



Furry Bits

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Animals, Fable

*Saturday

The slowly waking morning was full of hope, a new day and new opportunities. The pet shop was quiet and dark. The sun was up but the front of the store and the big windows faced west and wouldn't bring in much light till afternoon. The store lights were off except for the ones in the fish tanks and the employee light in the back room. The birds were sleeping not yet chirping in their tall rectangular cages. The fish at the back swam quietly in long ovals waiting for the first mornings feedings. The geckos, anoles, and chameleons sat in their glass box habitats warming under the glow of the red night lamps.

Near the front to the right in three cages sat the cats. In the far left cage sat a older cat, a short haired tom. His fur was smooth and black with white splotches around his neck, his back legs covered white fur up to his hips. His front paws carried the same bright white fur, but only a inch up the paws. He had been in the shop for six months and his price had now been marked down twice. The card in his window read, "Hi I'm Eddie, I have all my shots, and I would love to go home." The center box held three kittens, two black and white mixes and a orange tabby. All three slept curled in little kitten balls of fur. Their softly sleeping bodies cuddled up next to one another in the round bed with the thick puffy edges that sat in the middle of the cage. Their card listed all three by name and age and explained their health status. Next to that cage on the end one lone kitten, a dark haired tabby with a white chin and thick black stripes fading into the mixed gray and brown fur of his back. His tail was curled around his body and the black tip sat close to his pink nose. The card on his glass said, "Carlos, up to date, ready to go."

The front door of the shop opened hitting the hanging bell above it, the sound of it carried around the shop. Carlos and the tiny orange tabby were the first to be up and at the front of their cages. Their eyes eager and staring at Bobby as he walked to the counter. Eddie, stretched lazily in his bed, not bothering to get up. "Will you two lay down, you know it will be at least a hour before he makes his way to us." Eddie spoke to the two young mewling kittens knowing they wouldn't listen, but he still felt it necessary to instruct the young. He then yawned a large toothy yawn, his pink tongue curling up and then drawn back into his mouth. He looked at them, "Hmph." He tucked his face, nestling down to go back to sleep.

The two boys paid him no mind, not even turning to acknowledge the advice. The orange kitten, dubbed Rusty on his cage card, looked over to Carlos who was already calling to Bobby. "Mister, hey mister, mister. Come here mister," Carlos continued his meowing toward Bobby who looked over notes on the desk, they were instructions from the owner Mr. Kerppeltunick who had closed up the shop the night before.

Rusty joined in with Carlos and soon the meows, soft and high pitched, were synced as they called out to Bobby, "Mister Mister Mister. Sir, please come, can we come out?" The small jaws opening fully to express each meow and their soft furry faces focused on Bobby who walked from the counter toward the back room.

A few minutes passed and he was in the back and the boys could no longer see him. A few more plaintiff meows and they stopped, first Rusty and then Carlos. Looking at one another they decided to explore their respective

cages. Rusty's sisters were now awake and stretching themselves out of the bed. Eddie peeked from above his paw, glad for the peace and quiet and drifted back to sleep.

*Meanwhile across town

"Mommy, mommy, mommy." The curly haired young boy called repeatedly to his busy mother, who fished through her large brown purse. She wasn't ignoring him but she was focused. He continued, "Mommy, mommy, mommy."

Finally Renee' looked up at her son, who stopped immediately. She smiled a warm loving smile, "Yes David, what is it?" She looked at her beautiful son, who looked like a tanned short replica of his father.

David smiled back, the smart 8 year old had learned that his mother wouldn't remember what he was saying if she wasn't fully paying attention. He clapped his hands together gently in front of him, his smile turned from one of appreciation to one full of mischief, "Today is Saturday." He said this with a tone of finality, like there was no more to say. He looked at his mother as she sat in the sun on the edge of her bed. It was early maybe just after the Murray and Friends show, but not before the Super Friendly Happy Jamboree. David told time by TV shows, and his Saturday mornings were blocked off in 30 minute chunks, each separated by his shows of choice.

Renee' loved her son, his eager determination was a great quality, one she thought would take him far. However, this morning with her husband and daughters away she wished he had forgotten. "It is, isn't it?" she smiled at him again and cocked her eyebrow above her large red rimmed glasses. She turned the corner of her mouth up and tapped her chin with her forefinger in mock confusion as if she was trying to deduce what that meant.

David liked when his mom was silly, he knew she was teasing and it made him giggle. "Yes mommy, you know it is. Today is The Day." He emphasized, the final two words.

