

# TIDBITS & TINSEL TAILS



A HOLIDAY HIJINKS ANTHOLOGY  
EDITED BY LYN WORTHEN

CAMDEN PARK PRESS



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*Caryn Larrinaga is an internationally best-selling mystery and horror author. She has won multiple awards for her work, and in 2021 was named Writer of the Year by the League of Utah Writers. Caryn lives near Salt Lake City, Utah, with her husband and their clowder of cats. She is an active member of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, the Horror Writers Association, the Cat Writers Association, and the League of Utah Writers. Visit [www.carynlarrinaga.com](http://www.carynlarrinaga.com) for a free spooky cat story and true tales of haunted places.*

*About this story, Caryn says: "Like many of my stories, The Candlewick Caper was inspired by my own furry little schemers. My gray tabby is typically the mastermind, digging sandwich scraps out of the garbage to share with his orange tabby brothers or showing them how to jump up onto the countertop to access that most delicious of forbidden delicacies: an unattended butter dish. Excited as my husband and I are to try making Yule candles for the first time this year, we will be keeping an extremely close eye on the wicks, wax, and literally anything else that isn't nailed down."*

*What happens when you leave three cats in a room unattended, with a variety of treats and toys and temptations? You guessed it – though you might be surprised by who takes on the role of the ringleader...*

## THE CANDLEWICK CAPER

### Caryn Larrinaga

Rump wiggling, I studied my prey. It was the toughest foe I'd ever faced. Fast. Wily. Tricky as the day is long. Against me, though? It didn't stand a chance. I dipped my head and waited.

There! A hint of a shiver, the tiniest sign that it was readying itself to flee across the savannah. I pounced, snatching it up into my jaws and clamping down hard. I couldn't wait to show my parents. They'd be so proud.

"Nabial?"

My mom's sharp voice cut across the kitchen and echoed off the sliding glass doors. The golden grasses in my mind faded away, replaced by the heavy green cloth covering the table. My feet shrunk back down from the strong mitts of a lion to dainty white paws, and I traded my wide muzzle for the white-whiskered nose of a calico cat.

"Nabia," she said again, her tone rising.

I stared at her, frozen by guilt, my kill still clutched between my teeth.

"Drop it." Mom – or Olivia as the humans called her – towered over me with her hands perched on her wide hips. Her stance was stern, but a smile played at the edge of her mouth.

I crept forward, winding between blocks of beeswax and bottles of essential oils, and released the braided wick I'd snatched from the tangled pile in the center of the table. It landed on the cloth with a wet slap.

She picked it up gingerly. "A queen's ransom of cat toys scattered around the house, but you'd rather play with a wick."

"It wasn't a wick," I said. "It was a gazelle."

The explanation did me no good. She wouldn't understand. But she always talked to me, often even in meows, so I returned the courtesy as often as I could.

My dad, Oliver, poked his head out from the den. "I heard a shout."

Mom wagged the damp wick at him. "Our huntress strikes again."

"So fierce." His thick, sculpted beard jiggled as he shook his head at me. "She thinks she's the Predator, stalking Arnold through the jungle."

“I do not!” I protested.

“That ugly thing?” Mom said. “No way. She thinks she’s the Yule Cat.”

“The one that eats kids if they didn’t get any clothes for Christmas?”

“Yep. And she’s tough enough to take on an entire village of blandly dressed children.”

The acknowledgement of my toughness smoothed over the inaccuracy of the comparison. The Yule Cat in Mom’s winter picture book was an enormous scruffy longhair, whereas I was petite and the picture of perfection.

“Hmm.” Dad’s expression turned thoughtful. “She’s our kid, you know.”

“Oh, I know.” Mom leaned over the kitchen chair and brought her face close to mine. I pushed my head forward and bumped it against hers. With a musical laugh, she planted a kiss between my ears. “She’s our little girl.”

“Then we should be worried. If the Yule Cat comes around, she’ll be in trouble.”

“You’re right! The Yule Cat won’t find any new kitty clothes under the tree.”

Oh, no.

Dad wandered over to the kitchen counter and plucked a potato chip out of the festive snowflake bowl Mom had been filling while I was on the hunt. “So, what’s the plan for tonight?”

“Aniyah is coming over to make Yule candles.”

My ears perked up. I liked Aniyah. She reminded me of a cat, with her thickly lined eyes and the patterns of

black ink covering her arms and neck. There was a ferocity in her, too.

