

The Life Story
Of

Max & Rita



Written and Illustrated by Phoenix Mary



Chapter 1: Home

Once upon a time, before God, there was home. It was me and Mama Mary, then Darchin came along—a tiny, yellow, and chatty chick, always saying, "cheep cheep... cheep cheep." She was driving me crazy. At first, I didn't like her at all. I kept trying to eat her, but she wouldn't fit in my mouth. Then, gradually, I started to like her.

One morning, when I woke up, I noticed that Darchin was gone. I searched everywhere, kept looking and looking, and my little paws started to feel all jittery. I said, "meow meow," tugging on Mama Mary's dress. Mama Mary was also looking for her. She was gone, just gone. I missed her so much, thinking about the bubbles on her beak when she napped in the sun. It made my heart feel all squishy and sad. Then suddenly, she showed up, clucking and bringing a rooster with her.

There was only one thing I liked about the rooster: every morning, he would go 'cock-a-doodle-doo!' and wake up Mama Mary. She'd get up, give us breakfast, and the day would begin. When little Fel Fel was born, it was the best! I had already learned how to take care of chicks and loved helping Darchin with all the little chores. Even before Fel Fel hatched, we took turns sitting on the egg—sometimes it was Darchin, sometimes it was me. I don't really know who ended up being Fel Fel's mommy, but when she finally cracked out of her shell, the very first thing she did was look right at me! We were really lucky that Fel Fel turned out to be a hen. When she was born, Darchin said we had to wait and see if she would grow testicles or not. But Fel Fel didn't grow any testicles; instead, she started laying eggs.

Around that time, Mama Mary brought Golpar home. Golpar came from the farm and said that so many roosters fought over her that Mr. Grumpypants sent her here. Golpar said they had cows, horses, and donkeys on the farm. She told lots of stories about the sheep but liked it here more, saying home is like paradise. She had never been petted before, and the first time Mama Mary petted her, she was so happy her crest fluffed up. Darchin had gotten a bit grumpy and didn't really like Golpar. She said Golpar was from the farm and acted like a "newbie" who'd never seen much before, always eating too much. Honestly, she was right. One time, Golpar even stuck her head in my bowl! I told her, "Shoo, shoo!" After that, I didn't see her around much...

If you're wondering, "Who's Namak's daughter?" I couldn't figure it out either! But I did teach her to call me Mama Rita.



Chapter 2: The First Lick

Mama Mary gave Max so many treats to keep him away from the chickens and their eggs, but the rooster was still upset. I think he was jealous of Max's tail because the hens kept chattering about it. It seemed like they no longer liked the rooster's colorful, fancy tail. When I saw Mama Mary let Max put his foot inside the house, I couldn't help but complain. I didn't understand why she kicked the chickens out but let that silly long-tailed thing into the kitchen.

From that day on, Max lounged in the garden. I, now waking up early, would hop behind the door to keep an eye out so Max wouldn't come inside. The crows were gossiping and cawing, spreading the news all over the field...

One day, while I was sunbathing in the yard, Max jumped over the fence into the garden.

"Go away, silly long-tailed!" I said.

"Hello, Miss Rita," Max greeted me.

"Go away, we don't have any treats for you."

"I didn't come for treats. I just wanted to enjoy the sunshine with you."

"I'm not sunbathing with you."

Max went to a corner and lay down in the sun. Slowly, the hens and their chicks appeared. The chicks climbed all over Max, and he gently petted them with his tail. I got up from my spot and moved a little closer to Max, sitting on a chair.

Suddenly, Hop Hop arrived, and his barking drove everyone nuts.

"Huh? What do you want? You're giving us all headaches!" I said.

"Where's that tailless fox? Someone saw him around here!" Hop Hop said.

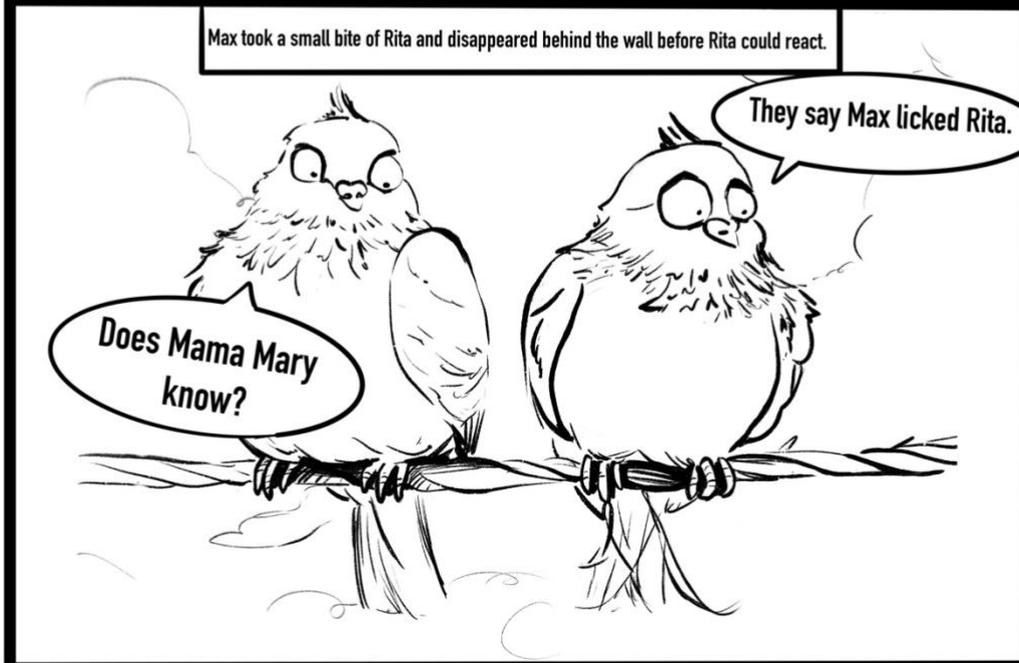
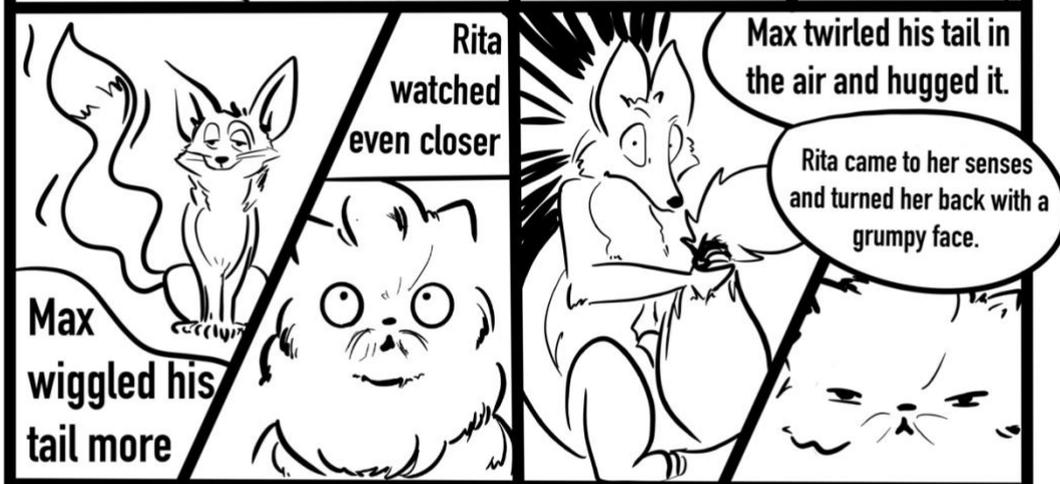
"His name isn't 'tailless,' Mama Mary named him Max."