“What day would that be?” She looked across the room with a feign of puzzlement on her face. “Clean your room day? Oh no, I remember!” She playfully looked at him and stared into his big brown eyes, her own face now turned from puzzle to a look of recognition. Her eyebrows arched up in the center and her mouth was wide, “Cartoon day, right!?”

“No mommy,” he protested, “Today we get the kitten!”

*Kerppeltunick’s Pets Emporium

Bobby came from the back a few minutes later with a push cart. On the middle shelves the morning feedings, the bottom contained cleaning materials, and on the top a bottle of water and a small canvass money bag. The wheels squeaked and creaked and protested as he pushed it out. Any animals who were still asleep at that point were awoken by the sound of Bobby pushing the cart to the cash register.

The small mammals which included mice, hamsters, gerbils, and guinea pigs all were now awake. Their enclosure was closest to the counter and the only habitat on that side of the store. Most were cleaning, a few ran on squeaky exercise wheels, some sipped at the water bottles. One of the guineas lay watching Bobby go past, the other nibbled at a itch on his furry belly.

“Good morning everyone.” Bobby spoke aloud to the entire store which was now alive with the various sounds and noises of small animals. A new chorus had begun in the kittens led by the boys but now joined by the two girls. Bobby faced the Cat Corner, and called to them, “Yes guys, I’ll be there soon.”

First thing first, Bobby put the money in the cash till. He then arranged papers under the desk on a shelf and put a few pens next to the register. He filled the treat bowl next to the edge of the register with the free samples. He checked his watch, he didn’t have to unlock the door till ten.

By the time Bobby was at the Cat Corner it was nine thirty. He was still on track. He started with Eddie.

“Morning Ed.” Bobby spoke in a soothing voice. Eddie could be feisty, one of the reasons he hadn’t been picked up yet. It was hard to get people to take the older cats, Eddie was five, but when they were jumpy it was doubly difficult. Bobby reached in and shook the litter pan, it was okay. He switched the water bowl for a fresh one and began to fill to the food dish.

“Bobby, could I have something else?” Eddie was awake and watching the young man. “I mean, this food isn’t bad, but it lacks flavor.” Eddie had asked this question often, and always got the same response. A friendly smile and a bowl full of the same dry kibble.

“I’ll see you later.” Bobby closed the cage and moved on.

“Mister Mister Mister.” The ceaseless cries of the kittens were now loud and all but drowning out other sounds in the shop. “Mister Mister Mister.”

“Yes guys, good morning to you also.” Looking at them crowded at the front of the cage staring up at him, large eyes, little mouths opening and closing, meowing. “I’m here, I’m here guys,” he smiled at them and was happy to see their eager faces. “Back up guys.” He unlatched the cage and pushed them back. They would need distraction. The three kittens, Rusty and his two sisters Abby and Shelly, were on the middle level in front of their bed, and had their paws on the gate as it opened. Bobby fumbled and stopped and restarted several times having to grab a kitten and put it by the food only to have to stop and do the same action again. Finally he got the food filled, fresh water in and the litter tray switched out. Occupied with fresh food and fresh water the mews of the three kittens in the center cage were now infrequent.

Bobby walked to the final cage and smiled at the kitten inside, “Good morning Carlos, please be a good boy.” He looked in, and Carlos stood mewing next to a tipped over dish. He called to Bobby eyes wide. “Oh no, you must have spilled it buddy.”

Carlos continued to call, “Mister, My water Mister.” He did his best to look innocent, letting Bobby think it was accident. He watched as Bobby unlatched the cage, “Thirsty Mister, so Thirsty.” Carlos had a good long drink last night before he spilled the water, making sure it would all come out by tipping the bowl. He wasn’t thirsty at all, he wanted to get free. Bobby bent turning for a fresh water bowl the cage just barely open, his hand

steadying it as he did. Carlos watched as Bobby turned back with a full water dish and opened the cage.

Suddenly Carlos had leaped from the second level into the water bowl. The bowl tipped and spilled. In a flash Carlos and the water were on the floor. Before he could realize what was really happening, Carlos was running. "Oh golly!" Bobby cried.

"Run Carlos!" Rusty had seen him jump and realized what was happening, his little heart was beating double fast.

Eddie looked up from his nap and stared at Bobby splashed with water who was fussing with himself. "What is going on Rusty?" Eddie asked.

"Mr. Eddie, Carlos is FREE!" They both turned and looked to the back of the store where Carlos had ran.

