

The  
TRUE STORY  
of  
DICK  
WHITTINGTON  
and his  
CAT



A 'Stupid London' Adventure

ONCE UPON A TIME in the olden days, a poor orphan boy named Dick Whittington lived in a tiny village with his only friend, a cat named Frank. Dick Whittington, with no mother and no father, had no money. He was often so cold that he had to wear a coat made of leaves, and he was often so hungry that he had to chew on some rope or an old mattress or whatever he found lying around.

One winter's day, Dick Whittington was particularly cold and hungry. He trudged through the tiny streets of the tiny village with Frank, shivering in his leaf coat and licking a cobblestone to stave off hunger.

"Oh, Frank," said Dick Whittington, sadly. "I am so cold and so hungry, and I will always be so because I am so poor!"

Frank sighed and was about to give Dick Whittington his habitual explanation of the concept of paid employment when he was interrupted by the sound of cruel laughter. Two finely-dressed men had just stepped out of a tavern and the sight of Dick Whittington was causing them much merriment.

"Look!" cried the first man, who had a fat, well-fed face. "His coat is made of old leaves!"

"Why, do *trees* set the fashion here, boy?" chortled the second man, wrapping a snug fur muffler around his neck. "And look, he is eating a cobblestone!"

"My goodness!" declared the first. "Doubtless the young man is such a *gourmand* that his palette has tired of the usual sweetmeats!" And the pair fairly collapsed against each other in their mirth.

"Please, kind sirs," said Dick Whittington plaintively. "I am only dressed in these leaf rags as it is so cold. And I am eating this cobblestone as I have no money for food."

"No money? No money?" roared the man with the muffler. "Then what are you doing here in this godforsaken place? Get thee to London!"

"London? What is in London?"

"Riches!" cried the fat-faced man. "Why, the very streets of London are paved with gold!"

"Paved with... gold?"

"Paved! With gold!" answered the man with the muffler, shaking a jingling purse in Dick Whittington's face. "If you were to pick up a cobblestone in London town, you wouldn't need to eat it - why, you could use it to buy yourself a banquet!"

And with that, the two rich men climbed into a stagecoach and drove off.

Dick Whittington and Frank carried on their way through the village.

"A banquet! Did you hear that, Frank?" said Dick Whittington. He wasn't quite sure what a banquet was, but it sounded delicious. "We must go to London, where I will find a hundred golden cobblestones, and buy a hundred banquets!"

Frank sighed. "It might not be quite as simple as that," he said. "Do you remember what I told you about metaphors?"

Dick Whittington screwed up his face in concentration. "Never leave a metaphor out in the rain?"

"No, Dick. When that man said that the streets of London were paved with gold, what he really meant was-

But before Frank could finish, Dick Whittington started jumping up and down, pointing excitedly. "Look, Frank! Look at that sign!" he cried. "I never noticed it before. 'London - three miles'. We can be there in no time at all! Come on!"

And so Dick Whittington bundled all of his worldly possessions into a knapsack - his cobblestone, his best length of rope that he'd hardly gnawed on at all, and his cat, Frank. He put the knapsack over his shoulder and set off out of the village. To London!



About an hour later, Dick Whittington stood in Trafalgar Square and looked around him, puzzled. He set down his knapsack and let Frank out.

"Have we come to the right place?" he wondered. "Most of the people look as cold and as hungry as me. And the streets are paved with cobblestones and covered with mud and straw. Surely this can't be the London those rich gentlemen were talking about?"

"I think it is," said Frank.

"But where are the banquets? Where is the gold?"

"You have to earn gold, Dick," said the cat. "Remember what I told you about paid employment?"

Dick Whittington looked blank.

"The world of work?"



After another lecture in basic economics, Dick Whittington presented himself at the big iron gates of a forbidding-looking factory. He looked up at the huge chimney, billowing smoke.

"I don't want to go in there, Frank," he said. "I'm scared."

"Do you want to keep eating cobblestones?" chided Frank. "They're hiring. Come on."