"If I catch him, he'll be tailless."

Suddenly, Hop Hop spotted Max. Max tried to move away, but Hop Hop chased him. I quickly jumped behind Hop Hop. I managed to grab a big chunk of his tail.

Hop Hop shouted, "Hooooop!" I shoed him away, and Mama Mary looked out the window, saw Hop Hop, and said, "What are you doing here? Go home!" She threw something at him from the window, too. Embarrassed and grumpy, Hop Hop slunk back to the farm.

I started licking myself; I smelled like a dog. Max licked me too. I shoed him away, although I liked it. No one had licked me before.



Chapter 3: The First Date

Max was licking Rita's tummy when suddenly Rita gave him a little tap on the head and jumped up, waking from her dream.

She meowed and followed Mama Mary into the kitchen to get some food. That day, there was no sign of Max. Rita kept peeking around with every sound, but Max was nowhere to be found. At night, Rita sprawled out on the couch, her tail swishing from side to side. Mama Mary was patting her back to help her fall asleep. Suddenly, Rita saw Max peeking through the window. She jumped up, scrambled off the couch, and raced up the stairs. Mama Mary thought, "*Rita must be seeing things again,*" and went back to her phone.

Rita saw Max wandering in the garden and called out, "Hey, long-tailed!" Max looked up with a grin. "Honey."

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" Rita asked. "I came to see my sweetheart," Max replied.

Rita: "It's bedtime for me, and I don't go outside at night."

Max: "All the best things happen at night. How can you not go outside?"

Rita: "I need to go to sleep early so I can wake up early for breakfast. I'm already sleepy."

Max: "That's too bad because I had a great surprise for you."

Rita: "What's the surprise?"

Max: "It's not something you can just tell. You have to see it!"

Rita: "Is it a chick?"

Max: "No."

Rita: "A bunny?"

Max: "No."

Rita: "A box?"

Max: "What's box?"

Rita: "If you've never seen a box, how can you surprise me at all?"

Rita playfully winked and licked herself. Max said, "Alright, as you wish. Maybe tomorrow, Namak and Fel Fel will tell you all about it." Then he leaped into the bushes and disappeared.

Curious, Rita imagined Namak, Fel Fel, and Darchin discussing Max and his surprise. She jumped out of the window and followed him. Max led her to a dark spot near a big tree and rock and jumped into a hole covered with dirt and grass. Feeling scared and far from home, Rita jumped into the hole and landed in Max's arms.

"How is it?" Max asked. Rita looked around and said, "What a lovely box... It smells so good... and it's so soft..." She flopped onto the den's floor, rolling around: "Meow meow... meow"

In the early morning, the rooster crowed in the distance. Rita's eyes flew open. "Oh no, Mama Mary must be waking up!" She dashed back toward the house.



I told you we should've given it a try

You did say that, but who had the guts? I was sure Mama Mary would catch us.

Now that big-mouthed fox is laughing at us. He showed up, licked Rita, and then jumped right into the house...

Forget Mama Mary; what about Rita? Hop Hop's pups are less of a threat! No way—even if she asked for it, I wouldn't lick her.

Now, show me yours.

These aren't nails; they're my super claws!

Show me your claws.

Your claws look like Hop Hop's.

Boo!

Careful, little one, you might break your nails.

Like a lion in the wood, Rita's paw is sharp and could.

No, they're truly super sharp!

Like a lion in the wood, Rita's paw is sharp and could.

BOOM!

Rita? Not good! Not good!

Chapter 4: There is Always a Ginger Cat

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. Mama Mary opened it, and Mr. Yummy entered. He gave Mama Mary a kiss, and Rita quickly jumped toward him, hoping he'd give her some lovey-dovey attention. He petted her for a bit, but then he noticed Max and forgot all about her.

Mr. Yummy came over to pet Max, but Max went and made a mess of it by biting him back. Mr. Yummy stepped back, talking with Mama Mary in human words. Rita hopped over to Max and said, "You shouldn't have been so silly... Do you want something yummy or not, you troublemaker?"

Max looked confused. "Huh?" he responded.

Just then, Rita leaped between Mama Mary and Mr. Yummy, rolling on the floor, showing off her belly, and stretching her paws out adorably. Mama Mary couldn't resist showering her with affection, and Mr. Yummy handed Rita some tasty snacks. But when he reached out to rub her belly, Rita jumped up and ran off.

Feeling proud of herself, Rita strutted back to Max and said, "See? That's how you do it!" Max hesitated but then cautiously approached Mr. Yummy. Just as he was about to charm him, Max snatched the treat bag right out of the man's hand and took off, with Rita chasing him into the garden. In the garden, Max dumped the treats in front of the hens and chicks, who all clucked excitedly as they gathered around.

Rita began grooming herself. "I smelled like a human," she muttered.

Max gave Rita a big lick on the face and said, "I gotta go now." He then leaped into the bushes and disappeared, while Rita found a cozy spot and fell asleep.

Achin, sitting on a tree branch, commented, "Living the good life with that long-tailed, huh?"

Rita, not understanding what Achin was saying, just licked herself and went back to sleep.

Achin continued, "A real man goes out hunting and brings back food for his lady."

Wachin chimed in, "That big-mouthed fox is just a lazy thief!"

Rita frowned and protested, "No, he isn't! Max works really hard!"

Wachin asked skeptically, "Has Max ever brought you any yummy food?" Achin added, "All he does is hang around your house and eat your food... and you call that a man?"

