

Rat Cat



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What this story is about

Cat started life as an unwanted kitten. But then a strange grey creature saved him from a big dog and Cat suddenly found a new family and a good home.

But now he's been asked to go down into the basement and get rid of the rats that have taken shelter from the freezing winter.

Cat doesn't even know what a rat is, but he's about to find out.

And maybe find a way to repay a big favour.

Chapter One

Emma called him Cat. Emma's father sometimes called him Fat Cat. And then started calling him Rat Cat after Cat cleaned out a whole cellar of rats all on his own.

No one knew how he did it. Or what he did with the rats. They never found any bodies. But the rats all vanished.

So Rat Cat became a hero in his own house and, to this day, he's famous as a great rat hunter.

Which is strange, because when he was a tiny kitten, a rat saved his life.

Chapter Two

He was born in a warm and cozy house. A tiny kitten, the smallest of five brothers and sisters.

One day, soon after he was born, the father of the family scooped up all the kittens and dropped them in a box.

His children started to cry because they wanted to keep the kittens.

'Don't worry, I'll try and find good homes for them,' the man promised.

He tried hard, and drove all over the neighbourhood offering free kittens. All of the kittens found new homes. Except the smallest one. No one seemed to want him.

'I guess I'll have to dump him somewhere,' the man said to himself. And he did.

That's how the little kitten finished up alone in a wet, dark alley. Scared, abandoned and weak from hunger. And really, really missing his family.

But then the little kitten spotted movement in the darkness. Could it be his mother? Had she come looking for him to take him home?

The tiny kitten raced down the alley and almost collided with the biggest creature he'd ever seen, chewing on the remains of a pizza.

A big, ugly dog.

Chapter Three

The little kitten had heard his mother talk about dogs, and how some dogs didn't like cats and tried to hurt them.

This was the first dog the kitten had even seen, and when it spotted him it stopped eating the pizza and curled its lips back in a frightening snarl.

The kitten knew he should turn and run away, but his legs were so wobbly they felt like jelly.

The dog snarled again and the kitten backed away on quivering legs, but then stopped as his tail backed into something solid. A large garbage bin full of rubbish.

With the dog blocking his only escape route, there was no way out.

The little kitten was terrified as the snarling dog got closer and he could smell pizza on its breath.

Did dogs eat kittens as well as pizza? He'd have asked his mother if she'd been there with him.

But then the kitten saw a strange grey creature explode out from under the garbage bin. He had no idea what it was, and it was smaller than the kitten.

But the little creature wasn't afraid and launched itself at the big dog, sinking its sharp teeth into the dog's nose.

The dog howled as it raced around and around in circles, shaking its head from side to side, trying to get rid of the little grey attacker.

When that didn't work, the dog banged its head against the garbage bin and finally the little creature let go and dropped to the ground.

The terrified kitten had been frozen to the spot watching the battle, and was sure that the dog would now pounce on the grey creature.

Instead, it turned and fled into the darkness, yelping loudly.

Chapter Four

The little grey stranger lay very still on the wet ground and the kitten wondered if it was still alive.

He slowly crept over and when he gently rested his paw on the creature's body he could feel it breathing. The same way he'd felt his brothers and sisters breathing when they all cuddled together.

The little grey creature stirred and, when it opened its eyes and saw the kitten, leapt to its feet ready to attack.

'Are you planning to hurt me?' the little creature asked the kitten.

'Why would I do that?' asked the kitten. 'You saved my life. That dog could have killed me.'

'True,' said the little creature. 'The same way you might want to kill me one day. When you're bigger.'

The kitten shook his head. Although he didn't know what the little grey creature was, he couldn't imagine ever wanting to harm it.

'Why would I want to hurt you?' asked the kitten.

'Because I'm different from you.'

They *were* different. Different size, different color, different shape.

'What are you?' asked the kitten.

'A mother,' said the little grey creature. 'A mother protecting her children.'

High-pitched squeals rang from under the garbage bin.

'That dog was a threat and I had to protect my babies,' she told the kitten.

He glanced at the scraps of pizza, but the grey creature jumped between the kitten and the food.

'Sorry, my children need this more than you do,' she told him, flashing her small but sharp teeth.

The kitten didn't argue. He was bigger than this strange grey creature, but he'd seen how well she could fight.

As the kitten's rescuer dragged the pizza scraps under the garbage bin, the kitten lay down in the wet alley and started to cry.