As a bonus, whenever Aniyah came over, she brought her cat, Seymour. He was full of strange stories about his life before Aniyah adopted him.

But if Aniyah was coming, and Seymour was coming....

Double oh no.

Brodie would be here, too.

As though reading my mind, Dad studied me while munching on a handful of chips. "Just Aniyah?"

"Yeah." Mom pulled out another bowl, this one decorated with a crackling Yule log, and poured a bag of Swedish Fish into it. "Makenna can't make it."

Happiness swept over me so strongly that I nearly purred. No Makenna, no Brodie.

Once again, Dad was on my wavelength. "That might be for the best."

"You're dang right it is," I told him, rubbing my face on a kitchen chair excitedly.

My elation faded as he kept speaking.

"I don't know why, but that cat brings out the worst in Nabia."

I stopped my rubbing and glared at him. The worst in *me*? That big gray brat brought out the worst in *himself*. He was three years old, but still acted like a kitten. I tried to float above the wake of his chaos like a hummingbird over a stream, but he always dragged me into his shenanigans. Just a few weeks before, at Aniyah's house, he got us both in trouble for knocking over a lamp and

breaking the bulb. I'd been the one yelling at him to stop, but I took half the blame.

It hadn't even made sense to me. Snatching up a wick or a stealing a ball of paper out of the garbage was one thing, but you couldn't hunt a lamp. Or a bowl of mashed potatoes like the one he knocked off the counter at his house on Friendsgiving. It shattered on the floor in front of me, splattering me with warm potato clumps. I got a bath and a scolding even though I was the victim.

None of that mattered tonight, though. He wouldn't be here. Seymour and I could converse like mature, civilized cats. For once, the evening wouldn't end in a lecture.

The ring of the doorbell startled me out of my thoughts. Mom's face lit up, and she sprinted through the living room.

"That's my cue," Dad murmured. He shot me a wink, then retreated to the den and shut the door. I didn't have to follow him to know that within minutes, he'd be settled deep into the recliner couch with a barbering magazine.

Cold air rushed into the house when Mom whipped open the front door. She gave a squeal of excitement.

"Aniyah! Come on in."

"Gladly," Aniyah's deep voice purred into the house. "It's freezing out here."

She stepped into the foyer and shook snowflakes out of her curls before gently setting a blue cat carrier onto the floor. Once the door was safely shut behind her, she unzipped the front flap.

A pair of cloudy blue eyes peered out at me. After a moment, a Siamese cat sniffed his way out of the carrier, his long, tawny fur rubbing languidly along the zipper as though it were a comb. Seymour carried himself with the pride of a great cat, but his arthritis had made his movements labored these past few years.

“Hiya, Nabby.” He lifted his nose and sniffed again. “Already eaten?”

I should have known that would be the first question out of his mouth. “Yes, but I haven’t finished yet. There’s some left in my bowl.”

He flashed a nearly toothless grin, his single remaining fang glinting in the light, and hustled toward the kitchen as fast as his sixteen-year-old joints allowed.

“Nuh-uh-uh, Mister Man.” Aniyah snatched him off the ground and scratched the back of his head with long, candy-apple-red fingernails. “Don’t think I don’t know where you’re off to. No extra food for you tonight.” She turned to Mom. “Do you mind putting Nabia’s food bowl somewhere out of his reach? Seymour’s on a special kidney diet now.”

“Oh no,” Mom said. “Kidney disease?”

“Yes, but it’s not very advanced. He’s on a new diet and getting subcutaneous fluids at home, so he should be in good shape for a long time.” She flapped one of Seymour’s brown paws. “Won’t you, handsome?”

Mom picked my dinner bowl off the floor and tucked it into the ‘Nabia Proof’ corner of the counter, between the coffee maker and the gray-tiled backsplash. Aniyah nodded her approval and put Seymour down beside me.

“All clear,” she said. “You rascals can go play now.”



“But stay away from those wicks, young lady,” Mom added. She bent down and ran her hand down the length of my back, then led Aniyah through the kitchen to the table.

“Play,” Seymour huffed, stomping over to my heater bed beneath the Yule tree. “She expects me to have the energy to play when all she feeds me is that awful kidney mush?” He glared at the kitchen table, where our mothers were chatting and examining the candle-making supplies, then turned his attention back to me. “I can smell your dinner. Paté. Chicken and salmon, if I’m not mistaken.”

