

The Cat's Story

My name is Tom, but my story begins with Felicia. I am a big strong (if I say so myself) wild cat. I rule the neighborhood. The people love having me visit them, since I do a great job at keeping the mouse population down.

The day I met Felicia life was changed forever. She was a pure white, blue-eyed, short-haired Siamese. She was smart and slim, quick, and wild. She really loved to talk. I had never met a better mouser. We hit it off right away. I guess I was showing off a little when I jumped into the shiny black foul-smelling pool of something that had just been laid at the end of our street.

The sticky, smelly, thick stuff stuck to my paws and I howled in pain. I didn't know what to do because it hurt to walk and it hurt to just sit, too! Felicia rubbed against me and tried to lick my paw, but it hurt her tongue, so she had to stop. I was in agony and rolled on my back, trying to lick my paws myself.

Then Felicia remembered the Porch Lady who often fed the strays when they came to her back door. She quickly led me to her house. As soon as we reached her porch, Felicia disappeared, as a smart wild cat will do. I meowed pitifully and the Lady opened the door and stepped down. She looked surprised and said, "What have we here?" She lifted me gently and carried me into the house. She filled the bathroom sink with cool water. I could not believe she would try to put me into water. Didn't she know that all cats hated water? I guess she didn't know what a tough fighter I could be either.

She spoke quietly to me and let me feel the water first. It was not hot, like the black stuff. It felt good. As she gently lowered my feet into the water she started to

sing. I tried to fight her, but she had a firm grasp of my neck and I felt trapped. Slowly I began to relax and really began to like the feeling of leaving the pain behind. Just as I started to feel at home in the sink. she gently lifted me out, wrapped me in a towel and placed me on the porch. "Enough for today," she said. "See you tomorrow." You can bet I will be back.

I did return every day until my paws were healed and the pain was gone. I still hung around for a nice breakfast of fine kibble. Eventually the man in the Black Pants said I was acting too friendly and that I would no longer get a breakfast at his house! Well, two can play at that game, I said to myself. You can just catch your own mice. I forgot that they already had three cats in their house who liked to roam at night. I decided to get tough. I beat up old coon cat who lived mostly in the house and never chased mice anymore. The vet said that I roughed him up pretty good! The next morning, man in Black Pants was not happy when he got that piece of paper from the vet. No more breakfast for me. I knew that I had to do something important to stay on the Porch Lady's good side.

I decided to talk to Felicia about the dilemma. She was busy feeding her first litter of six kittens at the time and was a little tired and a lot cranky. She thought and thought about it and finally suggested that I give the Porch Lady one of the kittens. I am sure she will start giving you breakfast if you have a kitten with you. WOW! That sounded like a great idea. I asked her if I could pick one. She smiled and said you may take any one or all of them. I felt drawn to a little boy cat who looked exactly like me. I

grabbed him by the neck before he could move. Off we went to meet the Lady on the porch.

Boy, Felicia was smart alright. The kibble and saucer of milk appeared as soon as the kitten appeared. Black Pants was not happy. "You may not let one more cat into this house," he said. "Three cats are enough for any house." Great, now I am stuck with a kitten who will need protection from the raccoons every single night. I raced back to Felicia to get her help. What should I do, I wailed? "Just find a safe place for him to sleep," she said. "He will be fine."

I thought and thought. I roamed around the yard and finally found the perfect spot. In front of the house was a huge lilac tree. In that tree was a bird's nest, about five feet off the ground. It had been vacated in the fall and was hidden from view. That night I grabbed junior by the neck and carried him up to the nest. I growled fiercely and let him know that his life depended on his ability to stay quiet for the rest of the night.

Well, he not only looked like me, but he was also smart like me. He stayed in that nest every night for the next two weeks. Then the little girl Boss sweet-talked Black Pants into letting him into the house. That was good news for me, although I had no hopes for being let into the house myself, after the thrashing I gave the ole coon cat.

Little Boss named him Scotty, and she took him everywhere. He seemed to like the attention. Little Boss was the youngest of the three children in the household, and she needed someone to boss. He loved it. Little Boss had more forest fiends than I

could count on one paw. The rabbits and squirrels were all fond of her because she fed them so well.

I was glad to be overlooked and I returned to Felicia and her family. In the meantime, Felicia continued to contribute kittens to our little town. Felicia had become friendly with Porch Lady. Felicia was going to have her next family in the pasture in August. A bad time to have a family, said Porch Lady. Kittens cannot survive in a pasture in extremely hot summer temperatures. Unbeknownst to Felicia, Porch Lady would be gone on vacation when Felicia was due to have the kittens. One night I overheard Porch Lady and Black Pants having a quiet talk about Felicia. My ears went up as I crawled closer to hear what they said.

Porch Lady said we must save the kittens from the August heat. "We could board her at the vets while we are away," she said. I heard a long sigh. I think it came from Black Pants. "Felicia will love the vet's office when she discovers that it is air-conditioned," she said. "Besides, the vet will not charge us for the kittens, only Felicia." "What luck," said Black Pants.

Felicia wandered into the barn and the Porch Lady hurried to the barn to have a heart-to-heart talk with her about the problem. They decided that the best place to deliver kittens would be in the cool comfort of the veterinary hospital.

Before we knew it, August first came around. Off went my dear friend to the vet. I was a little worried about how well she would be treated, never having been to the vet myself, but I had heard some stories about the vet that worried me a little.

When September popped up Felicia returned home. She looked good and brought six beautiful kittens with her. There were five long haired coon cat males and one beautiful blue-eyed white female who looked just like Felicia. Not one kitten looked like me! What a disappointment.

She enjoyed teaching her little ones how to hunt and play. Since she could go outside, she would bring mice in for them to play with. One night she brought them a mouse after everyone was asleep. Porch Lady came to let her in the kitchen but forgot to put her slippers on. Well, when the mouse ran over her bare feet, there were no longer people sleeping in that house. I know because I could hear her all the way on the next street.

I was not too pleased with having Felicia so busy with six kittens, but Black Pants was even more unhappy with 11 cats in his house. He told the family they had to find homes for every one of those kittens. The family gifted their classmates and friends alike. Soon there were only two kittens left. Felicia's daughter, the smallest, and the oldest male were not spoken for. The boy cat was very easy to get along with and was quite big. They named him The Tasmanian Devil. I do not think he ever lived up to his name. The children called him Taz. I was impressed with his size but found him to be very gentle. I was careful not to pick a fight with him, since I didn't know how tough he really was. I would much rather pick on one of the indoor cats who were lazy and soft. The children had run out of friends to give the kittens to, so they petitioned Black Pants to keep the last two, Taz and Bianca.

Felicia seemed quite content with the two kittens who remained with her. If she was happy, I was happy. Porch Lady seemed happy with seven healthy cats. Even Black Pants appeared happy to know that the number seven could be lowered in time. Seven is better than eleven, he kept repeating.

But is any number permanent in the cat world?