

Lost in
the Storm

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Lost in the Storm



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stripes

For Tom

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Chapter One



Fluff the kitten was lying in her basket on her back, showing off her furry tummy and snoring a little. She wasn't deeply asleep, just dozing, with her paws tucked under her chin. Her little body only took up one corner of the basket. Fluff was getting bigger, just not very fast. The basket was in a patch of winter sunshine, and it was

deliciously cosy. She was planning to spend as much of the afternoon as possible like this. She needed to keep her energy up, after all, for when Ella got home from school and wanted to play.

Ella's mum walked past, and Fluff opened one eye thoughtfully. Was there any chance of a snack? Ella's mum reached down to tickle her behind the ears. She hadn't wanted Ella to have a cat at first. When she and Ella first met Fluff at the farm where she'd been born, Mum had called Fluff a dirty, scruffy little kitten, and told Ella she could have a goldfish instead. (Fluff was a little sad that Ella didn't have a goldfish, actually. *She* would have liked one.) But when she'd seen how upset

Ella was, and understood that she really was old enough to look after a kitten properly, she'd changed her mind. Now she fussed over Fluff almost as much as Ella did. Fluff purred at the attention, and waved her paws idly. Ella's mum stroked the silky fur on Fluff's tummy, and laughed. She reached for the packet of cat treats on the counter. Fluff sprang out of her basket in half a second, standing on tiptoe with her paws against the cupboard door, scrabbling to get closer.

"I shouldn't be doing this." Mum shook her head. "You eat far too many of these. You'll get too big for your basket."

Fluff delicately nibbled the prawn-flavoured treat out of Mum's hand, and

pranced back to her basket. She knew Ella's mum was joking. The basket was huge! Fluff liked to lie up against one edge of it, to make it seem a bit smaller. She had a feeling that Ella and her dad had gone a bit over the top in the pet shop.



After Fluff had run away from the farm to escape being taken home by a horrible boy who wanted to feed her to next door's German shepherd dog, Ella and her family had finally found her again a couple of days before Christmas. It had been the snowiest Christmas for twenty years, so Ella hadn't been able to go out and buy Fluff a Christmas present. She'd made up for it when the snow thawed, spending most of her Christmas money from Grandma on cat toys. Ella walked past a pet shop on her way home from school, and she liked to pop in and spend her pocket money on things for Fluff. Fluff didn't mind at all – she was *very* fond of those prawn-flavoured cat treats...

Suddenly, Fluff pricked up her ears. She could hear someone opening the front door. Ella was back from school!

“I’m home!” Ella called, and Fluff bounded up to the front door to twine herself round Ella’s legs lovingly. She enjoyed having a nice sniff of the outdoors as well, poking her nose round the edge of the door.

Ella scooped her up gently. “Hey! No running off, Fluff!”

Fluff rubbed her head up and down Ella’s chin. She wasn’t trying to run off. It would just be fun to go and have a wander around outside. She hadn’t been allowed out much since Ella and her family had adopted her, and sometimes it could be a little bit boring, being an indoor cat. Ella took

her out in the garden at the weekends, but it was too dark when she got home from school. Fluff loved the garden, scratching the tree bark, chasing leaves, watching the bird table. She wished she could go and explore more when they were out, but she could see how worried Ella was about her getting lost again, so she stayed close by. Fluff thought it was a bit silly though – as if she could get lost by just investigating next door’s garden! She’d only been lost before because she had been so young. She was a bit bigger now, and she could find her way anywhere, she was sure.

“I brought you home a present!” Ella said, as she shut the door. She carried Fluff into the kitchen, gave her mum a quick hug, and started

to root around in her school bag.

“*Another* trip to the pet shop?” Mum asked, half-annoyed, half-laughing. “That cat is going to think it’s Christmas every day.”

Ella looked a little guilty. The pet shop was on her way home from school, and she was allowed to pop in, as long as she didn’t take long. Mum liked to know where she was. “I know. But you did say she needed a collar. They haven’t had any really nice ones before, but look at this!” She held up a beautiful blue leather collar. “Isn’t it gorgeous? And look, it’s got a place for her name and everything.” She fastened it round Fluff’s neck, and Fluff shook her head briskly, not sure about this new feeling.



“It’s a bit big,” Ella said, studying it thoughtfully. “But I suppose she’ll grow into it, won’t she? It looks beautiful.” Dangling from the collar was a little round golden tag. “You could choose,” Ella explained. “If I go back to the shop they can put her name on it. But I wanted to check what else we should put. Should we have our address engraved on it as well, in case she gets lost?”

Mum looked thoughtful for a moment. “Actually, I think just our phone number. Not even her name. I know it sounds silly, but if we put her name on, it means everyone knows it, and someone could call her over. We don’t want anyone to find it easy to steal our gorgeous kitten, do we?”

Ella looked horrified. “No! I didn’t think of that. Just the phone number then.” She picked Fluff up again and held her tight, so tight that Fluff wriggled after a few seconds, trying to get down.

“Hey! Ella, it’s OK. It’s just a safety thing. It’s really, really unlikely.” Mum gave her an anxious look. “I know you love Fluff, and of course we don’t want to lose her, but I think you’re just worrying too much. Fluff’s growing up now, and cats are very independent. I think you’re going to have to let her out on her own soon.”

Ella looked down at Fluff, who was now sniffing at the counter, hoping for more treats. “But what if she gets lost again?” she asked.

Mum sat down next to her. “There’s no reason why she should, Ella. Cats have a really good sense of direction. She won’t just go running off for no reason, she’ll look around, make sure she knows how to get back. She’s clever, isn’t she?”

Ella nodded. “Yes,” she agreed, and then she added doubtfully, “but she was lost before.”



“She was really little then, and it wasn’t her fault, anyway. She’d never been away from the farm. And she found you, didn’t she? That shows you just how amazing her instincts are.”

“Mmm.” It was true. They’d never understood how Fluff had found her way back to them, but Ella couldn’t believe it was just a coincidence.

“I think we ought to get Dad to put a cat flap in the back door. Then Fluff will be able to come in and out when she wants to.”

“OK,” Ella agreed reluctantly, still anxiously eyeing Fluff. She was such a small kitten, even now she’d grown a bit – and even with her podgy cat-treat-filled tummy. Would she really be safe out on her own?