*"But I am just an old carpenter," protested Ali Q'zan.  
"I don't know what to wear to a dragon's birthday party."*

Dick Whittington and Frank walked nervously through the gates and came to a small door in the factory wall. Dick Whittington gulped and knocked tentatively. After a moment, the door flew open. A thundering wall of noise - a rhythmic clattering and crashing like a vast metal army on the march - almost knocked the boy and his cat off their feet and paws respectively. A suspicious-looking old woman with a cruel mouth peered out at them. "What do you want?" she squawked.

"P-p-please excuse me, madam," stuttered Dick Whittington. "I-I-I'm looking for a j-j-job."

"A job? A job?" shrieked the old woman. "You're so skinny I'm surprised you can stand. And covered in leaves! Slept in a bush, no doubt! Why should I give you a job?"

"I... I..." stammered Dick Whittington.

"Although I see you have a cat," said the woman, looking at Frank. Frank stared back at her.

"Y-yes," said Dick Whittington. "His name is Frank."

"Hmm," said the woman thoughtfully. "We could do with a ratter, I suppose. Get in here, then, before I change my mind!"

The cruel-mouthed woman led Dick Whittington and Frank into the factory. It was a hubbub of noise and whirling machinery and hurrying people that Dick Whittington could not make head nor tail of.

"W-what do you do in this factory?" asked Dick Whittington.

"Do? What do we do?" scowled the woman. "We make banquets! Banquets for the Lord Mayor!"

"Banquets?!?" cried Dick Whittington, exchanging a glance with Frank and starting to drool.

"Yes, banquets. Now, this is the Pudding Department -" They had arrived in a large, sweet-smelling room full of rushing conveyor belts. "This is where the tubs of ice cream come off the production line..."

"Ice cream?!?"

"Yes, swan-flavoured ice cream for the Lord Mayor's pudding. Your job is to pick up the tubs of ice cream when they come off the belt, and stack them up in the cold room over there. And if you so much as take one single lick of that ice cream - well, so help me God, I'll-" And the cruel-mouthed woman's twisted face left Dick Whittington in no doubt of the consequences.

"Now get to work. You've got twelve hours ahead of you. The cat can come with me to the oven room and keep down the rats."



Ten hours later, Dick Whittington was very miserable indeed. He was colder than he had ever been, having spent the day hugging the freezing tubs of ice cream to himself and stacking them up in the slippery cold room, which was kept at a perishing temperature. And all day long he'd been staring at the labels on the ice-cream tubs, which all showed a fat, smiling swan with a napkin round his long neck, tucking into a huge bowl of delicious-looking ice cream, and that had made him hungrier than he had ever been, too.

Dick Whittington queued up with Frank and a load of other miserable orphans for his pay. "It's all right for you," he remarked, looking at Frank. "You've been in the warm all day with lots of rats to eat. I'd better get plenty of gold."

But when they got to the head of the queue, the cruel-mouthed woman had a surprise for them. "No coins left!" she said. "Ralph forgot to go to the bank. You'll have to be paid in... these beans."

"Beans?" said Dick Whittington.

"Don't let her get away with that!" cried Frank. "You've worked a full day! You have rights!"

"They're, ah, magic beans," said the woman.

"Magic beans?" said Dick Whittington. "Well - I suppose if they're magic beans..."

Frank clapped his paws over his eyes.



"These beans taste revolting!" cried Dick Whittington, ten minutes later, as he and Frank stood in Trafalgar Square. "And I don't think they're magic at all."

"I did try and tell you," said Frank. "You should have insisted that she pay you in money."

"She was a very mean woman. I hate these beans, and I hate London! Come on, Frank, we're leaving!" And with that, Dick Whittington hurled the beans to the ground and strode off towards the village.



They were half way to the village, Frank explaining about the difference between the Invisible Hand of Adam Smith (what he called 'metaphorical' magic) and magic beans (what he called 'bollocks'), when Dick Whittington came to a stop.

