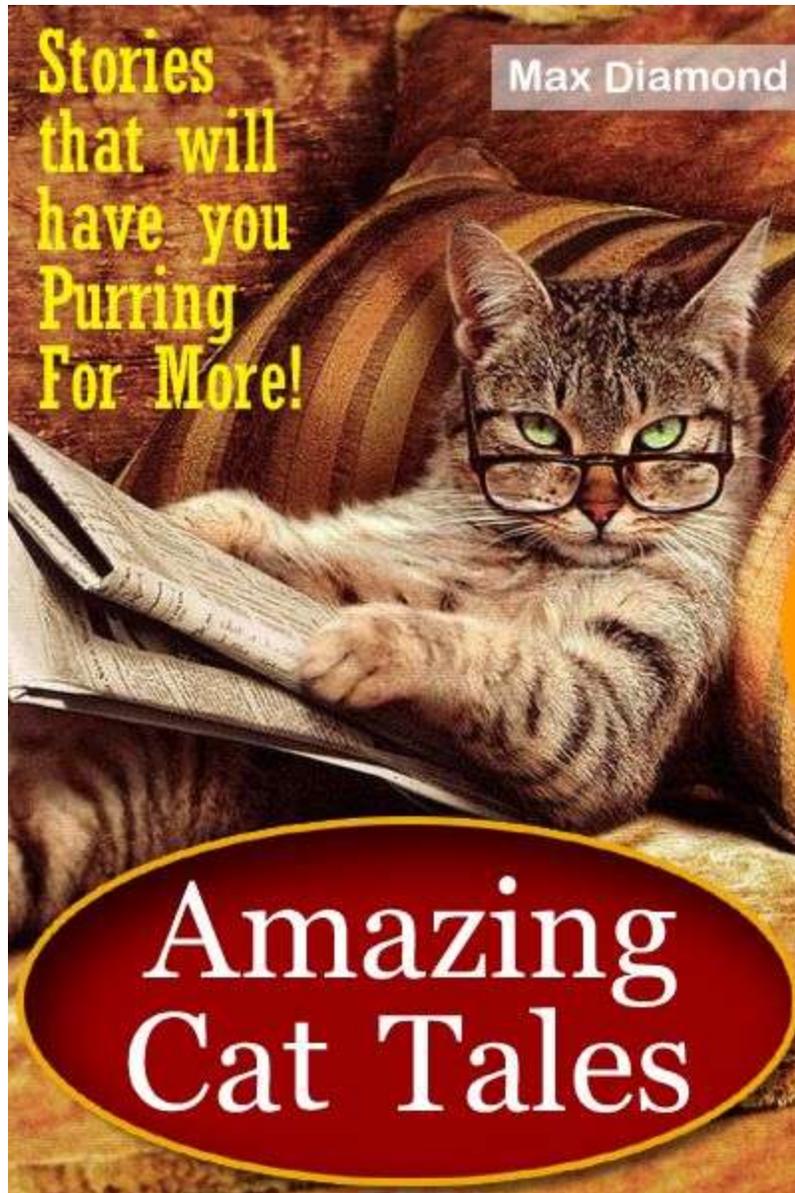


Stories
that will
have you
Purring
For More!

Max Diamond



Amazing Cat Tales

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Table of Contents

Cat Tales 1.....	5
Cat Tales 2.....	9
Cat Tales 3.....	13
Cat Tales 4.....	16
Cat Tales 5.....	20
Cat Tales 6.....	25
Cat Tales 7.....	28
Cat Tales 8.....	32
Cat Tales 9.....	37
Cat Tales 10.....	42
Cat Tales 11.....	45
Cat Tales 12.....	50
Cat Tales 13.....	54
Cat Tales 14.....	58
Cat Tales 15.....	62
Cat Tales 16.....	67
Cat Tales 17.....	70
Cat Tales 18.....	74
Cat Tales 19.....	77
Cat Tales 20.....	80
Cat Tales 21.....	84
Cat Tales 22.....	87
Cat Tales 23.....	90
Cat Tales 24.....	94
Cat Tales 25.....	99
Cat Tales 26.....	102
Cat Tales 27.....	106
Cat Tales 28.....	110
Cat Tales 29.....	115
Cat Tales 30.....	119
Cat Tales 31.....	122
Cat Tales 32.....	125
Cat Tales 33.....	128
Cat Tales 34.....	131
Cat Tales 35.....	136
Cat Tales 36.....	140
Cat Tales 37.....	143
Cat Tales 38.....	145
Cat Tales 39.....	148
Cat Tales 40.....	152
Cat Tales 41.....	157
Cat Tales 42.....	160
Cat Tales 43.....	164