Rita defended Max, saying, "Max is very nice! He even helped Golpar clean her nest yesterday."

Achin and Wachin burst into laughter. "What a kind fox! Ha ha..." Then they jumped from the tree and disappeared.

Who is a real man?

Chapter 5: Who Is a Real Man?

That night, Max showed up and started licking Rita again.

Rita: "Go away, stop licking me!"

Max: "What's the matter now?"

Rita: "Nothing, just don't lick me."

Max: "Who's my pretty kitty?"

Rita: "I'm not your pretty kitty!"

Max: "I knew something was up... come on, tell me what's wrong."

Rita: "Why don't you hunt like cats? A real man should work... like Mr. Yummy who brings us treats."

Max burst out laughing. "Cats? Hunting? They've never caught a fly in their lives. They just rummage through trash cans all night looking for scraps."

Rita: "That's not funny at all." Max, still chuckling, swished his tail in front of her face, making Rita forget everything.

The next day, Mama Mary was in the garden, moving her hands in the air, just like Rita, who was doing yoga beside her. As the sky began to darken, Max leaped over the fence into the garden, holding something in his mouth. Rita curiously approached him and saw that Max, with his mouth all bloody, stood proudly with his paws on his hips and said, "Here you go, Mademoiselle Rita, a real hunt."

Rita got closer, sniffed the prey, and suddenly jumped back, screaming. The hens rushed into the garden, and when they saw Max's catch, they trembled in fear, clucking quietly to each other as they slowly backed away.

With tears in her eyes, Rita cried out, "Why did you eat Bun Bun?"

Max looked puzzled. "Huh?"

Rita, meowing and crying, ran back into the house.

Max stood there, stunned, watching her leave. The rooster, standing by the coop, said, "You know what's harder than hunting? Keeping a lady happy."

Max retorted, "What do you know? You've never hunted anything in your life."

The rooster replied, "But I've had plenty of wives... even Mama Mary can't handle them all."

Max, mocking him, said, "Yeah, right... especially since they all love you so much."

The rooster puffed out his chest, strutting around. "You see, your hen must always know who's the boss."

Max sighed, "But I love Rita."

The rooster shook his head. "Ah, you youngsters... don't count on cats... they're all unfaithful."

Max gazed at Rita, who was sad and tearful, nestled in Mama Mary's lap by the window.



Chapter 6: Max Needs Wings

Max, pacing nervously, said, “I don’t know why she’s mad at me... She’s the one who told me to go hunting.”

Liboo, shaking his head, said, “You’re in big trouble. Rita used to call that bunny ‘Sisi.’”

Diboo added, “You better not show your face around here again...”

Max turned to Darchin and pleaded, “You’ve got to help me... You’re always the one who smooths things over when the hens fight.”

Darchin sighed. “Liboo and Diboo are right; you shouldn’t have eaten Miss Bunny.”

Max, frustrated, said, “How was I supposed to know they were friends? I saw a fat, plump bunny and thought Rita would be so proud of me.”

Darchin warned, “You’d better hope Mama Mary doesn’t find out, or you’ll have to leave the meadow for good.”

Max, now truly worried, implored, “Darchin, I beg you, on your feathers and your beak, please do something!”

Darchin shot Max a stern look, warning him not to say things like that in front of the rooster. Then she lowered her voice and said, “I heard from Achin and Wachin that there’s a patch of catnip growing in the middle of the meadow. The cats go there every day to jump around on the grass. They have the time of their lives and come back all happy and giddy. Take Rita there, and she’ll have so much fun she’ll forget all about Miss Bunny and fall in love with you again.”

Max, hopeful, ran into the bushes, grabbed a bunch of grass, and scattered it from the house all the way to the catnip meadow. He then hid behind the grass, waiting to surprise Rita when she was in a good mood.

In the morning, Rita woke up, ate her breakfast, and Mama Mary was overjoyed. She cuddled her, played some music, danced around, and gave Rita lots of kisses.

The scent of catnip filled the air, and Rita, feeling dizzy with delight, wandered outside, following the smell. She reached the meadow, rolling around on the grass, from one side to the other.

Max watched from afar, thinking the time was right to reveal himself and win back her heart. But just as he was about to move, he saw a huge eagle swoop down, grab Rita in its talons, and fly off.

Max, terrified, chased after the eagle, but it wasn’t long before the eagle disappeared into the distance.



High in the sky,
amidst the craggy cliffs of a tall mountain, an eagle landed.
Just as it was about to enjoy its meal,
Rita suddenly leaped out of its talons and hid in the crevice of the rock.

What was that?!?



The eagle tried to flap its wings,
but the space was too tight for any
movement. Its delicious lunch was now
tucked away in a corner, out of reach.

Chapter 7: The Eagle

Rita, too terrified to move, clung to the corner of the crevice, thinking, **What is this? Where am I?** Hours passed, and eventually, Rita fell asleep.

She awoke to the sound of the eagle's wings flapping. Startled and disoriented, she peeked out of the crevice and saw the eagle sitting nearby.

Rita, trying to be brave, said, "Boo! Boo!" before quickly retreating back into her hiding spot. The eagle was baffled.

Rita slowly emerged from the crevice again and said, "Boo! Boo! Get away... Did you come from the doctor? Boo! Boo! I've had all my vaccines, you know." When the eagle tried to approach, Rita quickly darted back into the crevice.

The eagle was confused. It had never spoken to its prey before. In fact, it hadn't spoken to anyone in a long time, not since its mother had taught it to fly:

"My son, you are the master of the sky. Just as the sky envelops the earth, know that you are the master of the world. Spread your wings and let the sky place you on your throne."

Since then, the eagle had flown off, never to see its mother again, nor to speak with anyone. All its life, every creature had fled from it, just as its mother had said, ruling over the sky and earth. But how had this strange, chatty creature escaped its talons? What was it talking about? How dare it come close to the eagle? Could it really scare me with its 'boo'?

The eagle felt a smirk in its mind, though its face remained stern.

Rita, now hungry, thirsty, and tired of the crevice, said, "Move aside, I want to go home. If Mama Mary finds out you pecked me, you're in big trouble." Suddenly, as if realizing something, she stepped out of the crevice and said, "Oh, I get it! You're a chicken! You've got a beak... Just like Darchin, Namak, and Golpar'. You're a big, really big chicken... Why did you take me? Boo! Boo!"

And with that, she half-charged at the eagle. The eagle tried to catch her, but in the small crevice, Rita evaded it once again.

