



Falling in Love with a Wild Cat

By Dina-Marie Kulzer

Until recently, I was never what you might call "a cat lover." It's not that I ever disliked the aloof feline creatures, but I had always preferred the more readily available affection dogs seemed to provide.

One morning all of that changed. My husband, Carl and I found four, soaking wet kittens in the yard next door. Our neighbor had inadvertently turned on the sprinklers and called us for help. The lethargic kittens' mother, a frightened feral cat, hissed at us before running away.

We kept the kittens warm, hoping the mother would return. There was

no sign of her. The kittens were very ill . . . half dead. We then did the only humane thing we could think of, and took them to the animal shelter.

I felt a lingering sense of sadness for the next few days. This was not helped by the fact that I could hear the mother cat pacing frantically on our roof searching for her babies.

One afternoon, the mother cat was on our porch, meowing mournfully. I felt a pang of guilt, and gave her a bowl of milk. "Kitty" with her gorgeous, blue-green eyes and deep, raspy meow, began showing up at the exact same time every afternoon,

and by doing so, claimed me as her slave for life. Kitty is what my husband terms a "Heinz 57" special. She's a wild, beautiful tabby mixture of black stripes and white and gray fur with an orange stomach.

After a period of several months, we noticed erratic changes in Kitty's behavior. She began showing up less frequently for her meals, and seemed to have several ardent gentleman callers.

One night I turned on our porch lights only to discover Kitty and "Walter" (an un-neutered house cat from one street over) wrapped cozily around each other in Kitty's new \$40 cat bed. (I told you, I truly have become her slave.) They were startled, and gave me an indignant look as if to say, "How rude of you to interrupt us."

We wanted to get Kitty spayed. Since she was a wild cat, the only way we could get her to the vet was to trap her. For several months, I tried to get a cat trap, but to no avail. When her stomach began to protrude, I knew that what I had feared the most had come true. Kitty was pregnant again.

Finally, we were able to obtain a cage. Then came the difficult part—trapping the elusive Kitty. This ended up to be a 10-hour ordeal.

Ever cautious and brilliant, panther-like Kitty, gracefully stepped over the mechanism which was to set off the trap. This funny, furry character ate her food and managed to leave the trap without setting it off. We had always thought of ourselves as two reasonably intelligent adults, however, one little cat managed to completely outsmart us. After hours of this nonsense, we finally tied a

string to the door and only then were we able to shut it.

We took her to the evening pet clinic and made sure she had all the proper shots as well as having her spayed. Kitty was much further along in her pregnancy than we had originally thought. The operation was touch and go.

When we arrived at the pet clinic to pick her up, the vet asked us who we were there for. "Kitty," we replied. "Oh Kitty," he said with a mock sweetness and a warm smile, "you

mean that attack-trained tiger masquerading as a little cat?"

The vet held tranquilized Kitty up by the scruff of her neck. For the first and only time to date, we were able to pet her soft, silky fur. Even under heavy sedation, Kitty's body, with her mile-long claws extended, was taut—still resistant to being held.

We brought her home, and resilient Kitty woke up hours earlier than the vet had anticipated. Later on in the evening, still doopey from medication, Kitty managed to escape—stumbling

down the stairs and disappearing into the night.

We had fallen totally in love with Kitty. Now, we were afraid we'd killed her. For several days and nights, I combed the neighborhood looking for Kitty. We left food out to entice her to come home.

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Four nights later, a cat that looked very much like Kitty, only much scruffier and thinner, showed up on our doorstep. Much to our happiness, we realized Kitty had returned. Our little friend has been with us ever since. Strangely enough, ever since the trapping, Kitty has refused to sleep in her cat bed. Perhaps, she is remembering more exciting nights.

Kitty won't live in the house, and we still can't touch her. Quite often people will ask me why I'm so attached to a cat I can't pet. I always say I may not be able to touch her with my hands, but everyday I touch her with my heart. □

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