"Hush, Frank! Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"The church bells in London! They're - it sounds as if they're talking to me!"

"That seems unlikely," said Frank, with a sigh. "It sounds more as though they're raising the alarm."

"No, no - it's very clear. Listen. It's like a rhyme: *Turn again, Whittington, once Mayor of London!*"

Frank rolled his eyes. Dick Whittington continued: "*Turn again, Whittington, twice Mayor of London! Turn again, Whittington, thrice Mayor of London!* Frank! The bells! They're telling me I'm going to be Mayor of London *three times!*"

"That's what they're telling you, right."

"It's like a sign or something! Quick! We must hurry back to London right away."



Back in London, the duo met with a horrible sight. Most of the buildings were on fire. Blood stained the cobbles. Men, women and children, chopped into pieces, lay about on the ground.

Dick Whittington and Frank staggered around the streets, horrified. The carnage was everywhere. Soon, they came upon the prone body of the cruel-mouthed old woman - she was still alive!

"Who? Who has done this?" asked Dick Whittington, grabbing her by the lapels and shaking her.

The woman coughed and some blood came out of her eye. "V-Vikings!" she said.

"Vikings?" said Dick Whittington. "But from where?"

"They came... they came down that!" she said, pointing. Dick Whittington followed the old woman's finger with his eyes - and there in the middle of Trafalgar Square, rising right up into the sky, was the biggest beanstalk that he had ever seen!

"Oh," said Dick Whittington. "Oh. I think I might know something about that."



*Out of the trees, a sibilant figure wriggles towards you.  
It is a SEA-HORSE, and you must fight it!*

Just then, there came a rough shout. Dick Whittington and Frank looked up from the dying woman to see a group of fierce, burly men in horned helmets rounding the corner. A Viking patrol! The boy and his cat ran, leaving the woman to her fate. They didn't stop until they reached the canal beside the banquet factory.

"Oh woe!" said Dick Whittington, bending over to catch his breath. "Vikings! I have brought Norse destruction upon London town!"

"Hey, it's not your fault," said Frank, laying a tender paw on the boy's shoulder. "You weren't to know those beans would produce a fast-growing stalk that would lead to Viking lands in the sky."



*"Are you sure he's the mascot for the Miami Dolphins?" whispered Julia.*

"I suppose."

"It was an accident waiting to happen."

"Yes. But I can't help feeling slightly responsible. What are we g-"

But Dick Whittington was interrupted by the familiar uncouth shouting. A Viking longboat full of angry Viking raiders was speeding down the canal toward them!

"Run!" screamed Dick Whittington and Frank. They hurtled toward the banquet factory.

"How ever did they get that longboat down the beanstalk?" wondered Frank, as they raced through the factory grounds. Dick Whittington barely had time to shout that he was sure he didn't know before more Vikings jumped out of a bush in front of them.

"Aiiiiieeeee!!!!" yelled the pair. They veered toward the factory and saw a small door labelled 'ICE CREAM DELIVERIES'. Quick as a flash, they were through it. They were in a large room filled with stacks of swan-flavoured ice cream tubs. Much of the ice cream was melting as it had been out too long - the factory workers hacked to pieces, no doubt - and the floor was slick with half-thawed puddles of dessert and blood. But the pair ran nimbly across it with no trouble at all; Dick Whittington because he had spent all day working in the ice cream room and he was used to such spillages, Frank because he was a cat and was good at that sort of thing. At the far end of the room, they paused to look back and saw a comical sight - the Vikings were slipping and sliding all over the place!

But Dick Whittington and Frank were still in danger, so they ran on into the deserted banquet factory, tearing down gangways and racing up stairs until they came

to a little office at the very top of the chimney.

"I think... I think we shall be safe here, Frank," said an exhausted Dick Whittington.

And with that, he fell asleep in a ledger.



