

Smudge
the Stolen
Kitten

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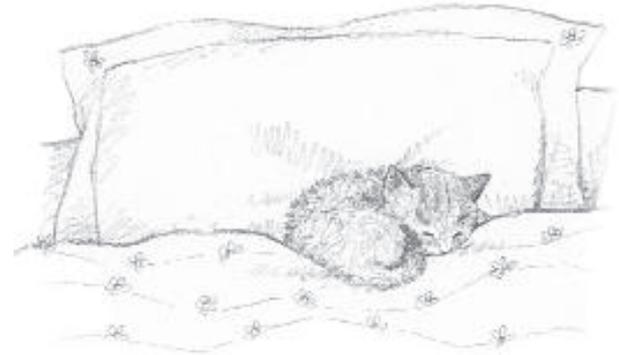
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Smudge the Stolen Kitten



Holly Webb

**stripes**

For Robin

For more information about Holly Webb visit:
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Chapter One



There was the sound of a whistle blowing. “Ben Williams and Rob Ford! Get down from there right now!”

Olivia looked up and groaned. Mrs Mackintosh sounded as if she'd yelled right in Olivia's ear, even though she was on the other side of the playground.

“What have Ben and Rob done now?” her friend Lucie asked.

“Something awful, as usual,” Olivia muttered, as they ran across the playground to see what was going on. Her big brother Ben was always in trouble at school – which wasn’t fair, because all the teachers either thought that meant Olivia was naughty too, or that she ought to have stopped him. As if he’d listen to *her*! And his friend Rob was even worse.

“You’re very lucky you haven’t broken your necks!” the girls heard Mrs Mackintosh saying crossly. “What a stupid thing to do!”

“It isn’t in the playground rules that we can’t tightrope walk along the top of the fence, Mrs Mackintosh,” Ben said innocently, pointing to the poster on the side of the wall.



“That’s because before you, Ben, no one had even thought of it!” the head teacher snapped. “We need to add an extra rule at the bottom of that list saying that whatever idiotic thing you two think of next isn’t allowed! You can miss the rest of play. Go inside and tell Mrs Beale that you’re to help set out the chairs for assembly this afternoon!”

Ben winked at Olivia as he and Rob went past on their way to the hall. He didn’t look as though he minded being told off at all.

Olivia sighed and Lucie gave her a sympathetic smile. “It’s probably better than having a brother who’s totally perfect – then everyone would ask you why you couldn’t be more like him.”

“I suppose,” Olivia sighed, kicking at a pile of leaves. “But I can’t wait till he goes to secondary school next year.”



“Mrs Beale told me about what happened at lunchtime, by the way.” Mum eyed Ben sternly. She worked as a part-time teaching assistant at Olivia and Ben’s school.

Ben waved a forkful of spaghetti at her, looking hurt. “It’s so unfair! No one had ever said we couldn’t walk along the fence.”

“Sometimes I think we should just send you and Rob to join the circus.” Dad was trying to look cross, but Olivia could see that he was smiling.

“Excellent! No more school!” Ben grinned.

“It wasn’t at all clever, Ben.” Mum frowned. “I’m tempted not to tell you the special news I’ve got.”

Olivia looked up from her pasta. “What is it? Don’t be mean, Mum!”

Her mum stared up at the ceiling smiling, while Olivia and Ben begged her to tell.

“All right, all right! You remember a while ago we had a leaflet through the door about the Cat Rescue Centre?”

Olivia nodded eagerly. “With photos of all the cats they’d found new homes for! They were gorgeous. I wish we could have one. It said they were always looking for good homes for unwanted cats.”

Mum smiled. “I know, Olivia – you went on about it for days. Well, Dad and I have been talking, and we decided that maybe you’re both old enough to have a pet.”

“Really?” Olivia gasped. “We’re going to get a cat?”

“I’d rather have a dog, Mum,” Ben put in. “Dogs are more fun.”

Mum shook her head. “No. Dad’s at work all day, and you’re both at school, and so am I three days a week. A dog would get really lonely.”

