

## The Cat Who Came for March Break

by  
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Actually, he came long before March break. He arrived in a snowstorm. I saw him and I didn't know then if it were a him or a her or an it. He was half of the way into my driveway, a silver tabby in a rut in the snow made by the tires of my car. He didn't move. He just sat there and stared at the house.

I decided to put some food and water on the front porch for the cat. I thought the water might freeze and it did. He didn't move when the food was put out. He just sat there until the light faded. The next morning the cat food was gone and so was he. I kept putting the food and water out and the same thing happened each day. Overnight the food and water were eaten, when the water wasn't frozen.

I had three stray cats living with me then, a golden tabby and two marmalades. I started to wonder how much trouble it would be to care for a fourth. For almost a month it was the same drill. He usually appeared late afternoon just before it got dark and waited for the blackness of the night to feed it would seem. One evening I waited for him and slipped quietly onto the porch hoping to reassure him that he was welcome but he tore off. That night the food went uneaten.

The next afternoon he was back sitting quietly in the driveway again. I decided against any attempt at trying to get near him. He seemed to be able to withstand the cold. This went on for another month. Then, one Saturday morning I awakened to the sound of scratching at the front door. It was the cat. Through the window I could see mud and blood on his face and front. The miracle was that he wanted in!

I opened the door and he rushed through it into the nearby kitchen. I grabbed some clean dust cloths from the broom closet and soaked them in hot water from the sink. He allowed me to pick him up and put him on the kitchen counter where I began washing away the mud and blood. There was no protest from him.

An ear was badly bitten and there was a huge gash on his nose. His paws were warm to the touch. I cleaned him up as best as possible and called the vet. By then I knew for sure it was a he. The vet said to bring him right over. The clinic couldn't keep him because I couldn't guarantee that he had had his shots but the vet would do what he could for him.

I shut him up in the kitchen. Again there was no protest. I got a cat carrier from the basement and stuffed an old fluffy towel into it. I took it to the kitchen and I got him into it with no problem. I decided I had a pretty sick cat on my hands.

The vet confirmed my diagnosis. The cat had a fever of 104 degrees. "I'll shoot him full of antibiotics," the vet said. "This is bad. I'll put some astringent on these wounds. The gash doesn't need stitches. I think he's been attacked by a mink, probably one that got away from a local breeder. They're mean things. I don't much care for fur coats but if people are going to make them out of anything, they might as well be made out of minks."

The vet advised me to keep the cat away from the others in the house. "I'm not sure he'll survive. I don't think he'll even hang around. Make it possible for him to get away if he wants to. That's my advice."

I took him home and put out a huge brown box on the porch with its back to the wind. I put the fluffy towel into it and some food and water just outside it. I slept fitfully that night. I peered out of the window several times during the night but could not tell if he were in the box. Early the next morning I crept out to the porch and gingerly lifted the blanket I had put over the whole box. The cat was gone. I was sick at heart. I tried to console myself that I had done for him what I could but I was sad and worried.

The vet told me that if he survived and if he stayed they would give him his needles and castrate him if I brought him back. I kept hoping for some sight of him but nothing happened. The food was there. I left the box out there for him but there was no sign of him.

The following week was the week before March break from school. I was "dragging" not only from the teaching but also from worry over that cat that had so touched my heart. Thursday was my grocery shopping day and I was too tired to do it. I calculated what I had left by way of foodstuffs. I had eggs enough for breakfast through Monday and some bologna for lunches. I'd do my grocery shopping on the Monday morning when I was off.

On Monday morning I put out the last of the cat food for the present residents, had my own egg and toast, was reveling in a leisurely third cup of coffee and I heard the meowing. I looked out the window and the cat was back, the first day of March break. He was back and he was howling, not just meowing but howling.

I opened the door and he rushed in. He ate all the cat food in sight which, granted, wasn't much. I put down the egg dish and he licked it clean. And he was still howling. I couldn't feed a cat cold cuts, could I? But I had nothing else. There were about a dozen slices of the lunchmeat. I quickly cut them up and while the three

other cats looked warily on, the new cat devoured the meat.

I called the vet and they agreed to take him. After he finished the meat, the cat walked into the kitchen and settled down on the rug there. It looked like he was ready to sleep. I closed the door on him and dressed quickly. I retrieved the cat carrier and got him into it this time with considerable protest from him. I knew then he was much better.

He stayed overnight at the vet, got his needles and was castrated. When I picked him up the next day there was a message from the vet please not to feed my cats cold cuts. After the anesthetic the cat had vomited five mice and the bologna the attendants told me. I didn't even try to explain.