Chapter Five

The kitten's tears made the grey creature pause. She pushed some of the pizza towards the kitten.

'Don't cry,' she said. 'There's enough food for all of us.'

The scraps of leftover pizza made the kitten feel better, but the rain had got heavier.

The grey creature poked her head out from under the garbage bin.

'There's not enough room for you under here,' she said, 'but there's a sheet of tin across the alley. Crawl under that and try and stay dry.'

Which is what the kitten did as he spent his first night alone.

He missed his mother and his brothers and sisters. He wanted to be part of a family again.

He finally drifted off to sleep, but was woken just as the sun came up by an anxious voice across the alley.

'Danger, danger,' cried the grey creature. 'Hurry, children, hurry!'

Chapter Six

The kitten poked his head out from under the sheet of tin and saw a big man stomping towards the garbage bin.

The kitten froze. The last man he'd seen had dumped him in this alley.

The grey creature's voice grew louder and more urgent as the man got closer.

As the little kitten watched, a stream of grey babies followed by their mother raced out from under the dumpster.

The man yelled something the kitten didn't understand and picked up a rock which he hurled at the retreating grey shapes. The rock missed the little creatures, but it bounced off the tin sheet with a loud clunk.

Which made the kitten's ears ring and he staggered out into the alleyway.

Next second, a giant hand swooped down and plucked him off the ground.

'Hey, little kitty,' said the man. 'What are you doing here?'

The other giant hand stroked the kitten's head as the man tucked him inside his shirt.

'After I've emptied this garbage,' said the man, 'I've got someone who'd like to meet you. This could be your lucky day.'

Chapter Seven

The kitten became a birthday present for the man's daughter, Emma.

'I'm going to call him Cat,' she said.

Emma loved the kitten and at night she let him sleep on her bed.

In his new home, the kitten never had to worry about what to eat or drink. His food dish overflowed. There were always bowls of milk left out.

In time, the tiny kitten grew and grew. With so much food, he quickly became the biggest cat anyone had even seen.

He grew so big Emma's father started calling him *Fat Cat*, and said he was bigger than the garbage bin in the alley where he'd been found.

Emma didn't like the name *Fat Cat* and just kept calling him *Cat*. A big, lazy pet, who spent his days lying around the house, eating and sleeping.

Cat had also found a special place of his own in the garden. An overgrown part where no humans ever went. The ruins of an old shed which provided *Cat* with shelter from the sun and warmth when it was cold.

Sometimes, lying in his special place, *Cat* would dream about that night in the alley. Of the little grey stranger who'd saved his life while protecting her children.

Cat still didn't know what sort of creature she was. There were none of them around his new home.

He wished he'd had a chance to say a proper goodbye and thank you. And somehow repay her kindness.

That summer was followed by the coldest winter anyone could remember. Roads and schools closed. Pipes froze. Heating and fires ran all day long.

And winter brought some unwelcome visitors to *Cat's* house.

Chapter Eight

Emma discovered them.

'Yuck, Dad, there are rats down there!' she yelled as she came screaming up the stairs from the basement.

'Must have got in through a crack in the wall,' he said. 'Trying to get out of the cold. I really hate those things. We'll sent Fat Cat down.'

'Stop calling him Fat Cat,' said Emma. 'He's not fat. He's just big.'

'Super big and super scary if I was a rat,' said her father. 'Cats hate rats, and a monster like him should be able to beat a whole army of rats.'

Cat blinked. How could he hate rats? He'd didn't even know what a rat *looked* like.

'Go get 'em, Fat Cat,' said the man.

Before Emma could protest, her father pushed Cat into the basement and closed the door behind him.

Cat stared down into the darkness. All he could see looking up at him were lots of little lights.

They could only be one thing.

Rats' eyes.

Chapter Nine

As Cat slowly crept down the stairs, he got used to the darkness and could see shapes behind the eyes.

What was he supposed to do with all these rats? Emma's father hadn't told him that.

'Have you come to kill us?' asked a voice in the dark.

'Why would I want to kill you?' asked Cat.

'Because we're different from you,' said the voice.

Cat stopped. He'd heard that voice before.

The light in the basement suddenly flicked on.

'So you can see what you're doing,' said Emma's father through the closed door.

The bare light bulb lit up the basement.