Ben sighed and nodded, so Mum went on quickly. “I gave the Cat Rescue Centre a ring this morning. They’ve got some kittens at the moment, they said, and they’re ready for new homes now.”

Olivia jumped up, almost upsetting her pasta into her lap. "Let's go!"

"Livvy, sit down!" Mum laughed. "The centre's not even open right now. And anyway, before we can go and choose a kitten, we have to have a home visit. To check that we're going to be suitable owners."



Olivia sat down, staring back at Mum worriedly. "Suitable? What does that mean? Do we have to know loads about cats? I only know a bit. But I've got lots of books about cats, and we could look things up on the computer..."

"Slow down!" Dad patted her shoulder. "It's OK. They're just going to want to check that our road isn't too busy. And that we're happy to put a cat flap in the kitchen door, that kind of thing."

"*And* that we don't have children who won't know how to behave around a cat," Mum said, eyeing Ben grimly. "A lady from the centre is coming to see us this evening, and we'll all have to show her that we're *sensible*, Benjamin Williams."

Ben scowled, and Olivia looked at him warily. Ben wasn't sensible at all. In fact, he was the least sensible person Olivia had ever met.

How were they ever going to convince the lady from the Rescue Centre that they were the right owners for a kitten?



"I'll give you this week's pocket money," Olivia said desperately.

Ben raised one eyebrow.

"And my Saturday sweets too! But you have to promise to be on your absolute best behaviour. Actually, don't even talk! Or – or move!"

Ben zipped his lips with his fingers,

and smirked at her, but Olivia wasn't sure she could trust him.

"Oh, there's the doorbell! Shall we go and answer it, or let Mum?" Olivia twisted her fingers together nervously. She so wanted to make a good impression.

"Mmmpfl." Ben made a strange grunting noise, and Olivia stared at him.

He shrugged. "Well, you said not to talk!"

"That doesn't mean make stupid noises! If she asks you a question you have to say something."

"Something."

"Fine, I'm keeping my pocket money." Olivia marched down the stairs feeling furious. If Ben managed

to mess this up, she was never going to forgive him. Ben followed her, sniggering.

Mum was just answering the door to a friendly-looking lady in a Rescue Centre fleece.

“Hi. I’m Debbie, from the Cat Rescue Centre.”

“Thanks for coming. I’m Emma and this is my husband, John, and this is Olivia and Ben.” Mum led Debbie into the living room, and Olivia and Ben followed behind. Dad went to put the kettle on.

“It seems like a fairly quiet area.” Debbie made a note on the sheet she was holding. “Not too many cars.”

“Lots of people around here have cats,” Olivia put in hopefully.

Mum laughed. “And Olivia is friends with all of them!”

Olivia perched nervously on the edge of the sofa. Ben was sitting on the sofa arm, and for once he didn’t look as though he was planning anything silly. Olivia crossed her fingers. “Are there really kittens at the Rescue Centre right now?” she asked Debbie shyly.

Debbie nodded. “Two litters, actually. One’s mostly ginger and white, and the other litter are a smoky grey. They’re all really sweet.”

Olivia’s eyes shone as she imagined sitting on the sofa, just like she was now, but with a tiny grey kitten purring on her lap.

Debbie went through a long list of

questions, checking how much time the kitten would be left alone, and that Olivia's mum knew they'd have to pay for vet's bills. Olivia could see the list if she leaned over, and it mostly had ticks in the boxes. Hopefully Debbie would say yes!

Just as Debbie was handing Mum some leaflets about pet insurance and flea treatments, Dad came in with a tray of tea. He passed the cups round, then he sat down on the sofa next to Olivia. There was a sudden, very loud, very rude noise, and Dad jumped up, his face scarlet.

Ben practically fell off the sofa arm he was laughing so much, and Olivia pulled out a whoopee cushion from behind Dad.

"Ben!" Mum sounded horrified.

"I'd forgotten it was there, sorry," Ben said, but he didn't look very sorry at all.

Olivia looked over at Debbie, her eyes starting to burn with tears. Did having a stupid, rude big brother mean no kitten?

