws to me?
I'm warning you! Take care!"

The afflicted Grumpuss pulled the knight
Back toward the rocky trail,
But the knight pulled back, 'til another attack
Ripped a hole in his suit of mail!

"Now, that's the last straw! If you're going to claw,
I'll be forced to teach you your place!
Well, what's it to be? Don't you dare hiss at me!
Your behavior's become a disgrace!"

For a moment the Grumpuss seemed dazed and confused,
And the knight felt the leash go slack,
So he quickly tried to get untied,
But the cat launched another attack.

At last, in an equal fury,
Sir Ellery drew his broad sword
And railed against the Grumpuss
That spit, and clawed and roared.

The farmers and villagers, safe in their homes,
Huddled together like cattle,
And shed frightened tears and covered their ears
To block out the sound of the battle.

Finally, a terrible silence reigned.
Then, armed with fork, rake and hoe,
The bravest men went forth again,
To see who had won, friend or foe.

They searched to and fro. They searched high and low.
They searched for the rest of the day,
But when night fell, they tolled the bell
And went back to their homes in dismay.

'Twas a gloomy night and this despite
The light from the full moon on high
And the dwarf went to bed with a sense of dread
And foreboding he couldn't deny.

If the dwarf was asleep when the first howl came,
By the second, he was wide awake.
By the time he heard the mournful third,
He'd begun to tremble and shake,

For out of the night came a clanking sound –
A horrible, ghostly clatter.
He tried to be still, but a cold, eerie chill
Set all his teeth a-chatter.

Who's there? the dwarf cried, but no answer came,
Save a rattle, a clank and a moan,
As closer and clearer and louder and nearer,
Came the horror unseen and unknown.

Trembling in terror, the dwarf lit a torch
And went out into the night,
And with torch held high, cast his eye
On an horrible, pitiful sight.

Like a nightmare come true, it reeled into view,
The source of the frightening sound,
The wounded Grumpuss, all covered in gore,
Dragging the knight 'cross the ground.

"Get away! Leave him be! Let him loose! Set him free!
Get back!" cried the dwarf, and he ran
Straight at the great cat and he shouted, "Scat!
Get away. I'll do what I can,

But you'll have to get back and stay back too!
Oh, how did this come to be?
I sensed all along that something was wrong.
Move away if you want help from me!"

The huge cat backed away from where the knight lay,
So the dwarf moved closer to see,
And in the torch light, examined the knight.
What a brave little man was he!

Oh, the outlook was bleak. The knight's pulse was weak,
And the dwarf was filled with dismay.
Then a howl rent the air, filled with grief and despair
And the dwarf cried, "Stay back! Get away!"

The dwarf cut the leash, then removed the knight's sheath
Then the gauntlets and breastplate and mail.
As he practiced his art, he began to take heart,
For although unconscious and pale,

Sir Ellery showed no serious wounds,
Just bruises and scrapes and such.
For a while he'd be sore. 'Twould be some time before
He'd be able to do very much,

But the dwarf was relieved and sincerely believed
That if nothing inside was broken,
The knight might pull through. "No thanks to you!"
Said the dwarf, but as these words were spoken,

The cat howled once more, then collapsed in a heap.
It had done all it could, for its part,
Through sheer force of will and now, it lay still,
With the knight's sword lodged near its heart.

'Though the dwarf nearly swooned at the sight of the wound,
He dared hope that the cat might be saved.
He would just have to trust that the angle of thrust
Would be safe, if the cat behaved,

If he dared be so bold, while the cat was out cold,
As to carefully draw out the sword,
Dress the cat's wound and then, get back, once again,
To the care of the noble milord.

'Tis said he accomplished his task before dawn
And a good deal more, besides,
For he brought Sir Ellery inside the cave
And made up a fresh bed of hides.

And somehow, he brought the Grumpuss in
And set about curing its ills.
How is not ours to know, but we know he did so.
Some say dwarfs have magical skills.

When Sir Ellery came to, 'though all black and blue,
It was clear that, with care, he would mend.
The dwarf saw he was fed, and made up his bed.
In all ways, he behaved like a friend,

But the knight knew the dwarf cared for the cat
In some other part of the cave.
Oh, the outlook was grim. Its chances were slim.
Its wound was especially grave.

