

Title: A Cat's Tale

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Summary: A frightened young cat runs away from danger, but fate returns it to the path of destiny.

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Category: The Untold Story

Warnings: none

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A Cat's Tale

Chapter 1 -- Retreat and Rescue

The frightened young cat crouched under a bush across the street from its home.

The cat was not quite two years old. It was not much older than the human baby that had intruded into the nice quiet home the cat had adopted. The cat liked the woman in its home. She was attentive and nice. The cat sensed affection from the woman and returned it. The man in its home was indifferent. But the baby was more intolerable every day.

The cat liked peace and quiet, but after the baby arrived, there was nothing but noise and chaotic activity that only abated when they all mercifully went to sleep. But the night was usually interrupted by the baby's crying. Even the mice would flee from it, which spoiled everything.

The worst thing of all was the small broomstick the baby had been given after it had learned to crawl. The baby raced around on it so fast that the cat had difficulty getting out of the way. One time, the cat was knocked over and sent headlong into a potted house plant. It was terrifying. After that, whenever the baby was racing about, the cat would cower under the furniture.

The cat had thought about finding a new home, but the woman remained nice and never forgot to feed it -- even with nearly all her attention focused on the baby. So the cat stayed.

The man and woman had many friends who would visit, even more so after the baby arrived. The cat generally stayed out of sight, except when the very old woman who lived nearby would visit. She always brought a treat for the cat, so the cat would appear for her and rub up against her legs. When the cat was outside, it would visit the old woman's house and see if she were in her garden and then beg for a treat. In return for the treats, the cat would hunt for garden pests.

There was one visitor the cat did not like. It was a small man who did not smell right. The cat hated his smell. The first time the cat had met the man, it had hissed at him and been shooed off by the nice woman. After that, the cat stayed out of sight whenever the wrong-smelling man was there.

Now, still cowering under the bush, the cat remembered smelling the wrong-smelling man just moments before in the front garden of its home. But now the smell was worse -- mixed with the odor of rat pee. That was new, but it was not even a true rat pee smell, it was different, more like strange-rat pee smell on the wrong-smelling man. Disgusting! The cat instinctively wanted to attack whatever it was.

But the cat did not move. It was afraid. Something bad had just happened. There had been loud noises and shouting. A stranger had entered the house and killed the man. The cat had intended to follow the nice woman carrying the baby upstairs but had been blocked in the hall by the man as he was facing the stranger.

There had been a flash of bright light and the man had fallen. The stranger had looked at the cat and the cat had seen a snakelike face with evil red eyes. The cat thought the stranger must be a daemon and it froze in fear. The stranger turned and walked past the cat toward the stairs, stepping over the man. The cat, seeing the open front door, made a mad dash for it. It raced out the door, down the path, through the front gate and across the street to hide under the bush, where it still cowered.

The cat heard the nice woman shouting and then screaming. Moments later there was a tremendous noise and a large portion of the roof of its home flew in

pieces in all directions. Dogs began barking in the nearby houses and yards. Some people turned on their lights and looked out windows or came outside and looked around, but soon went back inside. Only the old woman, who always gave the cat treats, came all the way to the gate of the cat's home.

The cat was still frightened and remained hidden under the bush. The old woman stood outside the gate for some time. Then, without warning, a tall old man with long hair and beard suddenly appeared beside her. The cat had seen the tall man before when he visited the man and woman in its home. The two people went through the gate together and into its home. The cat could hear them talking. Then the old woman came out and stood by the gate again.

After some more time, an enormous man walked out of the darkness and stood beside the old woman. The cat had seen him before too. He always smelled of many strange animals, but the cat had learned the enormous man did not like cats. He always sneezed whenever the cat got near him and shoed it off. The old woman sent the big man into the house.

Sometime later, the old man came out. The old man and woman talked for a while by the gate. He waved a stick at the house a few times and then the old man disappeared.