*Later that day

The family station wagon pulled up at about one o'clock. David starring at the store-front from the back seat his eyes wide in expectation. He had heard his mom on the phone earlier and remembered from her responses that this place would have at least four kittens to choose from. David felt like he might burst from excitement. He knew he wanted a kitten, like he wanted nothing else. He loved all animals but not like cats, not like a soft adorable kitten.

He was unbuckling his belt as his mom stood and opened his door. Hand in hand they walked to the pet shop and pushed in through the glass door. The bell dinged above their heads and Bobby looked up from the desk where he was looking over a textbook with his math course inside. "Good Afternoon." He called cheerfully from the desk, his shirt now dry. "Welcome to Kerppeltunick's Pets Emporium."

As Renee' turned to greet the young smiling man at the counter, David was already pulling free from her grip, having spotted the Cat Corner he leaned into his pull. "There they are mommy!" The eagerness of his voice matched the strength which he exerted with his pull.

"Oh. Good morning," Renee' managed to finally get out as she gently released her son and steadied herself. "We are here for a kitten," She smiled looking from David to Bobby and back.

Bobby laughed a short friendly laugh, "I see." He stood and placed his hands on the counter and looked to the Cat Corner, "Right over there, where young eager beaver is heading. I'll be right over to answer any questions."

"Thank you," Renee' walked to her son who was already peering in at the kittens who had fallen asleep, the bell only waking Rusty and Carlos who were now stretching and staring and the young boy's face.

By the time Bobby had made his way over, he had gotten the clipboard and pen from behind the counter and had the purchase slips clipped and ready to go. He watched as David stood between the cages looking at the kittens before him. Carlos and Rusty were both up and mewling, while Abby, Shelly, and Eddie were just coming awake. "Hello, who are you. Hi." the boys called to David and Renee', who stooped beside him, looking in.

"What do you think?" She asked David. Then looking the kittens over, she turned to Bobby, "Can he hold one?"

"Sure, which one would you like to hold young man?" Bobby made sure to answer the mother's question but then directed his own question to David who looked eagerly at the kittens, his eyes examining their fur and their different patterns.

"That one!"

*The Wilson home

David finished eating quickly and was putting his dishes in the sink before Renee' had taken a full three bites of their dinner. "Be careful David." She called to him as he disappeared down the hall to his room. She smiled and shook her head slowly and thought to herself, "That boy is amazing, he could talk me into anything."

David having ran full speed down the hall stopped and slowly opened his door at the end of the hall. He was peeking in at first, looking at his bed. It was empty. He opened the door more and looked around the room. The dresser, the floor, and in front of his closet. All were empty, then he thought, "Under my bed!" He came in closing the door behind him and switched on his lamp. He walked over and bent down beside the bed and peered in to the semi darkness. There under his twin bed he saw them, Rusty and Carlos curled into balls, a small orange puff and a small gray one. He smiled and laid down on his tummy and stared at them, so excited to see his sleeping kittens.

After some time David scooted forward and gently rubbed each one a few times not wanting to wake them. "Welcome home guys." David's voice was soft and full of love. "I'll be back soon." David scooted back out from the bed and went back to thank his mother again and then check on the things for the kittens.

*After bedtime

David lay sleeping on his bed, next to him a small cover was folded in to a square and the kittens lay on it. The kittens had been asleep, but they now began to stir. First Carlos, who stretched and stood looking at the kind face of the boy. Then next to him Rusty who was awakened by Carlos's paw tapping him in the face.

"Hey, come on." Carlos whispered to Rusty.

Rusty yawned and stretched, his orange paws extending, and his toes spread wide to reveal his little pink beans and tiny but sharp claws, "What?" Rusty was groggy but eager, "What are you doing, where are you going?" He stood asking the question as he arched his back in a stretch.

"Not just me, us." Carlos turned and looked at him, "Brother." Carlos said it and meant it, his own brothers had been taken from him. But, the boy earlier in the day told him that Rusty would be his new brother, they would have to look out for each other.

Rusty was excited, he also remembered what the boy said. David, his mommy called him. "Okay, where are we going?" Rusty asked Carlos.

"Exploring," Carlos said with excitement and wonder.

Then they were making their way down the bed and to the bedroom door. It was almost fully shut, but Carlos worked his paws under it and managed to pull it open just enough. "This way," Carlos called.

"Wow, good job." Rusty was right behind Carlos as he pushed his nose between the door and the door frame and with a nudge the door slowly opened enough for them to squeeze through into the hall.

"This way." Carlos led the way up the hall toward the front of the house. The night was quite and dark. It was spring so the house was cool, even without the air conditioner. They stopped and sniffed at the night light in the outlet half way up the hallway.