Thus began my adventures with B.C. It stood for Big Cat, Bad Cat, Beautiful Cat, depending of what he was up to. More often than not it was something very, very beautiful. For eleven years I had no more fierce protector. He growled when any car came into the laneway. He stalked visitors especially males. He was the first onto my lap and the last to leave. He slept with me every night. He grieved for me when I was away, my housekeeper would tell me. I never heard him howl again. His meowing was usually rather plaintive.

Eventually, I had a cat door installed. He had a special clip-cloppity sound when he used it. He went through it in kind of two stages. In the middle of the night one night after all those years with me, I heard the strange clip-cloppity sound and wakened to find him gone. I was heartbroken. This had never happened before. He had had bouts of abscesses over the years but otherwise had been healthy. Where had he gone and why?

For two weeks there was no sign of him. I gave him up as lost. He had been my watch cat, literally, and my sweetest friend. He had taken to spraying around the place the previous few weeks. The vet said older male cats sometimes did this. I watched every morning and nothing.

About a week after he left one morning I heard something trying to get through the cat door. A calico kitten finally made it through. She ate up a plate of tinned cat food and then left. I decided she was only coming for breakfast. Then to my amazement she came back through the door with a tiny silver tabby in tow and the latter ate her fill and then they both exited. They sat contentedly on the front porch washing up after their breakfast. I thought I had heard a car stop during the night and sure enough two more kittens had been dumped off, and both female.

The kittens were very friendly, house cats probably just weaned. I called the vet and he suggested I give them another two or three weeks before I brought them in for their needles. I asked them to try to find a home for them. I didn't know if I could handle more kittens. My friends were already calling my place "Catherine's Cat House". The kittens stayed of course and eventually I couldn't bear to give them away. They became Callista and Drusilla.

A week after their arrival I awakened in the middle of the night at the sound of the unmistakable clip-cloppity of B.C.'s coming through the cat door. I rushed out of bed to find him gulping down the dry cat food that was set out. He was half the size he was when he left. The kittens came to see what was up and he nuzzled them warmly much to my amazement. Then he hopped under the covers as he always had and began to snore in a deep sound sleep.

When I awakened the next morning I found the bed soaked where he had been sleeping and traces of blood in the wet spots. I stripped the bed and checked him all over. I couldn't find any problem. He was eating ravenously and savoring the kittens. Maybe it had been a fluke or some sort. He was more affectionate than ever. He was only annoyed with the other cats when he wanted into my lap and one of the other of them were there.

The day before the kittens were due for their needles and examination B.C. slept with me as usual. The next morning I found more fluid and more blood. I knew that something was very, very wrong. I called the vet and arranged to take B.C. with me as well. I held him close to me all that day. It was once again March break and I was grateful that I was able to be home to do this. He was still eating and playful with the kittens. Maybe it was only a urinary tract infection to which older cats are so susceptible, I kept telling myself.

I bundled up the three of them in the cat carriers. He was examined first. I could see the pain in the vet's eyes. He had cared for B.C. all these years. He felt his stomach. "I'm afraid there's a mass here. It's a very large one. We can x-ray him but he's really too old to survive any operation of the sort I think he would likely need. And we can't anaesthetize him as you know." On a previous occasion when he had had to have some teeth removed, B.C. had gone into shock and from then on we could only sedate him. "Giving him an anesthetic would kill him in any event," the vet continued.

"He has to be put down then," I said. "Yes, it's the kindest thing. He's not in pain yet but he soon will be. I think he may have left originally to go off to die but for some reason he came back." I agreed to the euthanasia.

I held him while the kittens were examined with the aid of a veterinary assistant. They got their shots. And then she looked at me. We put the kittens into the carriers and I looked at B.C. I held him tight, and kissed him and said, "Goodbye, old friend. We have come a long way together. Thank you for all the joys and all the

little bit of pain. Go in peace, my beautiful, beautiful cat." He gave a final meow as I gave him back to the assistant who stroked his head. I packed the empty carrier and the two kittens into the car and sobbed all the way home. It was then that I knew for sure that I would keep the kittens and not try to find another home for them.

Not a day goes by that I don't think of B.C. Of all the cats that I have had he was the sweetest and the most ferocious when it came to anyone or anything he thought was a danger to me. He was the third cat I had to have put down. I pondered how people say you feel good when you do the right thing. Not always.

Three dead and three disappeared including beautiful Callista who left about a year after she arrived. How these pieces of fluff can wind their ways around my heart.

I have a special prayer that is important to me. Now and again when I am in awe of some person, place, or thing, I say, "May I know the Whole of which you are so beautiful a part." I said that often in terms of B.C. and when I say it now it is "of which you were so beautiful a part." I hope somewhere or somehow he hears me.