“Right,” I said, impressed. “You can smell it that well from out here?”

“It’s on your breath, little lady.” He circled and settled down, legs splayed as though he’d been laying in the heater bed for days. “Where’s Brodie?”

My chest swelled, and I straightened up, excited to share the best news of the day. “He isn’t coming.”

“Isn’t coming?” he grumbled. “That’s too bad.”

That miffed a little. “I’m not enough fun for you?”

“Oh, don’t take it like that.” He huffed out through his nose and closed his eyes, looking suddenly like a very old cat. “You wouldn’t understand.”

I stood next to him for a while, watching and waiting for him to perk up. I wanted to hear more of his stories. He’d had a much more exciting life than me. Not that I was envious of him; I just found it fascinating. He’d been a street cat, then a shelter cat, then a street cat again before getting rescued by the same group that had rescued me. He spent two years with them before stealing Aniyah’s heart. In the course of the many years before,

he'd had adventures in the woods, run-ins with animals I'd only seen on TV, and romantic encounters with more than one striking outdoor kitty. Those stories were always thin on details but heavy on the descriptions of the ladies he'd been wooing.

In the beginning, after Aniyah rescued him and starting bringing him over to play, I had tried to be a storyteller, too. But nobody liked to hear about a bird some other cat saw out a window, and all my other stories happened in my head.

Boredom tugged at the end of my tail. I thrashed it impatiently to one side.

"Come on, Seymour. Tell me a story."

He threw a paw over his eyes. "I'm too tired for stories. Although...." The paw moved an inch to the side, and one blue eye peered out at me. "A treat might wake me up. Think you can get us some?"

"Maybe."

"We both know they'll give some to you. You're a good girl, not like the cats whose families sent them back to the shelter for misbehaving."

Something deep in my gut twisted. He'd never mentioned that before.

"That really happened?" I asked.

"Sometimes. But like I said, you're a good little cat, and good little cats get rewarded." He lifted his head and craned his neck until he had a good view through the kitchen to the table, where our moms were uncapping essential oil bottles and comparing scents. "Better go now before they get absorbed in their work."

“Good idea.” I took a moment and ran freshly licked paws over my eyebrows. I considered which tactic was more likely to earn a treat, settling on an upbeat trot and demure meows that would remind my mom of the first year I was with her. A few quick bounces put some pep in my step, and I started toward my target.

I was halfway to the table when the ring of the doorbell brought me skidding to a halt. It could have been the pizza man. It could have been a box of butter-rich cookies getting dropped off at the door. It could even have been an express package getting delivered to the wrong house. But I knew, deep down in my paw pads, that a very unwanted guest had just arrived.



I hunched on the floor, my shoulder blades sharp in my back, and glared. Across the rug from me, a neon-green cat carrier shook and shuddered.

“Boy, he’s excited,” Mom’s friend Mackenna said. She giggled, and for a moment, she looked like one of Dad’s teenaged nieces.

I knew Mackenna was an adult because she worked with Mom at the lab, but something about her narrow face disguised her age. Tonight’s braided pigtails didn’t help. It was fitting, I decided, that Mom’s youngest and most energetic friend would have a cat like Brodie.

Mackenna hadn’t even finished unzipping his carrier before Brodie exploded out in a cloud of gray fur. Despite being half my age, he was nearly twice my size, and fourteen pounds of Scottish Fold were now barreling toward me. I tensed, bracing myself to leap away if

needed, but he stopped just short of a collision and rolled over on his back like a dog.

“Nabia!” He stared up at me, face upside-down. “I didn’t think I’d get to come, but Mom’s date ended early, and here we are! Isn’t that great?”

Strong as his enthusiasm was, it failed to be contagious.

“Great,” I said flatly.

Mom laughed. “Look at these two. It’s awesome that they’re all such good friends.”

“And good troublemakers,” Aniyah chimed in from the table.

“That’s an excellent point,” Mom said. “These two have a naughty sort of synergy when they get together.” She led Makenna to the table, picked up the bundle of candle wicks, and added them to the stash behind the coffee maker. “I’ll just put these here for safekeeping. Grab one whenever you need it, ladies.”

Brodie rolled over again, rump in the air and front arms flat on the floor. “What are they doing with those?”

“Making candles for Yule,” I said.

“What’s Yule?”