"Oh neat, what's it smell like?" Rusty said as he stood on his hind paws to reach the light and sniffed at it. The warm dusty smell of it was new, but nothing special. Still he logged the location and smell in his mind, in case he needed it. His brother was already continuing to the kitchen. "What was that?" Looking to the kitchen Rusty's ears rotated like small furry satellite dishes, "I heard something."

"Shh," Carlos squished down flat on his tummy and hushed his brother. His ears fixed forward to pick up sounds. He had heard the sound too, but he was trying to figure the location. Then after a moment he whispered back to Rusty who was slowly creeping up beside him, "In the kitchen."

The kitten's eyes focused on the open doorway of the kitchen up and to the left. They both hunkered down and listened in silence. They slowed their breath, they were just outside the kitchen. "I hear it." Rusty told his brother this as he began to scoot past him. Then they were both slowly scooting on their tummy's through the door. The kitchen was mostly dark, but the kitchen window above the sink let in some of the nearby street lamp. The light fell in on the floor in a small square. The brothers looked up and there walking across the counter they saw the elf.

They both stopped, seeing it at the same time. In the cool quiet dark they watched it. The small elf was only slightly taller than the toy it was carrying to the open window. The toy was some multi-colored cube shaped box, each side having nine squares and each of the squares a separate color. The small elf held the cube toy with both of his arms wrapped around the center, he struggled and strained as he made his way carefully across to the window sill. The boys looking up to the window saw another elf on the sill, propping the window open waving to the elf carrying the cube.

“Come on Come on,” The one in the window called in a raspy voice.

“Hold your horses, I’m coming. This thing is awkward. We’ll get some more tomorrow.” He huffed and puffed the words out as he pushed the cube up to his partner. Then leaping up, the two pushed the window closed and were gone.

“Thieves!” Carlos called turning to Rusty, “They took David’s thing, his box thing!” Carlos was exasperated.

“I saw, I can’t believe it.” Rusty stood and looked at the window and then down to his brother. “He said they were going to take more tomorrow.”

“We’re gonna stop them!” Carlos replied sternly starring at the night shinning in the window above the family sink.

*The Next Night

The next day was split into two parts for the kittens. One part was playing with David and getting to know the house. They spent time in the kitchen and in the front room, they even got a chance to peek in David’s sisters’ room, where they had seen the multi-colored cube toy and smelled the peppermint. There unguarded were many treasures that Carlos told Rusty they must defend. They used the play to test their abilities.

The second half of the day they spent training, wrestling and running and pouncing. Rusty would sit prone facing one way and Carlos would charge him from behind, grabbing him and tumbling over. They would wrestle and nip and pull at one another with their claws out, not for damage but to practice their holds. Then they would both stop and simultaneously run full speed to the back of the house into mommy's room, jump onto and climb up her bedspread and wrestle around on her bed. They would twist and pull and nip.

Then running from the room giving one a head start, the other would stand at the end of the hall waiting and then practice intimidation stretching their backs up and turning sideways to fool opponents into thinking they were bigger than they really were. Many such activities continued through the day only broken up for nap, lunch, nap, dinner, another nap, and several sessions of cuddles with David.

When bed time came the kittens lay in bed with David on their cover, mommy tucked them in and kissed David good night. The kittens snuggled down and whispered their plan to one another, pretending to be asleep till David was. David's day filled with the joy of having two feisty kittens in the house had tuckered him out and he was soon asleep and much to Carlos's chagrin so was Rusty.

"Rusty, come on wake up!" Carlos fussed at his brother, surprised at how easily he had drifted off.

Surprised Rusty let out a small squeaky meow, and looked around startled, "Sorry, Carlos." They were both now making their way down the bed and sneaking off into the night. Once again they opened the door, Carlos had Rusty practice it during the day and allowed him to do it tonight. He felt pride for his brother as he pulled the door open a smidgen and pushed his pink nose through so that it creaked open.

"They were already out here last night when we came out, but I think we'll be early tonight," Carlos whispered to Rusty.

"Yeah," Rusty whispered back, "We'll get the drop on 'em. We'll teach them not to steal from our people." The small hairs on his neck and tail bristled with the agitating thought of something being done to his people. A thick dark orange stripe of hair started to rise on his back and the hair of his tail began to poof out.

In the dark, Carlos could sense his brothers anger and turned to him, "Save it for the bad guys, brother. Lets get in position."

