

The
Frightened
Kitten

For Lara

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Chapter One



“Make sure you wrap it up carefully,”
Kate told Maddy, stuffing an armful of
bubble wrap into her best friend’s lap.

Maddy nodded, smoothing it out and
starting to wind it round the photo
frame. “Ben looks gorgeous in this
picture,” she said, her voice a bit wobbly.

Kate nodded. “He always does. But
that’s my favourite photo of him.”

Maddy stared down at the photo – she was in it too. It had been taken last summer, and showed her and Kate, with Kate’s huge black cat Ben sitting on the picnic rug between them. He was almost as tall as they were, when the girls were sitting down.

She laughed with surprise as a hard head butted her arm, and Ben stomped his way on to her lap to see exactly what she was doing. He’d been asleep at the end of Kate’s bed, but he’d obviously decided something interesting was happening. He was the world’s nosiest cat.

“Do you think he’ll mind moving?” Maddy asked, watching Kate fill a big cardboard box with books and her ornaments, all carefully wrapped up.

“I don’t know.” Kate shrugged. “The new house has got a big garden, but he likes it here. Like me.” She sighed miserably. “I keep hoping Dad’s going to come home and say it was all a mistake, and he doesn’t have to go and work in Yorkshire after all. But we’re leaving tomorrow. It’s getting a bit late for that.” She sniffed, and sat down next to Maddy and Ben on the bed.



Maddy put an arm round her, and Ben bounced on to Kate's lap, standing up on his hind legs to wrap his front paws around her neck. It was his party trick. Kate always told people she had a cat who hugged, although he didn't do it to very many people. Mostly Kate, but he would do it to Maddy sometimes, especially if she'd given him a cat treat. He'd even done it to Maddy's dad once, when he came to pick Maddy up and stopped for a cup of tea. Her dad had been taken by surprise, but Maddy had noticed that he always looked for Ben whenever he came to Kate's now. As though he was hoping that Ben might do it again.

Maddy had been working on her mum and dad to let her get a cat of

her own for ages. She was pretty sure that Ben had won her dad over that day. Now she just had to persuade her mum...

Kate sniffed again. "What if he doesn't like the new house, Maddy? He might even try and find his way back here. You read in the papers about cats who do that."

"Yorkshire's probably too far for him to try it," Maddy said. It was meant to be comforting, but it didn't work. She didn't want to think about how far away her friend was going to be. And she was going to have to start a new school, of course. Maddy couldn't imagine having to do that.

Kate frowned. "I hope there aren't too many other cats near the new house.

Ben's the top cat round here, none of the other cats would put a paw in our garden. But the new garden might be another cat's territory already."

Maddy looked down at Ben, now sitting comfortably on Kate's lap. He yawned and stretched, and then stared up at her with huge green eyes. *He* didn't look like he was worried.

"Even if the garden is another cat's territory, I don't think it will be for long," Maddy said, stroking him.

Kate nodded, laughing. "Maybe. He doesn't fight very often, but when he does, I think he just sits on the other cats and squashes them." She sighed. "I suppose I'd better get on with packing. Mum says I should have had it finished yesterday." She pushed Ben

gently off her knee, and he slunk away to hide among the boxes.

Maddy went back to wrapping up the photo. She was going to miss Kate so much. She knew Kate would miss her too, but her friend was a bit like Ben, Maddy thought. She was so strong and bouncy and confident. She'd have a new gang of friends in no time – and she'd be showing off her famous hugging cat to them instead.

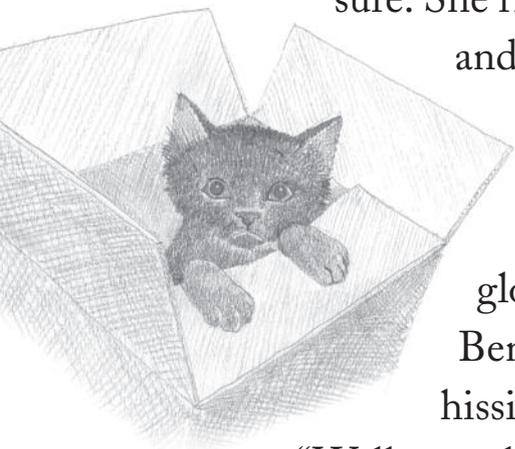
"Pass me that tape, Maddy, so I can seal this box up."

Maddy handed her the parcel tape, and wrapped another photo frame. "Where did Ben go?" she asked, a few minutes later.

"He's under the bed, isn't he?" Kate said, peering down.

But he wasn't. There was a sudden thumping and then a muffled yowl. "He's in the box!" Maddy giggled.

Kate stared at the big cardboard box she'd just taped up. "He can't be..." she murmured, but she didn't sound very sure. She ripped off the tape,



and the flaps came up, followed by a large black head, with cross, glowing green eyes. Ben scrambled out, hissing grumpily.

"Well, you shouldn't have been in there!" Kate laughed. "Nosy boy!"

Maddy was laughing too. But even as she laughed, she was thinking, *I'm going to miss them so much...*



Kate and her mum walked Maddy home – it was only five minutes away, and it was warm and sunny. Perfect Easter holiday weather. If Kate hadn't been leaving tomorrow, they'd have spent loads of time in the park, or maybe gone out somewhere for the day.

"Those cats that live next door to you are nearly as big as Ben," Kate's mum commented, as they came up to Maddy's garden.

"They're sitting on Mum's daffodils again," Maddy sighed, as she hurried into the front garden and tried to shoo the two big ginger cats off the stone pot that her mum had planted full of bulbs. For some reason Tiger and Tom

had decided it was a really good place to sit, and the daffodils were looking a bit squashed now.

Maddy's mum opened the front door. "I heard you coming, girls. Oh, no, not those horrible cats again!"

Tiger spat crossly at Maddy as she tried to get him off the daffodils, and yowled. He was so different to lovely, sweet-natured Ben. At last, he jumped

down, and the pair of them stalked away, glaring back at Maddy.



As the mums chatted, Kate flung her arms round Maddy. "Promise you'll call me every day! Tell me everything that's happening at school, OK?"

Maddy nodded. "And anyway, you're coming back to visit at half-term."

"We'd better go," Kate's mum said. "It'll be a long day tomorrow, and there's still some packing to do."

And that was it. Kate and her mum went back down the path, waving, and Maddy was left on her own.



"I've finished," said Maddy, pushing away her half-eaten dinner. Mum had made her favourite pasta, but she just wasn't hungry.

Her dad leaned over and put an arm round her shoulders. “Do you think we could tell her the news? To cheer her up?” he suggested to Maddy’s mum, and she nodded.

“What news?” Maddy sniffed sadly.

“Do you remember me telling you that my friend Donna’s cat had kittens a couple of months ago?” Mum asked.

“Oh, yes. You showed me a photo on your phone. They’re gorgeous. There were some tortoiseshell ones – my favourite kind!”

“Good. Because one of them is going to be yours!”

Maddy blinked. “I’m getting a kitten?”

“You can choose which of the litter you’d like. Donna needs to find homes

for them all, and we thought it would be nice for you to have a cat, as you’ve wanted one for so long. Especially as you’re bound to miss Kate – getting to know a kitten might make the Easter holidays a bit less sad.” Her mum looked at her anxiously. “We’re not trying to take your mind off missing her, Maddy. It’s a really sad thing for a friend to move away.”

“It just seemed like a good time,” her dad added.

Maddy nodded. “It is a good time,” she whispered. She couldn’t help still feeling sad about Kate, of course, but at the same time, inside she was jumping about and squeaking. *A kitten! A kitten! I’m getting a kitten!*