Didn’t this cat know anything? And why was it my job to explain it all to him? But I knew that if I didn’t answer, he’d keep pestering me all night. It was better to just get it over with.

“It’s the winter solstice,” I said.

He stared up at me blankly.

I tried again. “You know how the sun has been setting a little earlier every day? How the days have been getting shorter and the nights have been getting longer?”

A grin spread over his face. “Yeah. I love it. So much more time to play!”

I loved it, too, but I wasn’t about to tell him that. “The solstice is the longest night of the year. After Yule, things go the other direction. The nights get shorter and the days get longer. It’s all part of the Wheel of the Year. That’s why my mom is making candles. She likes to give them as presents so everyone can use them to call the light back into the world.”

“Wow,” he said. “You’re so smart. Can we make candles, too?”

“No. It’s just for humans.”

“What do you want to do then, huh? We could race! Or play hide-and-seek! Or—”

I cut him off. “*Seymour* and I already have plans. We’re going to talk. You know, like adult cats do.”

Brodie cocked his head. At every turn, he reminded me more of a dog than a cat. Something was deeply wrong with him.

“Talk?” He scooted closer. “Can I come?”

“Knock yourself out.” I stood and strolled toward the heater bed where Seymour sat, blue eyes locked on Brodie. “Just don’t interrupt Seymour’s stories. I’ve been looking forward to them all night.”

“Will you tell any stories?” Brodie asked.

I glanced sideways at him. “I don’t have any stories to tell.”

“Sure you do. Mom told me all about you. You were a rescue cat.”

It was true. But my parents had adopted me from the rescue group when I was just under a year old. I was seven

now, and enough time had gone by that I didn't remember what life was like before they brought me home.

Seymour's words – *Sent them back* – popped into my head, and the twisting in my belly returned. I didn't know why they bothered me so much. It's not like that would ever happen to me.

"I don't have any interesting stories," I said.

A low chuckle rumbled up from the heater bed. Seymour shifted and rested his chin on the bed's lip. Reflections of the Yule tree's red and green lights twinkled in his eyes. "You don't, eh? I thought I heard your mother say something about you stealing candle wicks."

Seymour's tone was kidding, but Brodie turned to me with awe in his eyes.

"You *are* making candles!"

"No, I'm not." I pictured myself on the savannah once more, bearing down on my prey. "I was hunting."

"Hunting wicks? How verrrrrry tough of you," Seymour purred.

I wanted to protest, but Seymour had hunted in alleyways and garbage dumps. He'd taken on rats and seagulls. He was tougher than me. We both knew it. But I didn't want him thinking I was some weak house cat.

"It's a lot tougher than hunting a lamp," I spat with a pointed look at Brodie.

For once, my words seemed to get through to him. The excited light faded from his eyes, and his head dropped to the floor.

The twisting feeling in my stomach climbed up into my heart. That was a low blow. But instead of an apology, a series of awkward sounds sputtered forth from my mouth, and my guilt chased me out of the room.



Makenna grinned at me from across the kitchen table. “How cute! She’s sitting on a chair just like a person.”

I couldn’t return the smile, because it occurred to me in that moment that this was all her fault. Last year’s Yule candle night had been peaceful and fun. Seymour and I had hung out on the cushioned window seat, talking and watching for any sign of motion in the bushes outside. Then last spring, Makenna started working with my mom. She was suddenly part of Mom’s social circle, which meant Brodie was suddenly part of mine.

But the iciness in my heart cooled and melted as I watched the women work. The kitchen was warm and humid from the double boiler on the stove, and the three of them laughed as they traded essential oil bottles, jokingly suggesting unconventional scent combinations like pineapple pumpkin spice and chocolate fudge baby powder. Their conversation was soothing, and for once, Brodie hadn’t followed me in here.

My budding tranquility was snuffed out by movement from the living room. I dipped my head and waited. A moment later, the movement repeated, and my eyes widened.

Beyond the hot wax and cold water dipping jars, the Yule tree swayed.

My skin rippled angrily, and a puff of white fur burst into the air around me as violently as a porcupine’s quills.

Before a single piece landed on the table, I was off the chair and darting between clumps of supplies.

Aniyah stopped a bottle of cinnamon oil from toppling over. "Watch it!"

I landed with a thump and thundered through the kitchen just in time to see Brodie lift his last foot off the ground and steady himself on a low-hanging pine bough.

"What are you *doing?*" I demanded.