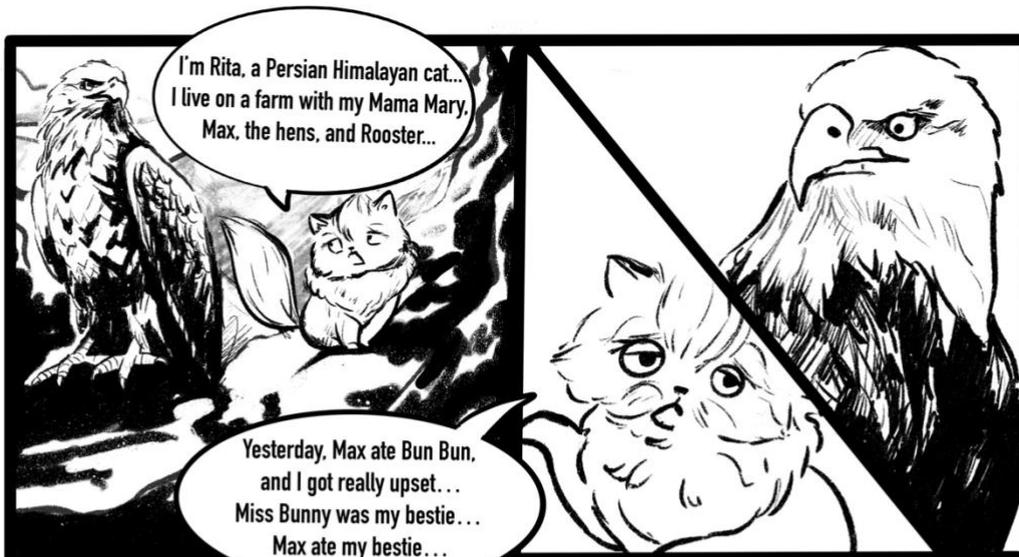
The eagle, forgetting about its hunger and its hunt, stared at Rita in amazement.

A little while later, Rita emerged from the crevice again, sniffed around the cave, and then turned to the eagle and said, "So you brought me here, but what are we going to eat? Can't you talk? Say something, hush?"

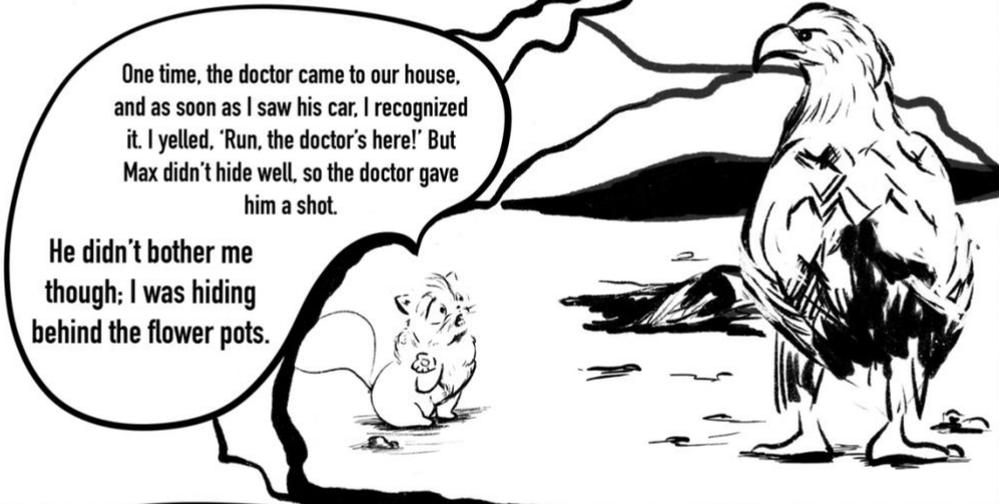
The eagle pondered... It had been years since it had spoken, only thinking in its mind. It instinctively opened its beak, and a garbled sound came out.

Rita tilted her head and asked, "What did you say? Huh? Say it again... I speak chicken language."

The eagle composed itself and, with determination, opened its beak and said, "What are you?"



Half an hour passed.



That's okay. First, we need to find you a rooster... Though you can lay eggs without a rooster, your eggs won't hatch into chicks... Why are you so big anyway? How are we going to find a rooster as big as you?"

Chapter 8: The Chatty Prey

The eagle didn't know what Rita was talking about, still thinking about chicks. Rita, growing impatient, asked, "I'm telling you; we haven't eaten anything! Aren't you hungry?"

The eagle, realizing it was conversing with its prey, thought about eating Rita again. But how could it eat such a chatty creature? She still had so many stories to tell. It needed to find another prey, one that wouldn't have the chance to talk. Suddenly, the eagle leaped off the edge of the cliff and flew away. Rita watched the eagle's flight with excitement, amazed by what she was witnessing.

An hour later, the eagle returned with a mouse in its beak. Rita quickly ran to greet it. She circled the mouse, sniffing it, then suddenly gagged and said, "I'm not eating that, yuck..." The eagle, puzzled, continued to stare at her, not understanding her reaction. Rita wandered off to a corner. After a while, hungry and frustrated, she circled the mouse again, sniffing it. This time, she closed her eyes and began to lick it. After eating, she started grooming herself. A little later, she anxiously searched around the rocks for a place to use the bathroom and asked the eagle, "How am I supposed to go to the bathroom here?"

The eagle, not understanding Rita's words, furrowed its brow and once again thought about eating her. Rita found a flat rock, did her business, and then covered it with small stones. She resumed grooming herself, drank some water collected between the rocks, and curled up to sleep.

In the morning, when Rita woke up, the eagle was nowhere to be seen. Reluctantly, she ate the leftover mouse from the night before and cleaned herself up. Suddenly, she jumped into the air like popcorn as a snake's mouth snapped shut nearby. Rita angrily stared into the snake's eyes. For a few seconds, they locked eyes until the eagle arrived, grabbed the snake with its beak, and threw it down into the abyss.

Rita, relieved, said, "That was such a brush... Haven't you ever had your mom brush your hair until it hurt? And she keeps saying, 'Brushing time, brushing time...'" She paused and then asked, "Do you have a mom? You don't have any chicks! You don't have a rooster either! Is this your nest?" The eagle remained silent.

Rita continued, "You should come to the farm so we can build you a proper nest. We'll find you some big friends. Golpar says there's a peacock on the farm... She says when the peacock spreads its tail, it's even bigger than Mama Mary. I'm sure you'll fall in love with it when you see it. I fell in love with Max's tail first, too. when we sleep, I wrap myself in his tail, and it's so cozy." The eagle was about to fly off when Rita suddenly said, "You're going to leave me here alone again? What if the snake comes back?" The eagle thought, **Why should prey that isn't mine become the snake's?** and said, "We need to go hunting."