"Ice cream ... mufflers ... a talking cat ... beans ... Vikings!!!" Dick Whittington woke with a start and sat bolt upright. Frank was stretched out on a desk in front of him, licking his own tummy. "Frank! Oh, Frank, I just had the strangest dream. Where are..?" He looked around. There was a graph showing sherry trifle sales over a three-year period that he didn't recognise from the ditch where he usually slept. "Oh."

"I got you some breakfast," said Frank, pointing at a box of canapés on the floor. "There's a store room just down the corridor."

"Oh, Frank," said the boy as he stuffed his face with miniature pizzas. "What are we going to do about the Vikings?"

"I've been thinking about that," said Frank. "I've been watching these Vikings from the window. Using that telescope."

Dick Whittington looked up and was surprised to see a large brass telescope. It must have had a refracting lens of at least six inches.

"Luckily for us, the owner of this banquet factory must have had an interest in the sky at night."

"Or his neighbour," said Dick Whittington, leafing through a stack of rather racy sketches of a young woman hanging corsets on a line.

"Yes. Anyway, I've been keeping an eye on these Vikings - observing their Viking ways, familiarising myself with their Viking habits - and it seems that they're a very cruel lot."

"Well, duh," said Dick Whittington, sniffing appreciatively at some prawn toast. "They're Vikings. Everyone knows that about Vikings."

"Yes, but they're extraordinarily cruel," said Frank. "People in general are cruel to other people, certainly, as a rule. Londoners are cruel to other people. That old woman - dead now, by the way, the Vikings chucked her in the canal -"

"Hooray!"

"- that old woman was cruel to you," continued Frank. "But: Vikings are not only cruel to other people. Vikings are cruel to their cats."

"Cruel to their cats?"

"Very cruel. They taunt them, they throw stones at them, and worst of all, they don't share their fish with them."

"Oh," said Dick Whittington, tucking into a little pastry parcel full of sausage-meat, or maybe it was pâté. "But - and I'm sorry if I seem insensitive - how does that help us? How does that help London?"

"Well, what do cats do?"

"Be insufferably cryptic? Ow!"

Frank withdrew his claws. "Try again?"

"Drink milk?"

"We catch rats! If it wasn't for us, the world would be crawling with rats."

"Go on."

"So - the Vikings are so cruel to us cats that I think I can persuade them to go on strike!"

"And then?"

"And then the Vikings will be overrun with rats!"

"Mm hm. Well, that won't be very pleasant for them, but they don't seem to worry about that sort of thing too much." Dick Whittington was idly looking through the telescope just then, watching a Viking ride a pig through an abattoir. The Viking came out the other side wearing a scarf made of offal and a huge smile on his ferocious Viking face. "Also, Vikings are a lot bigger than rats. I don't see how it would cause them a problem."

"Dick," said Frank, a sly smile spreading across his whiskers. "Have you ever heard of a tiny creature called *Yersinia pestis*?"

"What do you think?"

Frank sighed. "You stay here and stuff your face. I'll be back later." With that, he scurried off.

How mysterious cats are, Dick Whittington thought to himself. And then he decided to see how many miniature pork pies he could fit in his mouth.



Over the next few days, Frank was rarely in the office. He would occasionally come back to nap for an hour or so, or more usually to run off hundreds of pamphlets on the hand-cranked printing press that he found under a rug. Then he would disappear again.

Dick Whittington divided his time between eating - it seemed that the entire banquet factory was Viking-free, and he was diligently working his way through the stock - and looking through the telescope at London town to try and work out what Frank was doing out there. (Actually, he could eat and look through the telescope at the same time, although the eyepiece was getting a bit greasy.)

On the first day, the Vikings were definitely in charge. Vikings were everywhere on the streets, looting, patrolling, sometimes marshalling the few native survivors to put out fires or repair buildings.

On the second day, things were much the same, although he did see more cats out and about on the streets. It was hard to tell through the telescope, but when they met they looked like they were whispering to each other. Sometimes, a group of three or four cats would meet on a street corner and discuss something fervently. They would break up as soon as they saw any Vikings coming.