The old woman turned to leave and then stopped. She was staring at the bush across the street. The cat sensed that the woman was looking at it and its fear diminished enough to let out a small meow. The old woman smiled and beckoned to the cat.

The cat, sensing protection, eagerly left its hiding place and ran to the old woman, jumping up into her beckoning arms. The old woman turned and began walking back to her house speaking soothingly to the cat. The cat looked back across the old woman's arm and could see its home growing smaller, knowing instinctively, that everything it had known was gone.

The cat would never approach its former home again.

Chapter 2 -- New Home and Loss Again

The old woman was nice to the cat for several years and the cat was quite content. But then problems began to occur. The old woman would sometimes

forget to feed the cat, or forget to let the cat out, or forget to let it back inside. These problems grew worse as time passed. It seemed to the cat that the old woman could no longer hear because she did not respond to its meowing -- even its loudest caterwauling.

Then one morning, the old woman again forgot to let the cat inside. The cat patiently waited as usual at the back door. But this day, the old woman never came out to tend her garden as she eventually always did. Another day and night passed. The cat had to hunt for food rather than for entertainment.

The next morning, the old woman again did not come outside. The cat desperately tried caterwauling and jumping onto various windowsills and pawing at the windowpanes to get the old woman's attention. The cat could sometimes see the old woman moving around inside its home but could not get her attention. The cat tried this for several days to no avail and concluded the old woman no longer wanted it. So, the cat moved on.

For some weeks, the cat tried to adopt several families in the village, but none seemed interested. Homes with dogs could be dangerous and there were many of them. So the cat was forced to hunt to survive. At first, it was not particularly good at full-time survival hunting, having enjoyed the beneficence of humans for so long. But with practice and time, the cat became proficient, and the village mouse and rat population had something else to fear.

One night while chasing a particularly challenging rat, a large noisy vehicle appeared suddenly in the roadway directly in their path and stopped. As the door opened and a woman got out, the terrified rat jumped through the open door and dashed past a startled man up a curving flight of stairs. The cat followed the rat without hesitation, brushing the man's leg as it went past him.

The cat could hear the man shouting and some passengers screaming as the cat pursued the rat under the seats and in and around the feet of the people in the vehicle. The cat felt the vehicle suddenly lurch and then continue jostling violently, which made it difficult for the cat to corner the rat. But it finally did so after following it up yet another stairway. The cat pounced on the rat and bit its neck as it tried to double back around a large box at the far end. The cat heard the sound of praise from a large woman whose feet had been lifted high off the floor and were now resting on the box.

The man whose leg the cat had brushed while jumping onto the vehicle had followed predator and prey and now tried to pick up the cat. But the cat was hungry, and it did not want to risk losing its only meal of the day -- an especially big fat juicy one. So it scampered away from the man and dashed down the two sets of stairs. As it reached the bottom landing, the vehicle lurched to a halt and the door opened once again. The cat leapt off the vehicle still carrying its prey in its mouth. It turned and ran under the vehicle and then paused. From there it was able to see the entrance to a small nearby alley. The cat raced out from under the bus and into the alley where it soon found a hiding place behind a large bin.

The cat dropped the rat and took a few moments to catch its breath while it gazed back into the street. Amazingly, the large vehicle seemed to vanish. Then the cat settled down and enjoyed its meal. After a very pleasurable session of cleaning and grooming, the cat explored the alley. There were abundant signs of rats, many more than in the old village. As the cat was beginning to think this situation could work out, it was suddenly confronted by a very large and battle-scarred tom cat. This alley was its territory, and the intruding cat was chased out and into the street.

Then it began to rain.

Chapter 3 -- Magical Menagerie

The cat huddled from the rain in the meager shelter of a nearby doorway. The doorway was not providing much protection and at the point when the cat had almost decided to seek better shelter, the door opened. Without hesitation, the cat launched itself inside as two people came out and it scampered toward the darkest corner of the room where it crouched under a bench.