Rita eagerly responded, "Well, take me with you... I always help the hens catch worms... I don't eat worms myself, but..." Before Rita could finish her sentence, the eagle grabbed her in its talons and took off.



Chapter 9: When Dreams Take Flight

Rita looked down at the vast plains, feeling as though she were dreaming. She had always watched Liboo and Diboo fly and had wished she could fly with them.

The eagle landed by the river. While the eagle was fishing, Rita noticed a frog leap onto a rock and puff out its cheeks. Rita asked the frog, "Have you ever flown?" The frog jumped, and when it landed, it lifted its head proudly and said, "I can fly, swim, and run. Watch..." Then it leaped onto another rock. Rita laughed and said, "That's not flying..."

She wanted to point out the eagle's flight to the frog but didn't know how to address the eagle. She hopped from rock to rock, got closer to the eagle, and asked, "What's your name?" The eagle swallowed the fish in its beak and remained silent. Rita circled the eagle and said, "Oh wow, you don't even have a name? We need to give you one..."

She pondered for a moment—it was her first time choosing a name, something Mama Mary usually did. Then suddenly, she shrieked, "Yum Yum!" But, looking at the eagle's serious face, she quickly changed her mind. "No, we'll name you... Naz Naz?"

Seeing the eagle's furrowed brows rejecting that name too, she suddenly said with excitement, "Perfect! We'll name you Bravo... Whenever I do something good, Mama Mary says... Bravo!"

The eagle, not understanding much of what Rita was saying, grabbed a small fish with its beak, tossed it onto a rock, and said, "There will be no more hunting until tomorrow." Rita approached the fish, which was still twitching. She slapped her paw on it, sniffed it a bit, and reluctantly bit into the fish.

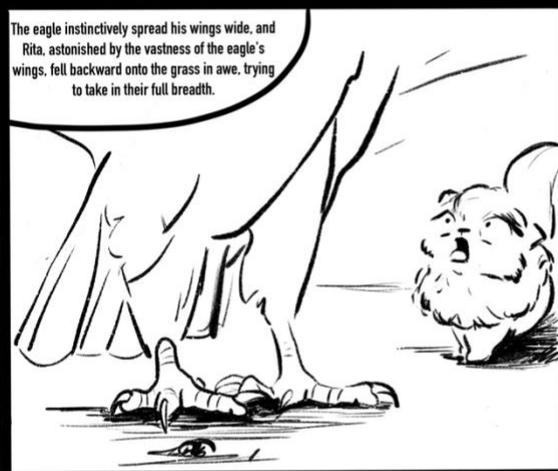
Meanwhile, after Rita was taken, Max ran around frantically, terrified and distraught. He howled, cried out, and even whimpered. He returned home and recounted the ordeal to Darchin. A commotion broke out among the hens, and the rooster crowed loudly upon hearing the news. Liboo and Diboo spread the word about Rita's disappearance across the farm. Mary, who had searched everywhere for Rita, kept asking everyone if they had seen her. She turned the chicken coop upside down, shook Rita's food dish, and showed treats, but there was no sign of Rita.

Max, unsure of what to do, suddenly jumped up, grabbed a corner of Mary's dress, and tugged at it. He led Mary into the field, showing her the spot where Rita had been taken, but no matter how hard Mary searched, she couldn't find her. Exhausted and tearful, she returned home.

The house was filled with sadness. The fox curled up in a corner, the hens stayed in their coops, and Liboo and Diboo didn't even sing. Achin peeked over the fence and said, "You ate her bestie, and now you've lost her too... Pray she doesn't come back... she'll make you pay." Max was too sad to even snap at Achin. Then Wachin arrived and added, "Don't tease the groom; the eagle took his bride, ate her up all alone."

Max, furious, lunged at Achin and Wachin, who escaped through the branches, laughing.

A few days passed, and the eagle took Rita to the fields with him, where he not only hunted but also protected her from hunters' attacks. One day, while the eagle was walking alongside Rita instead of flying, he suddenly became irritated and:



Chapter10: Papa Bravo

The eagle said, "That's enough... you need to go back home." Rita instinctively replied, "No, I can't go home. I just made a bed for myself," thinking of the stone covered with a large leaf in the eagle's nest. She continued, "Who's going to take care of you..."

The eagle, now thoroughly confused, asked, "But what about Max?"

Rita said, "Can we bring Max here too?"

The eagle, now both shocked and angry, raised his voice, "And what about Mama Mary? The hens? The chicks?"

Rita fell into deep thought and then, suddenly, with excitement, said, "You should come home with me too! Mama Mary will make a nest for you and give you treats..."

The eagle flared up and said, "You need to go back; everyone at the farm is waiting for you."