The tree wobbled as he looked down at me. "Hunting. There's a star at the very top of the tree. I'll catch it, you just watch."

"Get back down here right now! Do you know how much trouble we'll be in if you keep climbing?"

Panicked, I whipped my head back toward the kitchen. Knocking over the tree would be way worse than anything Brodie had done before. His mom had gotten him from a breeder, so there was nowhere he could be sent back to. But me? My parents donated money to the cat rescue every month. If they wanted, they would know exactly how to send me back.

I tried to shake the thoughts. They would never send me back. Never. It wouldn't make any sense.

But then again, there was a lot about humans I didn't understand. Like no matter how many catnip mice I brought them, they never caught on that I was demonstrating the proper way to hunt. And the one time I caught a real mouse in the basement, they were horrified. They should have been pleased, especially since I had left it alive so they could practice hunting actual prey.



Seymour piped up from the heater bed where he was curled up like a cinnamon bun. His eyes were closed, and his voice was calmer than I ever expected to feel again. “Don’t be a fool, Brodie. This tree is much too high, and you are far too big to reach the top safely. If you want to play at being a lion, hunt something closer to the ground.”

Grumbling, Brodie dropped back to the floor. As his weight left the tree’s trunk, the tree creaked and swayed. I held my breath until it stopped moving.

I rounded on Brodie and released my breath in a single furious stream of words. “What were you thinking? Don’t you know how dangerous that is?”

He shook a paw. “Ew. What is this sticky stuff?”

“It’s sap. And don’t ignore me.” I glanced at Seymour. His eyes were still closed, but I knew he could hear us. I needed to be mature about this, the way he would be. My ears and attention swiveled back to Brodie. “Why do you always have to act like such a kitten?”

“I’m not a kitten,” he said, still trying to shake sap from his paw. “I’m just as tough as you are. You’ll see.”

Oh, I could see. I could see right into the future, a future where I spent the rest of the evening watching Brodie so he couldn’t do anything else to get us into trouble. I hopped onto the sofa’s back and settled into a tense loaf for a better view of our surroundings. Scanning the room, I spotted far too many opportunities for mischief.

What if he jumped up onto the mantle and sent the row of framed photos flying? I could practically hear the glass shattering. There were books on shelves, a display

of Mom's collected crystals on a sideboard, easily shredded wrapping paper beside the tree, and a crystal candy dish on the coffee table that had belonged to Dad's grandmother. Stress compressed my shoulders. I didn't even dare blink.

To my surprise, Brodie went for none of those things. Instead, he ambled over to Seymour's bed. The two of them spoke in hushed tones, and my shoulders relaxed slightly. Seymour was probably trying to talk some sense into Brodie. If anyone could do it, it was Seymour. He was so much better than me at everything.

It must have worked, because Brodie trotted into the kitchen toward our collective mothers. From my perch on the couch, I couldn't see him once he passed through the living room doorway, but there were far fewer opportunities for trouble in there. No Friendsgiving potluck dishes on the counter or fancy cutlery on the table. The hot wax was right beneath our mothers' noses. The only risk was—

Crap. The tablecloth.

I scrambled off the couch and into the kitchen, scanning the floor around the table. If he tried to claw his way up one of the tablecloth's dangling sides the way he'd tried to scale the tree, he would pull everything down onto the floor. The mess would break records and hold the title for years to come. When I couldn't spot him right away, I circled the table, needing to be sure.

There was no sight of him. Not under the table, not on any of the chairs. Where had he gone?

Above me, conversation lulled as the women concentrated on dipping their candles. Then, I heard it.

It was too quiet for human ears. The softest rip of something gooey peeling away from laminate, followed by the nearly inaudible sound of furry paws tiptoeing across the same surface. I scurried out from beneath the table and stared upward in horror.

Brodie was on the kitchen counter.

He crept forward, his sap-covered front paw sticking to and lifting away from the countertop. His shoulders were lowered into a hunting stance, and his gaze was locked onto something tucked into the corner by the coffee maker.

The wicks, I realized.

If anything was sure in this world, it was that Brodie was dangerously uncoordinated. Everyone knew it. If I wanted to, I could pluck a single wick out of the tangle on the counter and get away clean. But Brodie? Everything up there was liable to come crashing down. He took another step, but this time, his sap-covered foot stuck to the counter more than it had before. He struggled against it, tugging and pulling with his full bodyweight. When it finally came loose, he lurched forward.