So when, at last, after three days had passed,
Sir Ellery sat up in his bed,
Not as weak as before, but still bruised and sore,
He was shocked when the grinning dwarf said,

"I believe that our friend will recover.
It's much better this morning, I'd say.
It managed to eat a bit of meat.
We should know by the end of the day!

We've begun to run low on supplies and so
Since you're better, I thought I just might
Step out for a while," said the dwarf, with a smile,
"I was thinking 'fresh fish' for tonight!

Oh, I shan't be gone long and now you're fit and strong,
You can stand to be left on your own,"
Said the dwarf with a wink, but the knight couldn't think;
Just the prospect of being alone,

With the wounded Grumpuss somewhere nearby.
The knight didn't know what to say.
He felt dizzy and weak, but before he could speak,
The dwarf had gone on his way.

Reliving all that had happened before,
Sir Ellery's blood ran cold.
He shuddered, and then, he shuddered again,
The knight, so courageous and bold.

Never mind that the Grumpuss had saved his life,
It had also attacked without reason.
He had thought it a pet, a friend, and yet,
It attacked - a plain act of treason.

He'd given the Grumpuss a chance to be true.
It had proven deceitful and wild,
A treacherous foe, prepared to bring woe
To knight, fair lady or child.

And not just this once. It had happened before.
They were known as a treacherous breed.
They were all maladjusted and not to be trusted.
They all came from the same bad seed.

The knight swallowed his fear, for his duty was clear.
Sir Ellery, noble and brave,
'Though filled with dread, rose from his bed
And set out to search through the cave.

For the knight had given his oath to the king.
Before the whole court he had sworn
To be worthy of trust, to always be just,
To protect the frail and forlorn.

Now the whole kingdom was counting on him.
No mistaking the king's command,
Return at the end of a week and a day
With the beast, or it's head, in hand.

He spied a dim light, off to his right,
That came from a level below,
And, one hand on the wall, so he wouldn't fall,
He groped his way down toward the glow.

Sir Ellery carried no weapons.
He wore no armor or mail.
He was battered and bruised and a bit confused
And weary and weak and pale,

But his duty seemed ever more dreadfully clear,
For the Grumpuss had scourged the land,
And had dared to pretend it had been his friend.
Now its end must come at his hand.

He came to a cell near the back of the cave,
Clearly the dwarf's own room,
Where a lonely candle, aglow on a desk,
Barely pierced the oppressive gloom.

Still, it gave the brave knight just enough light
To take in the cluttered array
Of parchments and papers and tablets and books
And the bed where the Grumpuss lay.

Then a flash, like a cry, drew Sir Ellery's eye,
For while magic may hide a dwarf's hoard,
It could not conceal the cold glint of steel
That revealed the knight's broad, light sword.

The Grumpuss lay still and stared at the knight
Who looked queer without his shell,
And frightened and small and about to fall
And not at all very well.

And its wide yellow eyes watched every move
As Sir Ellery took sword in hand,
Made his way to the bed, raised the sword up and said,
"You were warned not to scourge the land."

The cat pricked up its ears at the sound of his voice.
It seemed to relish each word.
It had no sense of danger. The knight was no stranger,
So it rolled on its back and purred.

They say heroes don't cry, but the tear in his eye
Gave the lie to that nonsense. You see,
The knight's vision blurred, when the wounded cat purred,
For a just, gentle knight was he,

And the great cat's trust, when only one thrust
From a horrible, unjust end,
Convinced the good lord to lay down his sword,
For the sake of his former friend.

"What made you do it? And why attack me?
We were friends. I was on your side!
You've offended the crown. Now, they'll hunt you down.
There'll be nowhere for you to hide."

Sir Ellery stroked the cat's fur coat,
And the Grumpuss stretched out on the floor,
Then reached out a paw and with one huge claw
Hooked the clasp on 'The Great Book of Lore.'

"Oh, no!" said the knight, and he swatted its paw.
"You had best leave that book alone.
Our host might object if his library gets wrecked.
Here! Why don't you gnaw on this bone?"

Then the clasp came apart, and the cat, to be smart,
Grabbed the binding with both of its paws
And pulled it away, in a spirit of play,
Close to its great open jaws!