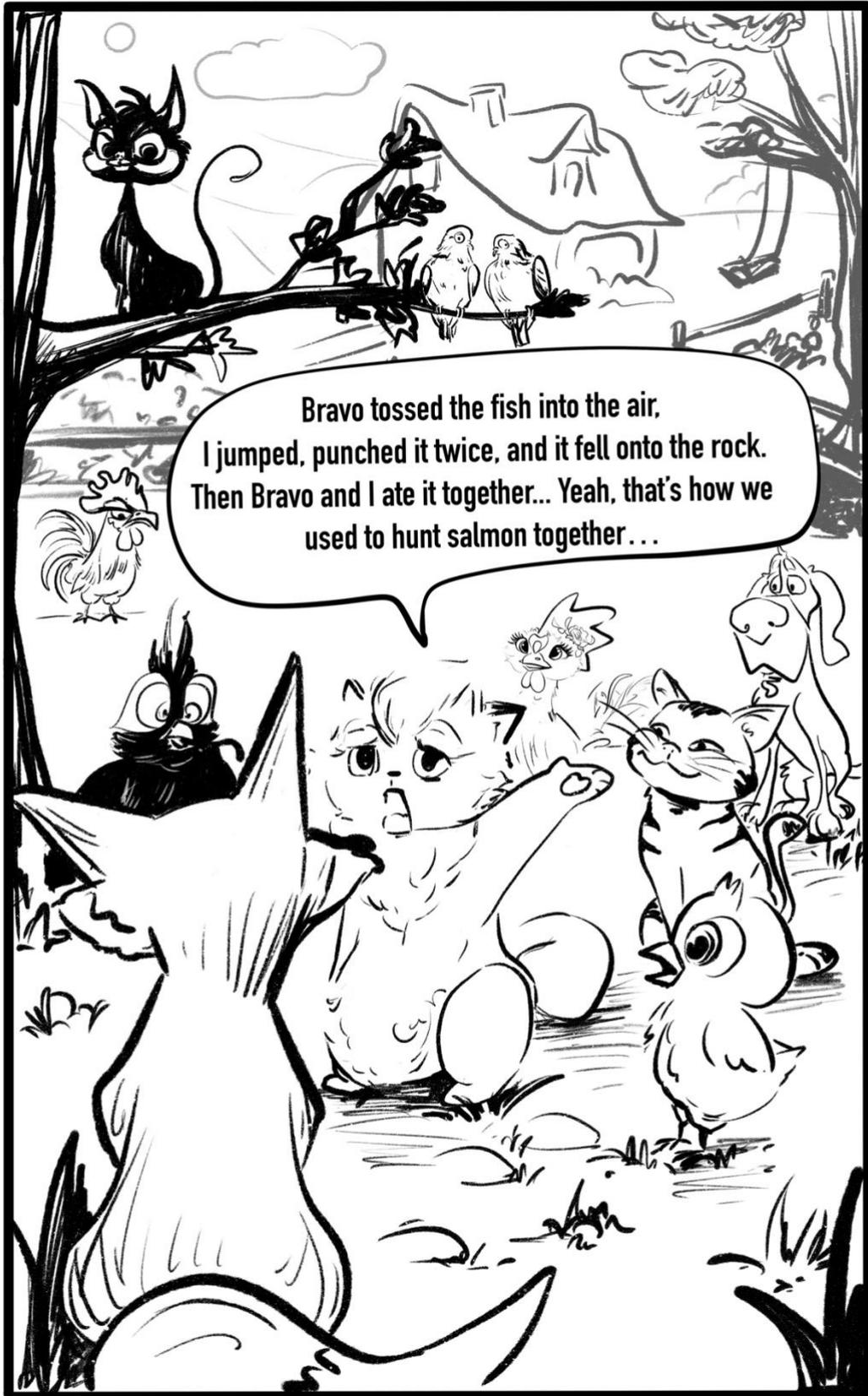
Rita replied, "I'll miss you," and hugged the eagle's leg. The eagle, who had never been hugged before, felt awkward but nonetheless wrapped his wing around Rita, a smile forming on his face as he thought he too would miss the talkative little cat.

Rita made him promise he would visit her at the farm. Then the eagle grabbed Rita in his talons and took off into the sky. When they reached the field, the eagle flew close to the ground and gently released Rita among the catnip bushes.

Max, who had been lingering nearby since Rita's departure, suddenly spotted her. Like lightning, he dashed toward her, and for several minutes, they licked each other. Then Max started sniffing Rita, circling around her, and with a suspicious look, said, "Are you really alive?" While sniffing around her, he raised his eyebrows and asked, "How did the eagle not eat you?"

As Rita tidied herself up, she boasted, "He couldn't eat me... I'm a fierce Persian Himalayan cat! I told him, 'Shoo, shoo, go away!' When he saw my claws, he got scared... yeah, just like that. He became my dad, when I realized that the eagle was actually a rooster, not a hen. I even gave him a name—Bravo."

Max, still confused and suspicious, said, "Come on, let's go home. Everyone will be so happy to see you." With Rita's return, the house was once again filled with light and joy.



Chapter 11: Is Beni There?

The next days, from morning till night, Rita entertained everyone with stories about Bravo and how she narrowly escaped his clutches and survived a snake attack. The farm animals gathered around her, listening intently. Namak, with her mouth agape, eagerly soaked up Rita's tales, imagining herself one day flying through the sky like an eagle.

As Rita continued her storytelling, a persistent knocking sound interrupted, distracting everyone. A strange hen was pecking one by one at the doors of the hens' nests. "Beni? is Beni there?"

Knock, knock, cluck, cluck. "Beni... Beni, is Beni there?"

Darchin raised an eyebrow and said, "We don't have a Beni here."

The hen replied, "Beni... Beni with the colorful tail? The one with the warrior's comb?"

Suddenly, Namak jumped in and pointed at the rooster, saying, "She's talking about the rooster!"

Fel-Fel pecked Namak to keep her quiet.

The hen clucked indignantly, "He's Beni...he is my Beni"

She darted towards the rooster and started pecking at him. The rooster backed away, puffing up his chest, and said, "I'm not Beni. Beni's my twin brother, he lives on the farm."

Golpar flapped her wings and exclaimed, "There's no Beni on the farm, no twin brother! I keep track of the farm... Cluck, cluck, cluck... Cluck, cluck, cluck... Liar, liar, pants on fire!"

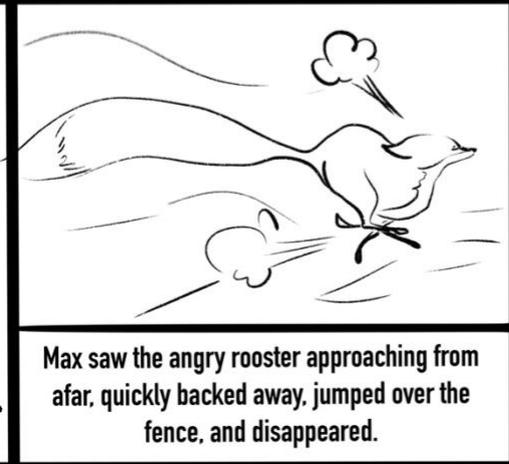
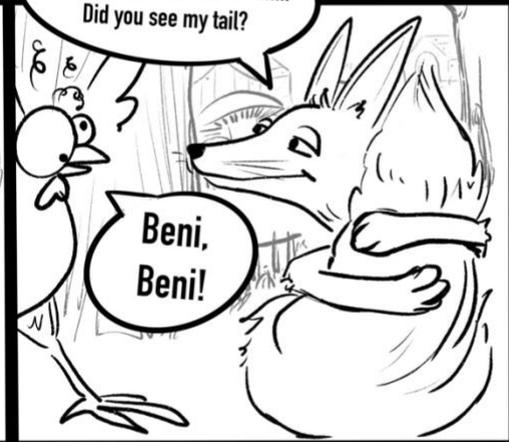
She circled the rooster, jabbing at him with her beak. Darchin joined in, pecking furiously, while Fel-Fel swooped down, and Namak yanked a feather right from his tail.

The yard erupted into chaos again. Liboo and Diboo jumped in, Achin and Wachin leaped onto the rooster, Rita smacked him on the head, and Max was dying of laughter.

Mama Mary arrived, shooed away the hens, and chased them off. The rooster limped back to his nest. Mary spotted the new hen, embraced her, and said, "Oh, what a lovely hen!"