Cat Tales 44.....	168
Cat Tales 45.....	171
Cat Tales 46.....	176
Cat Tales 47.....	180
Cat Tales 48.....	183
Cat Tales 49.....	185
Cat Tales 50.....	189

Cat Tales 1



When I was a boy, the cats I knew had jobs, like regular folks. Orange Tom, my father's favorite, and Tom's gray-haired female companion worked in our dairy barn keeping mice out of the feed. They earned a splash of fresh cow's milk twice a day.

It was a beneficial association, legitimate contract labor and one entirely appropriate to a cat's inherent dignity.

Things change. I have a cat now. No barn. Only a cat. My cat, Silky the Siamese, has no idea that mice and feed don't mix. Silky doesn't work for a living, a thing I thought common in the feline world.

I have Silky, the unemployed cat, because I wanted my wife.

After I met this really smart, funny, and sweet-smelling woman, after we had snuggled in movie theaters and held hands across restaurant tables and undertaken other semi-romantic adventures not requiring feline participation, she began to tell me more about herself, about her childhood, and about a female Siamese cat she'd had for more than twenty years. I learned Tammy, the cat's name, not the woman's, had recently gone to the Great Cat Heaven in the Sky.

The woman missed her greatly, and as she told me endearing stories of their two decades together, her eyes welled up with tears. Nothing will rearrange your opinion of cats like the smell of a woman's hair when she sits on your lap and puts her arms around your neck, which is an activity not requiring feline participation. Of course, the woman wasn't my wife when I first noticed how nice her hair smelled. But I didn't have a cat then, did I?

You and I know from personal experience that men can be shabby creatures, boastful, given to showing off, especially when trying to impress a woman. You know, too, that a man's audition for a lead role in any romantic drama tends toward the frenzied and implausible when a woman sheds tears. You'll not be surprised when I tell you the tears, plus the scent of this woman's hair, *lilacs? roses? lavender?*, had me thinking about finding a barn and kidnapping a cat.

I am not ashamed.

I came to my senses the next morning. I knew I'd trip over trouble if I couldn't distinguish the line between love, cats, and gallantry. Instead of committing a feline felony, I began to search eagerly through the want ad sections of every newspaper I could find. Finally, I stumbled onto the one thing that gave me hope that I might be able to waft in the fragrance of that soft brunette hair on a permanent basis:

Siamese kittens. No papers. Excellent pet quality. Two females. One male.

The phone number ending the advertisement belonged to a community a mere seventy miles away. "Hold me a kitten," I said to the woman who answered the telephone. "A female, please. I need that cat."

Few women can resist a man begging. She promised to keep a kitten until the upcoming weekend. It was simple to make up an excuse for a Saturday drive with the woman whose hair smelled nice. Early that morning we set out on the Great Cat Adventure.

Guess what? The place where the cat lived? It was next to a dynamite factory. An object lesson, an omen, an augury of things to come, I was to learn. The kitten was beautiful, I must admit. Better yet, it looked just like Tammy, the original. The woman was surprised and suitably impressed. More tears. A hug. I was allowed to sniff her hair for several minutes. I think she even purred, but I couldn't hear her because the kitten was yowling.

As we journeyed home, I discovered a minor flaw in the sequence of happy events I had envisioned unfolding post-cat acquisition. The woman and I were not married then, a

celebration my intuition had told me might be delayed until the cat had me housebroken. We set out, kitten on my lap, on the long drive home.

“Ouch! Geez, her little claws are like needles!” I said as we merged from the ramp onto the interstate and the kitten climbed onto my shoulder. “That’s why landlords like mine don’t allow people to have cats. Curtains, drapes, those sorts of things can get shredded,” said the woman, quite casually.