There were many people in the room sitting at tables and talking. The room was smoky and dimly lit by candles. The cat was wet, but it was much warmer here than outside. There was an inviting fire blazing in the fireplace across the room and a well-worn hearthrug before it. The cat wanted to curl up and sleep on it, close by fire, but that desire was overridden by its foremost desire not to be seen. So the cat waited.

After a long time, all the people had gone except one. It was a hairless old man who was bent over and did not appear to have any teeth. Finally he put out all the candles by waiving a stick and then went upstairs. He had left the fire going

and the cat immediately moved to curl up in front of it on the hearth rug. The cat was now properly warm and had a full stomach. It thought the day had ended rather well and wondered if this would be its new home.

The cat slept soundly and heard the footfalls too late. As it instinctively leapt up and began to run, the cat felt its whole body go rigid and it fell on its side. Then it saw the toothless old man standing over it. He was talking while shaking his head. The cat was terrified. It did not know what was happening. No matter how hard it tried, the cat could not move a muscle.

The cat felt the old man pick it up. Its eyes were wide with fear, but the man was talking soothingly while he walked. The cat could only see the crook of the man's arm, but it was obvious he had carried the cat outdoors. However, the noises and smells were now very different from the alley of the night before. After a short time, the man went through another door into a room. A bell sounded. It was a very annoying sound. The cat sensed many other animals, including rats -- *a lot* of delicious rats. The room was a riot of animal noises. The cat heard chittering, squeaking, the rustle of wings, the croaking of toads, and many other prey sounds. It also heard other cats. The cat's senses were on high alert.

The cat was anxious to assess the hunting opportunities, as well as the competition, but it still could not move. Then it heard another human enter the room and the old man and the other person began talking. They did not talk long. The old man placed the cat on a wooden counter. The cat was on its side and could now see the other person. It was a woman. She had small windows in front of her eyes like the cat had seen on some other humans. The man in her first home had them.

The woman placed her hands on the cat and a moment later it heard the man speak. The cat was instantly able to move again. The woman must have known because she had pinned the cat down before the cat could react. But the woman did not hurt it as it had feared. Instead, she felt the cat all over with purposeful and knowing hands while talking soothingly. Although the cat had initially tensed and waited for an opportunity to escape, it soon began to relax. Finally the woman gently checked the cat's ears, eyes and teeth and then began petting it, though still keeping one hand firmly on the cat's back holding it down on the counter.

The woman and man spoke some more and then, without warning, the woman picked up the cat and pushed it toward the door of a large wooden cage the man

was suddenly holding. The cat desperately tried to stop itself from going in by hissing and clawing, but it was too late. With one firm push from the woman, the cat was inside. By the time it had spun around, the door was closed. The cat growled in anger and cowered in the back of the cage, which the old man set onto the counter.

The old man and woman talked some more and then the man left through the door. The annoying bell rang again. The woman bent down and talked to the cat once more. The cat was trapped. It was angry. The woman walked away. As soon as she was out of sight, the cat tested the door to the cage. It would not open no matter how hard the cat worked at it.

Then the woman returned and dropped a clump of delicious smelling food through an opening in the cage. It looked and smelled like clawed up bird meat. The meat also had a slightly funny, but not objectionable, non-bird smell. The cat did not pause more than a second before gobbling up the meat. It looked up at the woman wanting more. And there was more. Two more times, the woman dropped clumps of the delicious bird meat into the cage.

The cat began to feel warm and relaxed. The woman picked up and moved the cage onto the lowest wooden shelf behind the counter. There were many other cages on the shelf and many other shelves higher up in the room. Before it dozed off, the cat could now see many of the other animals it had smelled when it entered the room. They were all looking at the new arrival. But the cat was not interested now; it would check them out later. Now it was feeling full, safe, and wanted nothing more than sleep.

The cat curled up on the soft cushion it had not previously noticed in the cage and dreamed of a new home.