"Whoa! That's quite enough!" Sir Ellery cried,
And he took the great book away.
"And before you spring, there is one thing
I'd like to look up, if I may."

'Twas the same as the book in the armory,
The authority proven and tried,
So the knight perused the index
Until the word 'Grumpuss,' he spied.

And then the brave knight held the book to the light
And began to read the report.
"Oh, I say!" he complained, "that was never explained!
Surely, somebody at the king's court

Should have had enough sense to mention a thing
As important as that! Oh, I say!
Here's a bit of advice that would have been nice
Somewhere along the way!"

But deep in his heart, Sir Ellery knew
He had only himself to blame.
He'd not paid attention and now, by extension,
The Grumpuss had come to shame.

It was he who had brought the poor Grumpuss to grief
By leading it down to the plain.
In its own habitat, it had been a good cat.
It was simply allergic to grain!

And he read in the text about the effects
Of celery, and turned pale,
For he held the king's trust and he'd sworn to be just,
To protect the forlorn and frail,

But he hadn't protected the Grumpuss at all,
And it was a king's subject, too -
An idea that might yet set things to right,
The least that the knight could do.

Sir Ellery began to work out a plan,
So determined, he was, to save
His great feline friend from an untimely end,
And the knight was as cunning as brave.

By the time the weary dwarf returned,
Sir Ellery's plans were made,
And when the dwarf heard the scheme, he concurred
And promptly offered his aid!

Together, they drafted a document,
With several extraordinary features.
Its language encompassed full rights for the Grumpuss
And the rest of the king's subject creatures!

To this end, it proposed a royal preserve,
Wherein wildlife might thrive, ever more.
From the top of the pass, to include the great mass
Of the foggy, wild, western shore.

Not a moment too soon, for the next day, at noon,
The king, with an army of men,
All well-armed and grave, surrounded the cave,
Certain it was the Grumpuss' den.

Imagine the looks on their faces,
When Sir Ellery strode out of the cave.
Imagine the glee of the king, to see
His good knight, so cunning and brave.

"Ellery?" cried the king, "We thought you were dead.
We were told there had been a great fight!"
"Just a minor misunderstanding, sire.
Everything's turned out all right."

"Have you slain the thing?" asked the king.
"Slain the king's Grumpuss? Nay, sire!"
Answered the knight, with enormous delight,
"Inside, it awaits your desire."

"You don't say!" said the king. "Oh, there is just one thing,"
Said the knight, "'tis no ordinary cave.
'Tis the home of a gnome." "A gnome, do you say?"
Said the knight, so cunning and brave,

"A sort of a dwarf, your majesty."
"Not the sort with rooms full of treasure?"
Asked the king. Said the knight, "Come, sire. See for yourself.
Within, he awaits your pleasure."

Well, the king was intrigued and his men were fatigued.
Said the king to his well-armored host,
"My good noble lords, do put up your swords.
Surely, you see he's no ghost!"

The king's men stayed outside. Well, they'd had a long ride
And the truth is, 'though many and brave,
And quite willing to fight, outside, in the light,
They were glad to stay out of the cave.

"I can't see a thing . . ." muttered the king.
"Sire, meet Rashpur," said the knight.
And the king blinked his eyes and bade the dwarf, "Rise!"
Said the dwarf, "I'll fetch us a light!"

The dwarf brought a torch to light their way.
"The Grumpuss awaits us below,"
Said the dwarf with a bow. "It won't be long, now."
Said the knight. Said the dwarf, "Shall we go?"

The good knight matched his stride to the dwarf at his side,
And he held the torch on high
To light the king's way, but the king shouted, "Stay!"
For the dwarf's books had captured his eye.

"Do I dare to believe what my eyes perceive?
Never have I seen such treasure!
I've silver and gold, new mint and old,
But this - this is wealth beyond measure!"

Here's a text from the library at Ephesus,
Alexandria on the Nile,
And Carthage, and Rome." "Aye, and closer to home,
Manuscripts from the Emerald Isle!

Hieroglyphics, sire. Long-lost alphabets,
In languages known and obscure.
These great tablets were wrought by men who fought
'Round the ancient walled city of Ur!