I looked down at the kitten. I licked the blood from the back of my hand. I realized I had no barn. The woman began to like me better and to love the cat dearly, but as the days and months passed, I began to think the cat and I simply shared the apartment like housemates who tolerate one another simply to avoid paying half the rent. The only time Silky appeared to enjoy my company was when I decided to have tuna for lunch. She liked the water from the can better than Orange Tom liked fresh cow’s milk.

The gentle *swish* when the can opener punctured the top may as well have been a fire alarm. Silky the cat appeared quicker than a volunteer fireman at a 9-1-1 call.

Otherwise, during those early years, I had to be asleep to be within touching distance of the creature. It appeared I had lived my entire life without understanding my feet make a perfect cat bed. If my feet were busy, Silky would agree to sleep on my chest, at least until my incipient asphyxiation. Blood oxygen levels are irrelevant to a Siamese’s idea of a good night’s rest.

This tale stumbled one step further toward its happily-ever-after ending when the woman whose hair smelled nice became my wife. We bought a house, and the three of us moved in together. Silky adored the woman. The woman adored Silky. I, having had the good sense to marry the woman, sometimes found myself acceptable cat furniture. I accepted those random moments in Silky’s company, stroking her fur and speculating on what was transpiring behind her bewitching blue eyes. I knew her presence meant I had been assigned a place in the Siamese universe. So opens the chapter in Silky’s biography where we introduce a new character, Beemer.

I’ve always liked dogs. I had become the owner of a house. Houses have yards. No yard is complete without a dog. I bought a dog. Simple male logic.

It began when the woman whose hair smelled nice decided she disliked her Volkswagen and wanted a new car. “A BMW is nice,” she offered. “So are dogs,” I agreed.

A successful marriage involves compromise. We bought the dog instead of the car. I named the dog Beemer, even though he was neither German nor a shepherd.

One minor problem. Silky the cat hated Beemer the dog. Despised, detested, abhorred him, found him obnoxious to the third power. How do I know that? Because Silky soiled

the carpet. In front of me. While looking disparagingly at the dog. I shrugged my shoulders and tried to appear innocent. The soiling continued, leading me to a fundamental discovery relating to cats and discipline. Yelling doesn't work. Neither does a clean litter box. Neither does escorting them to the door and politely suggesting alternate sites.

Buying a tile floor does help, though. I only wish Beemer had told us he didn't like our company and had moved out before I bought the tile floor. *C'est la vie*. At least *avec des chats*.

For years, my primary contact with Silky came only at night, during tuna lunches, and while she sat on my lap to await my wife's attention. That regular intersection of our two not-quite-parallel lives continued until a few days after she ate forty-two inches of thread and then refused to eat anything at all. Veterinarians extract thread from a cat's interior at a cost of precisely \$15.42 per inch, in case you're interested.

Upon her return home, I mentioned the expense to Silky, holding the bright blue credit card

in front of her. She rubbed against it with her nose and hopped into my wife's lap. Orange Tom, I'm certain, would have offered to get a second job.

For nearly two decades, I, like the graceful blue-point feline, have tuned myself to respond with affection and appreciation for the love the woman creates and shares. Silky continues to sleep on my feet, acknowledging in her own way that I am part of peace and joy in our home, a refuge that comforts the three of us taking rest on our marriage bed. I try now to never disturb the cat, having learned that the serene rhythm of her breathing resonates from the bottom of the bed and into my heart.

I no longer eat meat, but Silky still craves tuna water, and so the cans are hers alone. Other things have changed as well.

The woman we both adore once insisted on driving seventy miles, in the opposite direction this time, presupposing a belief in Siamese yin and yang, to purchase Dickie, a male kitten of the species. She had the quaint idea that if one Siamese did not revere me, one of the opposite sex might hold a different opinion. A faulty hypothesis, and another story altogether. One which would begin with my early recognition that Dickie, too, would never be the sort to understand that cats are supposed to work for a living.

It doesn't matter. I still don't have a barn.

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Cat Tales 2



Jane stands outside the front door and braces herself. If she completes this mission, then surely anything is possible. “Here goes nothing,” she says to herself as she pushes down the door handle. She enters the kitchen, trying not to look too rushed while simultaneously trying not to look too conspicuous.