*“Sharon, I will never know why you picked this lot for the groups,” said Simon.  
“The dog is the only one that can sing!”*

On the third day, larger groups of cats were apparent. They hung about in groups, reading what Dick Whittington recognised as Frank's pamphlets. The Vikings paid them little heed.

The fourth day was the day of the march. Dick Whittington could see London's High Street quite well from his vantage point at the banquet factory, and he thought that every cat in the city must have been there. Frank was at the head of the feline mass. Their banners were a little amateurish, with a few too many paw prints for Dick Whittington's taste, but there was no mistaking their sense of purpose. The few Vikings that bothered to turn out and watch simply laughed at the sight.

On the fifth and sixth days, hundreds of cats stood on every corner, huddled round bins full of fire for warmth.

And on the seventh day, the Vikings began to die. Just a few, at first, and mainly the older ones or the ones who looked poorly to begin with. But soon Dick Whittington saw, as he munched on pheasant legs, Vikings with handkerchiefs over their faces pushing barrows of dead Vikings round the streets. These Vikings made great mounds of Viking bodies at street corners - usually opposite some striking cats - and burned them. The smell of burning Vikings reached as high as Dick Whittington's office. It usually made him reach for another sausage roll.



Frank burst through the office door.

"Dick! Come and look! Come now!"

"What is it? Can't I just look at it through the telescope?"

"No! Come quickly!"

"OK. Just a minute."

Pausing only to allow Dick Whittington to stuff some Scotch eggs in his pockets, the pair rushed out of the banquet factory.

"Where are we going?"

"Trafalgar Square!"

"But won't the Vikings..?"

"You'll see!" said Frank.



*Tolliver knew, as he prepared to weld on the helmet, that he would never see his old friend's foolish face again.*

They arrived in Trafalgar Square. There was a group of several Vikings there by one of the stone lions. But they weren't the fearsome barbarians that had so frightened Dick Whittington when they chased him into the banquet factory. They were drawn, haggard-looking figures, with defeat in their eyes. Some cats stood watching, paws crossed sternly in front of their chests.

"Look..." said a young tabby. "They're leaving."

And Dick Whittington and the cats watched as the Vikings wearily gathered up sacks of the few possessions they could be bothered to carry and started to clamber up the beanstalk.

"How? How did you do this?" asked Dick Whittington, turning to Frank in astonishment.

"You remember when I asked you if you'd ever heard of a tiny creature called *Yersinia pestis*?" said Frank.

"Um... no." said Dick Whittington.

"Well, *Yersinia pestis* is a tiny creature called a germ which causes plague," explained Frank. "Little *Yersinia pestises* live in the blood of rats. Fleas that bite rats get *Yersinia pestises* living inside their blood..."

"And then the fleas expel a gas that has all plague in it, and the Vikings breath it in!" declared Dick Whittington triumphantly.

"Well... that's close enough, I suppose."

"So the Vikings are all dead or gone - and they're not coming back. Look!"

Dick Whittington pointed - the Vikings were gone and the huge beanstalk was being hoisted up into the clouds.

"Yes. Pretty much all the Londoners are dead of plague, too," said Frank. "Or else the Vikings got them."

"Ah. So - I'm the only person left in London?"

"Looks like it."

"So - I can do anything I want?"

"I guess."

"Well, hooray! The bells were right! I declare myself Lord Mayor of London! Times three! Ha ha!"

Frank clapped his paws over his eyes. Dick Whittington jumped up and down, whooping, until he ran out of breath.

"There's just one thing I don't understand. How come I didn't get the plague?"

"Hmm," said Frank, eyeing the boy's newly rounded tummy, and the Scotch egg rolling out of his britches. "I think perhaps all that rich food at the banquet factory may have boosted your immune system."

"My what now?"

"Your immune system. My Lord Mayor."

"Hm, good thinking. Hey, how would you like to be bishop?"

And that is how it came to pass that the office of Bishop of London is always held by a cat.

**THE END**