In front of Cat, stood dozens and dozens of creatures he'd seen before. And now he knew what they were. Rats!

He also recognised the one who'd just spoken to him. The mother rat who'd rescued him from the dog and saved his life after he was dumped in the cold and wet alley.

And shared the left-over pizza with him.

Chapter Ten

'Hello, again,' said the mother rat. 'You're a lot bigger than the last time I saw you.'

'Hello,' said Cat. 'Why didn't you tell me back then that you were a rat?'

'It didn't seem important at the time.'

'You just told me you were a mother,' said Cat.

'I still am, and now I'm a grandmother, too,' said the rat. 'These are my children *and* grandchildren.'

'No way I could ever hurt you,' said Cat looking around at the grey faces.

'But that's what cats do to rats,' said the mother rat.

'Why?' asked Cat. The same question he'd asked her last time.

'I told you in the alley,' said the rat. 'Because we're different from you.'

'Is that enough reason?'

'Some think so,' said the rat. 'You're a cat and I'm a rat. Different colour. Different size. Our tails are a different length. We have different shaped heads. And noses.'

'I can't do it,' said Cat. 'You saved my life. I can't hurt you or your family. I just can't.'

Cat turned and ran back up the stairs.

He yowled and screeched until Emma's father opened the door and let him back into the house.

'You're not a real cat, you're a *scaredy-cat*,' he said, laughing at his own joke.

'And we've still got rats in the basement,' said Emma. 'I'm not going down there till they're all gone.'

Her father nodded. 'Well, Fat Cat's no use. I guess I'll have to call in the professional pest control people.'

Cat heard the man pick up the phone and talk to someone. Telling them to come around in the morning and kill every rat in the basement.

Cat was so upset, he could hear his own heart thumping. Those rats weren't his enemies. No matter how other cats treated other rats.

The mother rat had saved his life. He owed her a big favour.

Now he had a chance to repay it.

But he'd have to hurry and come up with a plan.

Chapter Eleven

That night, Cat woke Emma's father with his yowling and scratching at the basement door.

'What? Ready for another go at those rats?' he asked. 'Bit late for that. Go back to sleep. They'll be gone in the morning when the rat killers do their thing.'

Cat yowled louder and kept scratching.

'Okay, okay,' said the man. 'One more chance.'

He opened the basement door, threw on the light, and Cat raced down the steps.

The door slammed shut behind him and, up in the house, the man stood and listened.

Silence.

But a few minutes later, the rest of the family woke as a tremendous noise erupted from the basement. Boxes crashed. Tins tumbled. Cat yowled and screeched. Rats screamed.

'That lazy cat's finally remembered what he's supposed to do to rats,' Emma's father told the others as they gathered around the door.

'I hope the rats don't hurt him,' said Emma.

The noise in the cellar suddenly stopped.

Minutes went by. Five. Ten.

'He might be injured,' said Emma, starting to panic. 'Quick, Dad, open the door.'

But when he did, the family found Cat slowly walking up the stairs. Not a scratch on him.

And when they looked down into the cellar, they couldn't see any rats. Living or dead.

They'd all gone.

'Who'd have believed it,' said Emma's father. 'Probably forced the rats out the way they came in. They won't survive outside in this cold weather. They're as good as dead.'

And, from that night, Emma's father stopped calling Cat *Fat* Cat, and gave him a new name.

Rat Cat.

Chapter Twelve

'Thank you,' said the mother rat. 'It's warm and dry here and they'll never find us.'

Cat had gone down into the basement with a plan. He and the rats had staged a pretend fight. Making lots of noise. Knocking over things.

Then Cat had told them to quietly leave the way they'd got in through the crack in the basement wall.

The mother rat had started to protest. She and her children and grandchildren would freeze to death outside. They needed shelter.

That's when Cat told her about his special place. A safe place. Warm when it was cold. In the overgrown part of the garden where no human ever went. The ruins of the old shed.

Every day, all through that winter, Cat secretly visited them. And every day, he smuggled them food from his own overflowing bowl.

'There's enough food for all of us,' Cat told them.

The mother rat always smiled when he said it. The same thing she'd said to the abandoned kitten in the alley when she'd shared the pizza with him.

When spring came, the rats moved on and Cat was sorry to see them go.

But he always thought of them when he heard people being unkind to others just because they were different.

And whenever Emma's dad called him Rat Cat, he just smiled.

The End