Her mother is where she always is at this time of day; standing over the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes for an army of three. She doesn’t look at Jane. She doesn’t need to look to know that one of her daughters has arrived home from school. “You’re late, Jane,” her mother says without missing a stroke of the peeler. “Yeah, I got caught up on the way out of school,” Jane replies. Not a complete lie, just not the whole truth. Jane didn’t want to tell any more lie’s than necessary; besides, her mother had a built-in lie detector that was on permanent transmission.

“Caught up?” Jane’s mum asks. “Yeah, I got chatting with Pam about this boy she fancies. You know how it is, Mum—girl stuff.” Jane’s mother gives a compulsory “*tut*” and raises an eyebrow at the potato in her hand. “Dinner will be ready about five o’clock. Have you got any homework?” her mother asks. “Loads,” Jane answers, bounding up the stairs.

Again, not a lie, just not the immediate truth. Jane did have homework, just not school related. Jane seizes the handle of her bedroom door, makes sure the coast is clear, and then slides into her room and firmly shuts the door. She sighs in relief, but in the next instant wonders whether her mother suspected anything. *Better not to think about it,*

Jane tells herself as she moves toward her bed. She carefully puts her hand into her coat pocket and pulls out the illegal load she has just managed to smuggle into the house.

The tiny black kitten sits on Jane's bed, looking groggy and confused. Jane goes over to the wardrobe, not taking her eyes off the precious package, and removes a plastic cat bowl she'd stashed away a few days earlier. She scoops out some tuna from a tin she'd stolen from the kitchen this morning and mashes it into the dish, which she places on the floor. She looks over at her new friend, who is currently sniffing a pillowcase. Mrs. Jameson had said she might not eat straight away and would need time to settle into her new home.

As Jane watched the kitten circling her bed, leaving tiny paw dents in the duvet, she thought about what to call her. "You definitely look like a Sophie," she finally decides, not really knowing why. "Yes, Sophie it is!" Jane declares, smiling brightly at the kitten.

"The kittens were born at three this morning," Pam told Jane on the way to school several weeks ago. "Mum says you can come over in a few weeks and pick which one you want. I'd go for the small black one; she's a real cutie. I still can't believe you managed to persuade your mum to let you have one. You sure it's still okay?" Pam asked as they turned the corner onto Thornhill Mews.

"Yeah, why wouldn't it be?" Jane replied a little too quickly, knowing full well why it wouldn't be okay and, more to the point, why it isn't okay. She hadn't asked her mother; she already knew what the answer would be. Her mother had no love for pets of any kind, no matter how adorable. The answer would have been no, plain and simple. So she never mentioned the kittens to her mother.

Jane had it all planned out. She would bring home one of the kittens and keep it hidden in her bedroom until it was old enough to go outside. She would let the kitten go outside via the blossom tree conveniently located underneath Jane's bedroom window. The tricky part would be keeping the kitten concealed in her room, but she had already thought that through. Her mother came into her bedroom only when it was a mess, when she needed to put away Jane's clothes, and when she changed the bed linens. As long as Jane kept her room tidy and put away her own laundry and changed her own bedding, there would be no need for her mother to come into her room. The rest of the plan would be easy.

"Wow, Jane! What's that?" Sara, Jane's elder sister, cries as she, quite rudely, enters Jane's room unannounced. "Quick, shut the door and keep your voice down, will you!" Jane whispers loudly while shutting the door behind Sara, who appears immobilized by the new visitor. "Is that what I think it is?" Sara asks, knowing full well that it is. Sara hurries to the bed and begins stroking Sophie's tiny head, besotted in their first meeting. "Jane, Mum is

going to have a fit. I take it she doesn't know?" "And she's not going to, either," Jane says, sitting next to her sister on the bed.

"You can't hide a kitten, Jane," Sara says in a mature manner. "It would be difficult enough hiding it from anyone else's mum, but this is our mum we are talking about, the all-seeing, all-knowing presence."

Sara leaves this thought with Jane for a moment before asking if the kitten has a name. "Sophie, her name is Sophie," Jane replies with a note of sadness creeping into her voice.