As they made their way up the hall they could hear the TV going on in mommy's room, the door was almost fully closed and they easily crept by in the shadows unnoticed. Soon they were at the sisters' room and they peeked in double checking, all clear. Then they were at the kitchen. Looking up they both took note, the window was closed. They then crept around past the kitchen double checking the front and side door. They made quick visual checks of all the front room windows. They both had agreed that the elves would come back in the same way they left, but better safe than sorry.

They made their way to the dinning room entrance for the kitchen and peered in. Their eyes adjusting to the dark and picking up any changes. Everything was the same, they sniffed the air. The smell of the elves from last night wasn't there yet. They had agreed they both smelled peppermint in the kitchen and in the hall where the elves had walked. They were able to follow the scent back to the sisters' room and it was strong in there, especially in the box of toys by the door.

"Let's go." Carlos was scooting into the kitchen and squeezing under the counter where the cabinets hung out. Rusty followed behind him and squeezed into place.

The night was quiet and still and the yellow light from the light-poles shinned into the kitchen through the closed window above the sink. They were quiet and just scanned the dark and waited.

"Carlos?"

"Yes Rusty?"

"I love David." He said softly.

"I do too." Carlos said in agreement.

"I love mommy." Rusty spoke out again.

"So do I," Carlos agreed again.

Just as Rusty was about to speak again, he saw a shadow move in the square of light on the kitchen floor, "Carlos, look." His hair bristled and he stiffened.

“Shh, I see,” Carlos whispered, now bristling at the sight of the coming intruders.

The first shadow soon had another next to it and then the window began to creak. The creak continued until the shadow on the floor showed the bottom of the window frame sliding up. The kittens could hear the soft raspy whispering of the elves floating on the air coming into the kitchen.

“Careful Bomm, we need to get the loot and get out just like last time,” One of the voices said speaking to the other.

“You be careful, Flarn, I know what we are doing and how to do it, it’s my plan,” Bomm replied chastising his partner.

The sound of small booted feet could be heard climbing onto the window sill and then the tiny soft thuds as they dropped onto the counter by the sink. The kittens could hear them walk across the counter toward the trash can. Then the elves jumped down onto the lid of the trash can, one and then the other then they jumped to the floor. The elves tip toed around the corner and toward the square of light in the middle of tiled kitchen floor.

Then from the still motionless shadows of the dark Carlos ran out and pounced on one, pinning him face first to the floor. Rusty close behind jumped at the other but the elf spun and seeing the leaping kitten dodged to the left. The elf on the ground under Carlos’s paws squiggled and wormed fussing, “Let me go, I say let me go this instant.”

Carlos only reply was more pressure and a attempt a fearsome hiss, which came out in starts and spits and sounded much less intimidating than he hoped. Meanwhile Rusty turned and jumped at the other elf swinging his paws in fury. Squeaky meows and soft growls coming from his tummy as he attacked the nimble opponent. Finally connecting his claws grabbed the green tunic worn on the elf who cried out in protest, “Back you furry beast!”

It was at that moment Rusty felt the stabbing pain in his paw, he jerked it back in surprise and fright and saw a small sharp sword in each of the elf’s hands. Blood dripped from one, and the elf now standing ready to fight in the moonlight had a mean snarl on his face. The elf turned and saw his companion pinned under Carlos and

called out, "Bomm!"

Suddenly a deep fierce growl erupted from Carlos and his face shifted as he pulled his mouth open wide revealing his long sharp white teeth. The elf, Flarn, was so distracted he didn't see the orange blur rush him from the side. BLAM! The elf fell to his back and his swords clanked and slid across the floor ending up under the fridge. Standing over the pinned elf, Rusty looked down at him and snarled and hissed at his captured foe.

"Listen to me," Rusty spoke his voice much deeper, "This house belongs to our people!" He stopped and growled again.

Carlos picked up where his brother had stopped, "We could kill you now, but that is not our way. We will release you. But, if we find you stealing from our people again, you will leave us no choice!"

"Do you understand, ELF!?" Rusty asked pushing his paws down on the pinned elf's shoulders. He felt like he might sneeze, the smell of peppermint was so strong.

"Fine, we'll go," The elves mumbled.

"Never come back, swear it." Carlos pushed down.

"We swear we will never return," The elves answered.

The kittens stepped back and watched as the elves climbed up to the open window, jumped out, and disappeared.

Carlos and Rusty looking at each other knew they would always look out for David and their family here in the Wilson house, no matter what.

"We must always be ready." Carlos said.

"You're right," Rusty replied, "Who knows what else is out there. We have to train."

As they walked back to David's room the two small elven swords glinted in the darkness under the fridge. And the sound of kitten sneezes could be heard in the night.

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