

From *Cat and Mouse* by Maggie Pearson



A cat and a mouse set up house together. Yes they did!

They managed things very well to begin with. They saved up their pennies and bought a pot of dripping to keep them through the lean winter months. And, so they wouldn't be tempted to touch it before the hard times came, they took it down to the church and hid it in the vestry.

Oh, the smell of that dripping! The cat wished it was winter already. She began to dream of dripping, even when she was awake. At last she said to the mouse: "I'm off to church today. My sister's baby's being christened."

There was no christening. Cat went straight to the pot of dripping and creamed off the top. Oh, the taste of that dripping!

"How did the christening go?" asked the mouse, when the cat got home. "What's the baby's name?"

Cat thought fast: "Top-off!" she said. "Top-off!" said Mouse. "That's an odd name." It wasn't long before Cat was off to the church again – this time, for her other sister's wedding.

There was no wedding; only a pot of delicious dripping that was half-gone by the time cat came home, still cleaning her whiskers.

“Half-gone?” said the mouse. “Is that your sister’s married name? That’s a very odd name, to be sure.”

But she was a trusting soul. She even trusted Cat when she said she must be off to the church again.

This time, she said it was for her grandmother’s funeral. And when Mouse asked her what was her grandmother’s name? Why, Granny Cleangone, Cat told without so much as a blush.

Time went by and winter came and Cat kept saying times weren’t that hard; no need to dip into their store of dripping yet. Till the mouse went on her own to fetch it back. And found the jar licked clean.

Then she began putting two and two together: Top-off? Half-gone? Cleangone? “You!” she cried. “It was you!”

Cat drew herself up indignantly: “What do you mean? Some thief has stolen our dripping and –”

“It was you!” Mouse bounced up and down with rage. “Top-off! I thought that was an odd name.”

“I’m warning you! said Cat.

“Half-gone!” squeaked Mouse. “That was even odder.”

“Not another word!”

“As for all that stuff and nonsense about your grandmother’s funeral – what was her name?”

Cat pounced,
bit, chewed,
and swallowed.

“Cleangone,”
she said.