"Dare I ask how Sophie ended up in your bedroom?" Sara inquires.

Jane sighs and tells her sister how she picked up the kitten from Pam's house after school and smuggled her into the house. She tells Sara how she plans to keep Sophie hidden in her bedroom until she is old enough to go outside. Sara doesn't look convinced.

"You will never get away with it," she says as she tickles Sophie's exposed tummy. "Mum will find her. She will probably smell her before she sees her. What are you going to do about toileting Sophie?" Jane pulls out a litter tray from underneath her bed. "Ta-dah!" she sings. "A slight problem . . . there is no litter in it," Sara observes. "I know. I managed to save up enough money for the tray but not enough for the litter."

"And what are you going to do about food? She can't live off stolen tins of tuna," Sara says, now beginning to sound very much like their mother. "Oh, but look at her, Sara! Just look at how fluffy and vulnerable she is. Would you have been able to refuse such a tiny, precious angel?" Jane protests. Gazing into the sweet face and sorrowful eyes of Sophie, Sara takes a deep breath. "No, I probably wouldn't. I am with you on the cuteness thing. I think I would have struggled to bring home just the one. Joking aside, though, you are going to have to tell mum. It wouldn't be fair on Sophie." "But she'll make me get rid of her. I'll have to take her back to Pam. I don't want to. Sophie is mine." Jane sniffles.

"You never know, Mum might let you keep her," Sara says. Looking first at Sophie and then at her sister, a frown of doubt clouds Sara's face. "On second thought, she probably won't. But think of it this way, if you don't tell Mum and she finds Sophie, she will just take her away without you having a chance to say good-bye." Jane looks sadly at Sophie, who already appears to have settled in well and is playfully attacking Jane's favorite teddy bear.

"Dinner's ready!" their mother's voice trails up the stairs and under Jane's door. Even Sophie stops what she is doing.

"Coming!" calls Sara. "You are going to have to tell her, Jane. Tell her now before it is too late." Carefully shutting Jane's door, the girls make their way to the dining room and

take up their usual places at the dinner table. Their mum sets the steaming plates of shepherd's pie in front of them and instructs the girls to dig in.

"Everything all right at school?" she asks, aimed at no specific daughter. "Everything is fine, Mum," Sara speaks up. "Nothing new to report!" "What about you, Jane? Anything exciting to tell me? Any school gossip?" she asks. Jane looks blankly at her mother, then at Sara.

Should she tell her now or wait until after their dinner? Her mouth is open, suspended in midair as the silent confession floats out across the dinner table, dancing in front of her mother's eyes, mingling with the steam from the shepherd's pie. "Ooh, before I forget, I have some good news," their mother says cheerily. "I was in the supermarket last week and bumped into Linda, you know, Pam's mum." Jane's heart stopped beating, she was sure of it.

Ever so slowly, daring not even to blink, she looked over at Sara for reassurance.

"Do you know, she was telling me about that cat of hers, Poncho, the one they thought was a boy and turned out to be a girl," their mother continues. "Well, she had a litter of kittens a few weeks back, and Linda is having a difficult job finding homes for them. Now, I am not keen on household pets, but I couldn't help thinking how you two have never had a pet of your own and, now that you're both a bit older, it might be nice to have something to call your own. It might teach you a bit of responsibility. What do you think, girls?"

Jane didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She couldn't believe her ears. What was she going to do now? She was still going to have to confess, and that would be it, her mum would be so upset they wouldn't be allowed any cat at all. Here was their one chance to have a pet, and now she'd blown it. Why hadn't she asked her mum? Jane was on the verge of tears as her mother stood up to go get some water for the table.

A large grin elongated her face as she looked down at Jane. "Besides," she says, "you'll need a friend for the one upstairs." Then off she strolled to the kitchen, but not before aiming a well-timed wink at Sara.

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Cat Tales 3



Sierra, a full-grown cougar, had come to us more than two years earlier, when the breeder who'd sold us our first male cub asked if we were open to taking another big cat. These mountain lions were many generations in captivity and hadn't been taken from the wild, but Sierra had been neglected to the point of abuse and removed from her previous home. That's all we needed to know, and we became a two-cat family.

