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The Snow Bear

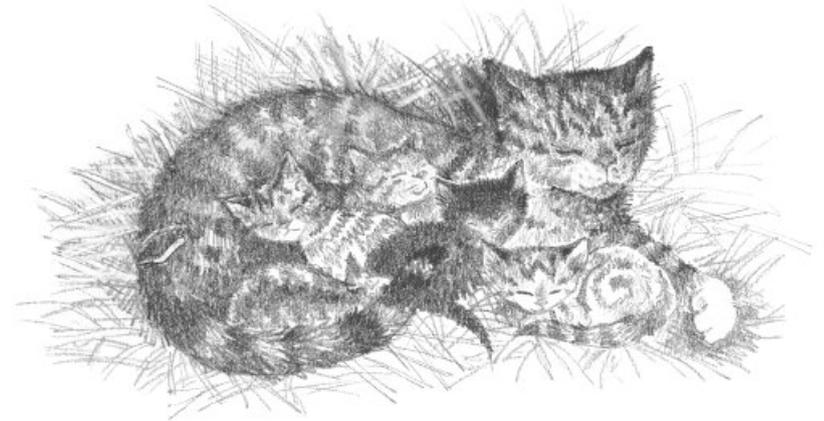
Animal Stories:

Lost in the Snow	Misty the Abandoned Kitten
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New Tricks for Rascal	Rascal's Festive Fun
Playtime for Rascal	Rascal the Star
Rascal's Sleepover Fun	Rascal and the Wedding

Ginger the Stray Kitten



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**stripes**

For Sophie

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Chapter One



“Are we going past the farm today?”
Rosie asked her gran hopefully. They had a few different ways back from school to Gran’s house, but the lane past the farm was Rosie’s favourite. That was the good thing about Gran picking her up from school while Mum was at work. Gran wasn’t usually in a rush, and she didn’t mind walking

slowly while Rosie stopped to look at any cats she happened to meet on the way. Rosie loved cats and was desperate for one of her own, but she hadn't managed to persuade her mum yet.

Gran smiled at her. "Oh, I suppose we could go home that way. I could do with picking up some eggs from Mrs Bowen. I might make a cake tonight, as it's the weekend." She looked down at Rosie, and said thoughtfully, "But you know how she likes to chat, Rosie. Are you sure you won't get bored?"

Rosie looked up at her in surprise, and realized that Gran was teasing. Gran knew that Rosie loved going to the farm, because while she was talking to Mrs Bowen, Rosie could go and watch the stray cats in the farmyard.

There were lots of them, and Gran said they were called feral cats because they weren't anyone's pets. Rosie had never managed to count them all, as they were so hard to see, but she thought there were probably about twenty of them. Mrs Bowen put food out occasionally, but mostly they lived on the mice they caught in the barns.

Rosie loved to imagine that the cats belonged to her, but they weren't really very friendly. If she sat on the foot step of the old rusty tractor for ages and ages, they might prowl past her, but none of them would come to be stroked.

One of the prettiest cats, a tabby with beautiful spotty markings, had given birth to a litter of kittens about

five weeks before. Rosie had heard them mewling in the barn, but she hadn't been able to see them for ages, as the tabby cat had hidden them under some old hay bales that were stored in there.

Now the kittens were all dashing about the farmyard, and they weren't quite as shy as the older cats. Rosie was really hoping that she could tame one of them. She couldn't help dreaming of taking a kitten home for her own pet.

She knew which one she wanted most of all – the gorgeous little ginger boy kitten. He was so sweet – he had gingery-creamy fur with darker ginger stripes, and an amazingly bright pink nose. His eyes were very green and very

big, and Rosie thought he was the most handsome cat she'd ever seen.

Sometimes people called Rosie Ginger because of her long, curly red hair. Mum had always told her that her red hair was lovely and different, and that she'd like it when she was older, but Rosie wasn't so sure. Then she had seen the kitten. She felt like she and the kitten were a pair, with their ginger colouring. They were ginger and proud of it!

She wished the ginger kitten would let her stroke him. She could just imagine how soft his fur would be. The other day he'd actually come close enough to sniff at her fingers, but he'd darted off again without letting Rosie touch him.

Gran called hello at Mrs Bowen's back door, which was half open, and Rosie looked eagerly around the farmyard.



She had something special for the cats today, and she was really hoping she could tempt the ginger kitten to come over to her.

Rosie had noticed at lunch that her friend Millie had ham sandwiches. Mum usually put jam sandwiches in Rosie's lunch box, because they were her favourite, but she couldn't help thinking

that the kitten would love Millie's sandwiches, the ham smelled really nice. Millie was picking at the ham with a bored expression.

"Don't you like your sandwiches?" Rosie asked, a plan starting to form in the back of her mind.

"I wanted peanut butter, but my brother had nicked it all," Millie sighed. "I hate ham..."

"Do you want to swap? I've only got one left, but it's jam," Rosie offered hopefully.

"You sure?" Millie looked delighted. "I didn't know you liked ham. You can have both of them!"

Rosie had slowly eaten one of the sandwiches, and then tucked the other one away in her lunch box.

“Didn’t you like it after all?” Millie asked.

Rosie leaned over closer to her. The kitten felt like a special secret, and she didn’t want everyone to know. “I’m saving it. Remember the gorgeous ginger kitten I was telling you about that lives on the farm on the way back to my gran’s house? He came right up to me the other day, and I bet if I had some food he might even let me stroke him. You don’t mind, do you?”

Millie shook her head. “Of course not! Oh, you’re so lucky, going to see kittens. Are they tiny?”

“The lady who owns the farm thinks they’re about five weeks old. They’re so cute! Maybe your mum would let you come home with us and see them

one day? I’m sure Gran wouldn’t mind. She could do tea for you as well.”

Now Rosie carefully unwrapped Millie’s sandwich, and started to crumble it into little bits, very gently, trying to keep as still and quiet as she could. It didn’t take long for the cats to get a whiff of the delicious, meaty smell.

Rosie caught a movement out of the corner of her eye, just a streak of black fur. It was one of the kittens, popping its head round the tractor wheel, trying to see what that yummy smell was. Suddenly, several more little cat faces popped up, their whiskers twitching as they sniffed the air.

Rosie threw a bit of sandwich on the ground a little way away, and the

closest kitten, the black one, pounced and swallowed it whole. Then he looked up for more. All the other kittens padded a few steps forward, not wanting to miss out. This time Rosie dropped the food closer, and one of the tabby kittens darted in and grabbed it, running back to a safe distance before she dared to stop and eat.

Rosie's heart thumped with delight as she saw her favourite ginger kitten patter across the farmyard, eager to join in. She tried to throw the next piece close to him, but the tabby kitten got there first and gobbled it up, right under his nose. The ginger kitten gave Rosie a piteous stare. *I'm so hungry, he seemed to be saying. Pllleeease feed me...*