She looked her up and down and said, "We'll name her Avishan... Avishan...it is..."

She brought out a wooden box from the shed and placed it next to the hens' house, making a nest for Avishan.



Chapter 12: Snouty Chick

A few days passed, and the hens were clucking, counting their chicks, who had just hatched. Namak had just become a mother, and she was so happy she nearly flew off. Rita had organized a tour of the garden for the chicks, teaching them the farm rules.

Rita instructed, "Don't peck at Mama Mary's flowerpots... And when I'm napping in the sun, no chirping, got it?" As she was lining up the chicks, she spotted one with a long snout and asked, "Hey, snouty chick, who's your mom?"

The confused chick mumbled, "Mom? Who's mom?"

Darchin looked at the chick and said, "What's that supposed to be? That's no chick!"

Golpar arrived just then, gasped, and said, "Oh my god, that's not one of mine!" She quickly gathered her chicks under her wings.

Fel-Fel came around, circled the snouty chick, and declared, "This chick belongs to Max."

Darchin agreed, "She's right, it doesn't have a beak, it's got a snout instead."

Suddenly, the hens started clucking loudly, and chaos broke out in the yard. The snouty chick, lost and confused, got caught up in the commotion. No one wanted to claim the snouty chick.

Namak suggested, "I think this chick belongs to Avishan." But Avishan insisted that Beni was the father of her chicks. The poor snouty chick, motherless and caught in the middle of the hens' squabbles, was about to get trampled. Rita pulled the chick aside and said, "Listen, snouty chick, the hens say Max is your dad, which means I'm your mom. So you need to start calling me Mama Rita, okay? Now we just have to wait for Mama Mary to give you a name..."

As Rita was playing mother to the snouty chick, the rooster heard the commotion, jumped up, let out a loud crow, and charged after Max. Max, who had just arrived, completely unaware of the situation, took off running... Max ran, the rooster chased, Max ran, the rooster leaped.

Darchin clucked her way over to Rita and whispered in her ear, "If that chick is Max's, it means Max has licked Lady Avishan."

As soon as Rita heard that, she jumped up like a bullet... Max ran, Rita chased, the rooster leaped... The hens clucked wildly... Liboo and Diboo's nap was completely ruined.

When Mary arrived, she saw the chicks, petted their heads, and gave them names. But when she got to the snouty chick, she picked it up with excitement and was overjoyed. She spent some time fussing over it and then named it Saffron.

The next day, someone came into the yard and built a small pond, filling it with water. Saffron jumped into the pond, and Mama Mary was thrilled. The hens started clucking in protest, and Rita said, "I told you, Saffron is my daughter!"



Fox Chick

Chapter 13: Fox Land

The snouty chick, now Mama Mary's favourite, Rita's daughter, and the proud owner of the pond, suddenly made Max very popular. The hens were constantly hovering around him, acting all coy, and calling him "Mister."

Max, feeling unsafe at home because of the rooster, started showing up less often. One morning when Max finally appeared, Rita meowed at him, "Where have you been?"

Max replied, "I was with my mom..." He paused and then suddenly added, "Yes, Mama Maggie... I have a Mama Maggie too."

Rita shot back, "Oh really? Then why haven't you introduced me to your family?" Max said, "Oh darling, I'm sure you wouldn't want to hang out with foxes. It's nothing like home, no hens or chicks... just a bunch of sly foxes."

But no matter how much Max tried to convince Rita that the foxes' home wasn't a place for her, she wouldn't back down. She insisted on meeting Mama Maggie. Finally, Max decided to take her to his family that night.

Mama Mary was cooking when Rita jumped out of a window hole, running after Max across the field. Max led her through the trees until they reached a tunnel surrounded by bushes and trees. As soon as Max and Rita entered, a bunch of foxes stared at them, forming a circle around them. Rita was stunned by the sight of so many foxes.

The male foxes circled Rita, grinning widely. Max tried to scatter them a bit, but Rita got scared, stepped back, and curled up.

A silver-tailed lady fox approached Max and, while sizing up Rita, asked, "Did you get married?"

Max stammered, "No, we just sniff each other." Rita immediately turned around, and when she saw the lady fox, she instinctively went wild, unleashing all her fear and anxiety on the lady fox with a loud hiss and then backed off.

Everyone froze for a second, but when the foxes realized the cat had just scared them off, they got angry and bared their teeth.

Max whispered in Rita's ear, "Run!"

Max and Rita dashed towards home, with the foxes chasing them...

After they got some distance, the foxes were no longer in sight. Rita was panting heavily.

"Don't ever take me to your mom's place again... I'm not going... those silly long-tailed creatures," she huffed as she ran into the house.

Max quietly said, "I told you so."

Faster



Or

Master



Chapter 14: August

The hens' clucking echoed through the yard, passing around some news. Rita perked up her ears, glanced to the left, and then dashed behind the window.

Liboo and Diboo suddenly soared towards the field. The hens had sent their chicks off when Max's head popped through the hatch: "Hurry up, let's go!"

Rita jumped towards Max, her eyes wide with excitement, and asked, "Where to?"
As she followed Max, he said, "There's a race in the field... between Bravo and August."

They joined the group of animals heading towards the field. Rita slowed down when she found herself among the hens and said, "It's obvious that Bravo will win."

Max replied, "But you haven't even seen August."

Rita countered, "It doesn't matter, I know Bravo will win. No one can beat Bravo." Then, with enthusiasm, she continued, "Have you seen Bravo up close? His wings are so big when he spreads them out! Have you seen? Bravo can fly. Can August even fly?"

The hens clucked in agreement with Rita's chatter.

Achin, catching up from behind, said, "Stay away from August." Then turning to Rita, added, "Hey, you, chubby, she'll make a meal out of you."

Rita responded, "Have you seen Bravo at all?"

She suddenly stopped, spread her arms in the air, and said, "This big... has such huge wings... Max and I could fit under them..."—she paused— "with the hens, their chicks, the rooster, and..."

As Rita was fitting the entire farm under Bravo's wings, suddenly, with clucking and bleating, everyone scattered, except Rita, who was stuck to the ground by August's claws.

August growled, "What's this rat saying?"

Rita, struggling to speak and trying to free herself from August's grip, said, "I'm not a rat. I'm a Himalayan Persian cat."

August tightened his claws on Rita's belly and moved his teeth closer with a growl.
Max charged at August, shouting, "Let her go!"

August shoved Max back with her other paw.

All the animals held their breath in fear and stepped back a pace.