Chapter 4 -- A New Home

When the cat woke up, it was still in the cage but now in another room on the floor. The cage door was open. There was a box with sand for proper elimination along the far wall. The cat left the cage and used the facilities. Then it investigated the room, but there was not much to check out. There was one door and a high window that was so dirty you could not really see out of it. But it let in enough light that a burning stick was not needed. The room and sand box were full of other cat scents. A small opening appeared high on the door and the cat

heard the woman speak through it. Then two bowls suddenly appeared inside the cat's cage -- one with more delicious food (though without the trace of the non-food smell) and one with water.

The cat reentered its cage to eat and drink. The cage door snapped shut behind it. The cat jumped a little with surprise, but then began to eat. Later, shortly after it had finished eating and drinking, the two bowls disappeared, and the woman came in and carried the cage back to its place on the shelf.

Now the cat began checking out its surroundings. There were dozens of animals, mostly prey, in various cages. Birds were in cages hung from the ceiling. Toads were in boxes with dirt on the floor. Rats were in metal cages on the far end of the counter. Rabbits shared a large pen in one corner. There were several other cats in cages like its own on the same shelf. The cat could smell them and hear them. But there were cloths hung between the cages so it could not see them. It only saw them when the woman carried its or their cages to and from the elimination room. Even from these glimpses, the cat did not fear any potential competition from the other cats. They were *too* tame.

After a while, the cat's food and water bowls appeared and disappeared in its cage while on the shelf and no longer in the elimination room. It now used the time there to stretch and sharpen its claws on the rough wooden door. Sometimes the cat chased its tail. The cat learned it must to return to the cage in the elimination room in order to be fed after the woman returned the cage to the lowest shelf.

Unlike the other cats, it did not complain. It was always quiet, while the other cats were constantly meowing and seeking attention. The woman started talking to the cat and petting it through the cage openings.

One day the woman took the cage with her after she let the cat out in the elimination room. She also left the door open. The cat went through its normal routine and then peeked out the open door. It heard the woman bustling around the shop. After a minute, the cat walked back to the shop and jumped up to the shelf. The door to its cage was open, so it went in. The cat knew food would present itself in the cage. The cat waited and the food came when it always did. But the woman never closed the cage door. The cat did not leave the cage -- it merely stuck its head out for a better view. After that day, the cage door always remained open.

In the beginning, the cat would have escaped if it could. It did not like being kept in a cage. But now the cat accepted the place as its new home because the food was the best it had ever been given. Even if the food never included live prey -- which were always preferred because they were *fun* -- the cat was never hungry. The cat hated being hungry more than just about anything -- including the bell.

During the day, many people of all descriptions came and went, often with their young ones. The annoying bell always rang when the door opened, and all the animals would become alert when it sounded. This was because the people would often take one of the animals away with them, sometimes with the cage and sometimes without. The woman would always bring in new animals and make cages appear as needed.

If the cage door had been left open sooner, the cat might have gone after the other animals, especially the rats. However, the cat had learned these rats were pathetic and stupid. They would have been no challenge. And when you were as well fed as the cat was, there was no point if there was not going to be any fun. The birds were simply too high and well protected in their metal cages. The rabbits were interesting, but were quite large and had strength in numbers. They would be difficult prey, assuming the cat could open their substantial cage. The cat knew from experience that toads tasted bad -- it would have to be starving to eat one. There were other 'last resort' prey animals as well, including newts, snails, tortoises (and others it had never seen before) in various containers. The cat had no interest in any of them.

Soon after the cat's cage door was left open, the woman did not pick up the cage to carry the cat to the elimination room. Instead it took the cat from its cage and carried it to the room. The woman stood there for a while talking to the cat. The cat did its business, exercised a bit, and then returned to its cage.

The next day, the cat heard the woman calling it from the hallway. The cat stuck its head out of the cage door and looked. The woman was standing at the end of the hall. She called and beckoned again. This time the cat jumped out of its cage onto the shelf and then onto the floor. It trotted back to stand in front of the woman. The woman talked to the cat, opened the door to the elimination room and left.