My husband, Allen, built a thirty-two-foot by thirty-two-foot enclosure for our cats, divided into two equal sections by a chain-link wall in the middle. A door in the dividing wall gave us the option of turning them in together. We left large Douglas fir trees growing throughout the space, with the chain-link roof cut out to fit around their trunks. Allen built a couple of platforms several feet off the ground, where the cats could lie in the sun and survey their kingdom. He dug underground dens for privacy as well as for warmth in the winter. Sierra didn't accept Spunky, our half-grown male, so each of the cats had their own den and a large space to run and play.

Sierra's previous home had housed her in a small, gravel-floored kennel, and the pads of her feet were sore and raw from constant pacing. Instead of receiving the raw meat big cats need, she'd been fed dry dog food, and her coat reflected the poor diet.

If Allen approached Sierra's enclosure, she ran to the far side, snarling, hissing, and backing into the corner. She snapped and swatted at him, so he gave her space and time to adjust. He spent dozens of hours outside her natural enclosure, sitting silently or talking softly, before finally stepping inside the door and sinking onto the ground. Weeks passed before Sierra quit crouching in fear or running to the other side of her home, and more time went by before she allowed Allen to touch her.

The vet advised against spaying Sierra, as it could cause a hormonal imbalance. But the cougar-screams she emitted while in heat wore on us, so we decided breeding her might be a better option. Eventually, Sierra came to trust and accept Allen, but we had no idea how that trust had deepened into love until Sierra gave birth to her first litter of cubs.

That day, I noticed Sierra hadn't been out of her underground den for a couple of hours. Rather than exhibiting the normal pacing she'd been doing the past couple of days, she'd stayed hidden from sight. Because she was an inexperienced mother, we couldn't predict how she'd be with her little ones, so Allen was prepared to intervene, if necessary.

"Allen, you'd better check on Sierra," I called to my husband. "I think she might be having her cubs." Moments later, the sound of his rapid footsteps coming down the steps emphasized his excitement. Sierra was his own special project.

During the fifteen years of our marriage, most of the animals we'd owned were mine or our kids'. That changed with the arrival of our big cats.

"I'll take a look," Allen replied and jogged up the slight rise to her kennel. He unlocked the door and stepped in, carefully closing it behind him. He watched for a few minutes before speaking. "You're right. She's in her den and not coming out." I stayed outside the chain-link enclosure and kept quiet, because Sierra was a one-man cat and didn't like women. The last thing we wanted was a spooked, upset mountain lion trying to give birth. Allen lay flat on his stomach and shone his flashlight into the den. "I think she's already had her babies," he called over his shoulder. "I see only one. I'm going in a little farther. She might be lying on one of them." His shoulders disappeared, and he remained there for several minutes. Then he slowly backed out. "There are two cubs. I'm going to stay close but give her some space. They look okay, but I'd feel better waiting awhile."

Allen settled onto the ground near Sierra's den. Fifteen minutes or so passed, then Sierra poked out her head with a newborn, still-damp kitten in her mouth. She glanced at Allen, then headed in the opposite direction and began to pace, apparently unsure what to do with this little bit of fluff. Allen took the opportunity to crawl into the den

and check on the other baby. "It looks smaller than the other one," his voice drifted out to where I sat on a stump outside the enclosure.

"Do you think it's healthy?" "Yeah, I think so. It just looks a little underdeveloped." He backed out of the den and scooted away from the opening. "I'm going to keep an eye on her. I don't want her hurting one." Poor Mama didn't know what the little creatures were; worse yet, she had no clue what to do with them. Finally, she deposited the larger cub on the fir needles and headed back underground.

Easing up off the forest floor, Allen walked over quietly and scooped up the baby. He met Sierra at the door of her den as she crawled out with the second cub in her mouth. Holding out the baby, Allen showed it to Sierra, then he crawled partway back into her den and deposited the little one inside. This cycle of behavior continued for some time, with Sierra repeatedly bringing out each of the two babies, carrying them around for several minutes, and dropping them, and then Allen picking them up and returning them to the safety of the den, before Sierra finally calmed down and stayed inside with her cubs. Allen checked on the new mother throughout the night, and I kept an eye on her the next day, with no repetition of her nervous behavior. But something new transpired on Allen's arrival home. Sierra always reacted when he got out of the car and called her name each afternoon. She'd chirp and answer him repeatedly, until Allen went into her enclosure and scratched behind her ears and she rubbed against his legs in welcome. Often, he'd stay for thirty minutes, visiting with her, sitting on the ground beside her or on a nearby stump or large rock.