Chapter 15: Wings and Claws

Suddenly, with a flutter of Bravo's wings, August looked up, and Rita quickly wriggled free from August's claws.

The hens clucked triumphantly, and the rooster flapped his wings in approval. The cows, standing a bit farther away, swung their tails in the air.

Bravo perched on a low tree branch and said, "What's going on here?"

Max replied, "We came to watch the race between August and you, but it's clear who the winner is... Just the sound of Bravo's wings is enough to distract August."

Turning to the farm animals, Max said, "Let's head back." The animals started heading home.

As they moved away, August grumbled, "Someone must have told them we were having a race."

Bravo said, "There's no race. It's clear who the winner is." His rare, gentle smile only served to further irritate August.

August: "I can't believe you avoid eating that chatty rat! I guess you want to have chick too."

Bravo: "To be honest, I prefer cub."

August hid her smile.

The sun slowly dipped behind the mountain, and Bravo thought back to the first time he had seen August. As he soared across the sky, a swift movement on the ground caught his attention. He lowered his altitude to get a better look at his nimble rival.

Bravo's shadow on the ground captured August's attention. August looked up and observed Bravo circling above. A connection between sky and earth. Sharp-eyed eagle and swift cheetah.

On the way home, Max said: "Are you happy now? Because of your big mouth, I lost face in front of all the animals! Did you see how she threw me to the side?"

Rita: "She called me a rat! Do I look like a rat? Maybe I should've called her a silly human instead!"

Max: "But you live with a human... Don't you love Mama Mari?"

Rita: "I love Mama Mari ... but I don't wanna be a human!"



Chapter 16: The Big Party

Max asked, "Has anyone ever told you what lovely ears you have?"

Rita replied, "Yeah, Mama Mary always gushes over them. And when she squeezes them, it feels so good... Do you want to give them a nibble?"

Max, excited, said, "Yeah!"

Rita leaned her head forward and warned, "But be gentle..."

Max reassured her, "I will."

Rita pulled her head back slightly and repeated, "Very gentle."

Max nodded, "Okay."

Max gently nibbled on Rita's ear, and Rita enjoyed it. Max nibbled a bit more, and Rita enjoyed it even more, but suddenly, it hurt. She slapped Max on the head, and Max yelped in pain. Mama Mary yelled from the kitchen, "Rita?! What did you do now?! Bad behavior again?!"

Rita dashed towards the kitchen, protesting, "But I told him to be gentle!"

Mama Mary was packing her things. Whenever she put her flashlight in her bag, she would disappear for a few days. Mr Yummy would come by to give us food and water and pet us while she was gone.

As soon as Mama Mary disappeared behind the hills, I jumped into the house and played some music. Max flung the door wide open, and the hens and chicks rushed inside. The rooster stood at the door, proudly crowing. Soon, the lambs started appearing in the garden too. I gave one a little slap on the head when I saw it nibbling on Mama Mary's flowers.

When DJ FISHER played: * ♪ Movin' on the dancefloor* *Dancing tonight*

I couldn't control myself any longer—I jumped into the middle of the room. Max showed off every dance move he had learned from Mama Mary, and the chicks circled around Saffron, who was strutting her stuff in the center. Golpar saw this and quickly pulled her chicks aside, giving them a couple of quick pecks, as if she didn't approve of such silly antics.

Fel-Fel whispered in Darchin's ear, "Farm girl." They both giggled.

Suddenly, Achin and Wachin peeked through the window and called out, "Everyone... to the meadow..."

It seemed like they were planning to jump around on the catnip bushes.

After a while, everyone had gathered in the meadow. It was loud... noisy... and chaotic... Achin, Wachin, and I were having so much fun rolling in the grass that we didn't even argue.

While the meadow was filled with the sounds of baaing, clucking, and braying, I spotted Bravo coming toward the field from a distance. I ran toward him, and when he saw me, he landed and brushed his beak against my face. I couldn't help but purr with happiness...

Suddenly, August appeared from behind a tree. Bravo flew up and perched on a tree branch. August straightened his neck, glanced around, and, feeling reassured, flopped down under the tree.

The party in the meadow was in full swing when suddenly...



Chapter 17: The Western Sky

A few moments passed... Bravo landed on a tree branch and asked August, "Did you see it?" August nodded, "Yeah." She looked around and added, "But it seems like only we saw it..."

Rita, meowing, ran towards the tree, frantic and breathless, and asked Bravo, "Did you see it? Did you see it? It was my Mama Cat!"

August shot an angry look at Rita. Rita spun around and demanded, "Where did she go? Where did my Mama Cat disappear to?" Annoyed, August shoved Rita aside and snapped, "What's this rat babbling about now?! Your Mama Cat? That wasn't a cat at all!"

Rita, even more frantic than before, darted back and forth, pleading with Bravo, "I saw her with my own eyes... She looked right at me and said, 'Ritaaaa... Ritaaaa...'" and I answered, 'Meooooow... Meooooow...'"

August looked up at the sky and muttered, "You've had too much catnip; you're hallucinating. Get out of here." Then, turning to Bravo, she said, "We have to go after it." Bravo, still serious and determined, stared up at the sky and said, "We need to head towards the sunset."

Rita, now completely beside herself, exclaimed, "I'm coming too!"

Max, slightly more alert, tried to get up but was still dizzy and stumbled, collapsing back onto the grass. The farm animals continued their celebration, oblivious to what was happening. Bravo turned to the horse and asked, "Did you see it too?" The horse lifted its head and asked, "See what?"

But Bravo couldn't find the words to describe what he had seen.

Suddenly, Rita jumped in and said, "It was a Mama Cat... a big Mama Cat in the sky... She called out, 'Rita, Rita.'" The horse laughed.

August lunged at Rita, and Bravo said, "Rita, that wasn't a cat at all, and it didn't say anything." Rita insisted, "I saw it myself!" August, furious, placed his paw on Rita's tail and growled, "You were dreaming about Mama Mary, you noisy little mouse!"

Just then, Max, still stumbling, joined them and said, "What was that?! What was that smell?! What a scent! Where did it go?! I want more!" And he collapsed back onto the grass.

Bravo turned to August and said, "It seems like only we felt it." August replied, "We have to find it."

Rita insisted again, "I'm coming too!" August snapped angrily, "That's no place for kids!"

Rita, growing more desperate, kept pacing and pleaded with Bravo, "Tell her something, Bravo... I want my Mama Cat!"

August clenched her teeth and said, "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't eat this noisy little mouse right now."

Bravo, staring into the sky, deep in thought, said, "There must be a reason why only we saw it." Then he turned to Rita and said, "We leave at dawn."

To be continued...