Here are books all the way from the court of Cathay.
Sanskrit scrolls from Hindu-land.
Small tablets from Crete, 'The Timaeus,' complete!"
"Written in Plato's own hand?"

"I've been meaning to read it," the dwarf replied.
"I never could find the time,"
Said the knight, "but I may. Oh, I plan to, one day,
But I do like books best if they rhyme."

"Your library is unrivaled in all the land.
I can scarcely believe my eyes.
If it's not just for looks and you've read all these books,
You must be incredibly wise!

"Wise is as wise does," grumbled the dwarf.
Said the knight, "Well, we're nearly there."
There'll be time to explore. Just a few paces more.
Here we are, sire. The Grumpuss' lair!"

'Tis said a cat may look at a king.
Well, this king looked back at the cat!
"Go ahead, sire. Pet him," Sir Ellery said.
Asked the king, "Is it safe to do that?"

"I tell you, sire, the Grumpuss is tame,
And he's taken a liking to you!"
Said the knight. Said the king, "What a wonderful thing!
I'd been told that the beasts were untrue."

"They're dangerous enough when they're out of sorts,
But they're mostly friendly and mild,"
Said the knight. Asked the king, "Are you sure that it's safe?"
"For king, knight, fair lady or child!"

Pet it, sire," said the knight, "The Grumpuss won't bite."
So the king stroked the great cat's head
And when the king heard how the Grumpuss purred,
He grinned. "Who'd have thought . . ." the king said.

Said the knight, "With the aid of this good dwarf, I've made
A rough draft of a proclamation,
To set aside land, mostly scrub and sand,
And provide for it's administration . . ."

"May I?" asked the king and he took the thing
And held it up to the light.
Then he read it with care, for he wished to be fair
To the cat and the dwarf and the knight.

But the king, a sagacious ruler
(You'll remember I said that before),
Discovered a flaw in the new-drafted law -
A flaw he could hardly ignore.

Said the king, "It's just too fuzzy-minded.
If all the wild creatures had 'rights,'
Might those 'rights' not extend to creatures penned?
Oh, imagine the long legal fights.

Would a farmer be forced to free his pigs,
To let his cows loose in the corn?
Was it your wish to include the 'king's fish'
Among the frail and forlorn?

Is it your opinion, that I hold dominion
Over everything under the sun?
It might be objected your concept neglected
All property rights - every one!"

The dwarf was contrite, but never the knight.
Said he, "Sire, I most deeply regret,
Whatever the flaw. I know little of law,
But the Grumpuss is nearly a pet!

You've seen for yourself that the beast is tame.
Indeed, sire, I really must say,
The cat's not to blame that it's come to shame.
It was me led the creature astray!"

Said the king, "As regards the Grumpuss,
This most recent transgression, it's true,
Stems from your intervention and lack of attention.
Full pardon is granted as due.

And I like the idea of a royal preserve,
But things can't go on as before,
So I'm placing this land under your command -
First Marquis of the Western Shore!

Mind you, as the marquis, 'twill be your job to see
That this wonderful Grumpuss remains
Within the preserve, on this side of the hills,
And never comes down to the plains.

As for other duties, a royal preserve
Is required at all times to be
Maintained in the natural order of things,
So its creatures may stay wild and free.

Oh, and as for my human subjects,
When the west winds blow sweet and mild,
Provide a good guide and let them inside,
To learn how things live in the wild."

The rest of the story is fairly well-known.
Soon a castle rose over the cave,
A magnificent home for the crusty old gnome
And the knight, so cunning and brave.

And with people and animals both well-protected,
It wasn't too long before
The first visitors came and spread the park's fame,
And soon more were coming . . . and more.

Well, the knight took a wife and he led a good life,
'Though he seldom was seen at court,
For the more the knight learned, why the more he turned
Into a more scholarly sort!

He began keeping notes on the wildlife.
He studied both range and diversity,
'Til, much to his fame, his new castle became
The seat of a great university.

Rashpur, the dwarf, kept the library.
It was he who took on the huge chore
Of compiling and filing Sir Ellery's notes
And revising 'The Great Book of Lore.'

And, of course, the Grumpuss recovered,
They say it returned to the wild,
'Though when last it was seen, it looked downright serene
With its head in the lap of a child.

THE END