From that day on, the cat went to the elimination room whenever it wanted -- as long as the door was open. When it was closed, it meant another cat was inside.

Then one day, on returning from the elimination room, the cat did not return to its cage. Instead it walked up behind the woman and rubbed against her leg. The woman talked to the cat then bent down and picked it up. Instead of putting it back in its cage, the woman put it on the counter next to the cage of rats. The woman opened the door to the cage. The rats squealed and cowered in the cage. The cat showed no interest and simply laid down. The woman scratched it behind the ear, and it purred.

From that day on, the cat had the run of the place. It had ascended to and accepted its proper role -- overload of its new home.

Chapter 5 -- Destiny Fulfilled

Years passed. Hundreds of animals came and went. The cat continued to rule.

On a day with many visitors, which was typical near the end of the warm season, the cat was sitting on top of its cage now located on the highest shelf behind the counter. This kept visitors, usually the young ones, from trying to pet it. The cat generally did not like strangers.

The outside door opened, and the annoying bell rang. Three young people came in. Two were male; one was female and had unusually bushy hair. It made her look top heavy. Ordinarily the cat would have condescended to a brief glance and then resume its cat nap -- as it had done when the adult man currently talking to the woman had come in. But something was *different*. So, the cat stared at the group.

First it noticed that the smaller young male seemed vaguely familiar, but then it was distracted by the taller one. The cat smelled something coming from him which it had not smelled for a very, very long time. It was faint, but it was the strange-rat pee it had once smelled along with the wrong-smelling man that had sometimes visited the cat's first home. The cat still hated the wrong-smelling man. But something was wrong. This young male was not the same person. Two humans *never* had the same smell.

The annoying bell sounded as the adult man left. The taller young visitor was now talking to the woman behind the counter. The cat's attention was completely focused on him.

The taller young visitor reached into his clothes and pulled out a large mangy-looking rat and placed it on the counter. The strange-rat-pee-wrong-smelling-man odor *exploded* into the room. The cat was confused. He was looking at a *rat* but smelling the small wrong-smelling man and the strange-rat pee of years before.

Then the cat understood. This was no ordinary rat... It was a *daemon* rat!

Instantly enraged, the cat launched itself off the cage toward the counter below, hissing and spitting. The woman was in the way, so it landed on the taller visitor's head and rebounded toward the daemon rat, which was now being held on the countertop by the woman.

Unfortunately, the cat was now much older and not as quick as it once was. Plus, the taller visitor interfered with the cat's attack. The daemon rat itself was surprisingly fast. It seemed to squirt out of the woman's hands. It jumped to the floor and raced through the gap at the bottom of the outside door before the cat could catch it. The young female visitor grabbed the cat as it scabbled at the door, desperately reaching under the gap with its front paws and still hissing. The two male visitors quickly stepped past the female visitor, opened the door and ran out. The annoying bell rang.

The room was in an uproar. The animals were all making a racket and jumping around in their cages. The woman was running around trying to calm them down. The only one who seemed to be in control was the young bushy haired female. She seemed to sense the distress in the cat and was talking to it soothingly and rocking it in her arms. She would not let it go even though the cat tried to break away. After a minute or two, the cat relaxed and then began to purr.

The woman eventually managed to restore calm to the room. She and the young visitor began talking. All the while, the visitor continued to hold and pet the cat. After some time, the visitor gave the woman a handful of some small metal disks. The woman handed the visitor a small red bottle. The woman then came from behind the counter and bent low, so her face was close to the cat's face. She spoke soothingly and petted the cat, which was still held tightly in the young visitor's arms. Then the woman stood up strait and talked to the visitor again while opening the outside door. The annoying bell rang. The visitor walked out into the sunlight holding the cat.

The woman in the shop had been very nice, but in this bushy haired young female, the cat sensed the same affection it had only known once before -- so very long ago.

The cat was quite content and looked forward to seeing its new home. It hoped there was no annoying bell. It did *not* like bells.

The End