A few days after the cubs' birth, when Allen sat on the ground, the big cat trotted back to her den and returned with a kitten in her mouth. I'd brought our two children up to the enclosure in hope of seeing the babies, but I got a bit nervous when the new mother seemed to be repeating her bizarre behavior of a few days before. But instead of pacing, she walked to where Allen sat and gently laid the tiny, spotted cub on his lap. Then she went back into the den and returned with the second baby, depositing that one, too, on his lap. As the kids and I gazed in silent astonishment, Sierra sank down on the ground, laid her head against Allen's leg, and began to purr. Allen sat entranced, in near disbelief at the behavior of his big cat. The endless hours he'd spent sitting on the soft ground of her enclosure had returned a magnificent reward. A creature rarely seen in the wild and feared by humans for centuries had finally grown beyond her fear of people enough to trust one man and to share her family with the man who'd won her heart.

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Cat Tales 4



I thought we were adopting a cat.” I froze in shock at the first sight of our tiny new housemate.

“Oh, it’s a cat,” my wife, Roz, assured me. “I’ll take your word for it.” It did resemble a little white kitten from the nose to about halfway back. The rest looked like a low-budget robotics project. Its hindquarters were shaved bald, and most of them were covered by a series of bandages, splints, and braces all the way down past its back paws. The vet had been merciful enough to leave the fur on the tail. When the robotic kitty creature walked across the floor, its trussed-up hind legs chugged along like a steam locomotive while the splints clacked across the linoleum. The bandaging job was so thorough that we were a long time guessing

whether it was a he or a she.

Bob became ours (or did we become Bob's?) after a series of tearful pleas on the part of Roz's friend Carol, who needed to find a new home either for the cat or for herself. Roz and I had recently transferred to my new duty station in the Philippines and obtained married housing, which allowed pets. It was a perfect match for everyone, but me. I was outvoted.

"He will be Bob. Nobody better have a problem with that." I did my best to save some face in the deal. Carol began to protest as she had already been calling it Fluffy or Mittens or some other name no self-respecting cat would choose for itself. But my foot was down. I'd been walked on enough.

Just because a cat lands on its feet doesn't mean it can walk away from the fall. Bob was living proof of that. One day as the kitten was exploring, it climbed too high up a palm tree to figure out a way down. Carol heard mews for help and asked one of the groundskeepers

to help get the poor little thing out of the tree. Before Carol could comprehend the cultural differences between the American and Filipino for "get that poor little thing out of the tree," the grounds-keeper assented with a cheerful smile and "No problem, ma'am" and shinnied up the tree, rake in hand. Carol's cries of "Wait!" went unheard as the groundskeeper approached the kitten, who was poised for battle. She watched in horror as the kitten lost two battles: first with the rake handle, then with gravity.

She ran to the kitten where it landed, ignoring the groundskeeper and leaving him baffled

that his cheerful efficiency and bravery were not rewarded with some gratuity. Carol rushed the kitten to the base vet, who worked a miracle or two with pins and chicken wire and lots of kitty anesthesia. The finished product was now interrupting her perusal of her new digs to

look me over. Bob and I did not take too long to get used to one another, and the kitten displayed moments of actual affection after it discovered I was capable of filling the food dish.

Before we knew it, the splints and bandages were off, revealing the even more grotesque-looking bald hindquarters and surgery scars. It was then we learned that Bob was, in fact, a she. (We later learned a bit of kitty genetics: her black and brown calico spots were a dead giveaway to her gender, as all calicos are female.)

With her legs back, Bob was getting around pretty well. The fur on her hindquarters grew back, and she came to resemble a cat rather than a character from an old science fiction B-movie. Bob did her best to be normal, but her injuries gave her some limitations. She could run, but a bit sideways and always with a limp. We had to be careful how we handled her, lest we aggravate something or other that never quite

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