“No!” In my terror, I shouted in both the silent language of cats and a shrieking meow even humans could hear.

Mom lifted her head at the sound of my scream. An instant later, she was on her feet, and both of us lunged toward Brodie together.

We were too late.

The coffee maker came down first. It landed on the tile floor with an ear-splitting clang, and the tempered glass carafe cracked neatly in two.

Brodie's clumsy stumble knocked my food bowl off next. Paté splattered across the floor. I thought nothing could beat the range of the mashed potatoes, but chunks of the chicken and salmon blend reached all the way to the living room doorway.

At last, the gray rascal himself tumbled off the counter, followed by a rain of candle wicks.

Nobody moved except Seymour, who dashed into the kitchen and gobbled up every stray morsel of my leftover dinner.



Dad sat on the sofa and stroked me on his lap while Aniyah and Makenna packed the other cats away into their carriers.

"I'm so sorry about all this," Makenna told Mom. Two pink spots colored her cheeks. "I'll replace your coffee maker."

"Don't worry about it," Mom assured her. "I'm just glad it didn't shatter. No cut up little paws for anyone. Besides, you know how Nabia and Brodie egg each other on when they're together."

Sorrow welled up in me, and I slunk out from beneath Dad's hand. I dropped to the floor and rubbed my face against the zipper of Seymour's carrier to say goodbye.

"Thanks for all the stories," I said glumly. "I hope I can hear them again sometime."

"Hope? One cheat meal won't kill me, Nabby."

"I know. But they think I'm a naughty cat, and you said it yourself. Naughty cats get sent back where they came from."

He blinked at me through the mesh. “You can’t really think that. Your parents adore you. They dote on you as zealously as any human dotes on their children. They would never send you away.” A mischievous gleam twinkled in his eye. “Besides, no rescue would be foolish enough to take *you* back.”

“Really?”

“Really.” The twinkle faded, and he sighed. “I’m sorry if anything I said upset you tonight. I’ve been a bit crabby lately. It’s this new diet. And...” He paused. “I’m sorry for putting Brodie up to getting on the counter.”

I stared at him for a moment while I processed his words. “You put him up to it?”

He nodded. “I told him candle wicks were the closest thing here to real mice, and that if he could catch one, he’d be able to prove to you how tough he is. He looks up to you, you know. And I imagined that if he got up there, he’d make enough of a mess to get your food onto the floor.” He licked his chops, tongue scraping against his one remaining fang. “And I was right.”

Aniyah picked up his carrier then. A wall of cold air rushed into the house when she opened the door.

“I’ll get you back for this,” I called to Seymour.

The wind carried his laughter back to me, and the door snicked shut.

Brodie’s voice, softer and sadder than I’d ever heard it, floated across the room. “Nabia?”

I hesitated. He’d gotten me into trouble yet again, and made me terrified my parents would send me away. But, I realized, Seymour had been the one who planted that seed of fear in my mind and manipulated Brodie into

getting onto the counter, so how much blame should I really lay on Brodie's gray shoulders? I padded over to him and rested my rump on the floor beside his carrier.

"Hi, Brodie."

"I'm so sorry, Nabia. I didn't mean to get you into trouble."

For the first time, I believed it. "I know that. What I don't know is why you keep doing it."

He hung his head. "It's just... my life hasn't been as exciting as yours. I've never had any adventures outside, hunting mice or climbing trees that aren't made of carpet and rope. But I thought if I could show you I'm tough, too, you'd want to be my friend."

I frowned. "You were trying to impress me?"

"Yeah." He lifted his head and met my gaze. "Did it work?"

Understanding rattled something loose in my chest. The absurdity of it tickled my whiskers, and I was overcome with laughter. Brodie joined in hesitantly.

When my mirth subsided, I shook my head. "No, but it doesn't matter. I'll be your friend if you'll be mine."

Joy spread over his face. "You mean it?"

"I mean it. I'll see you soon."

Makenna watched us and sighed. "What a night. At least the candles came out okay." She held up a taper and admired her handiwork. Her eyes narrowed. "Well, almost okay."

Bits of white fur peppered the green wax. Four human heads turned toward the only suspect: a certain strikingly beautiful calico cat.

THE CANDLEWICK CAPER

Dad chuckled. “Well, what’s a Yule candle without a little Yule cat fur?”

