



She was a female cat.

Around the back of his building, Billy hid her in the box of sand saved for winter ice. He went up the back steps to the third-floor landing of his apartment. His mom and dad were out, so he brought the cat inside.

His bedroom dresser was kitty-corner to the wall. Billy stripped off his shirt and spread it over the floor in the space at the back. When he placed the cat on top, she crumpled into a dark heap and started to shake.

What now?

Her paw dripped steadily. Billy went to the bathroom where his mother kept the medical supplies. Somewhere in a drawer of old tubes, there was a cream for skin scrapes. He found the cream, and filled a dish with warm, soapy water. Then he wormed his way back behind the dresser.

CAT FOUND

When he picked up the cat, she sagged through his fingers like a hank of drain hair. “Cat,” he said. “Your paw’s festering. It needs a hand.”

Billy dunked the bad paw into the warm, soapy water and swished it around. He was careful. The cat had claws. He didn’t want to be a scratching post. After the paw was well soaked, he cleaned the pus away with a tissue. Somewhere in the process, the cat roused herself and took over. She licked the wound until Billy could see the rawness. When he put on the cream, she shook her paw in the air.

Billy snuck back downstairs with a foil pan and filled it with sand from the box. He didn’t spill a single grain on the way up. He slid the pan into a corner of his closet. He filled a bowl with fresh cold water and coaxed the cat till it got her attention. She lapped the bowl dry. Billy stayed there until she went to sleep. Maybe he took a nap, too. It didn’t seem more than a minute or two before his mom got home.

“Billy!” she called from the hall. “You haven’t touched the meat loaf. Come out of that room and eat some dinner.”

“Cat,” Billy warned. “You’d better be quiet.”

As if he needed to say that. The cat was sleeping so hard, she didn’t flick a whisker.

INGRID LEE

Billy wiped the black dust from his arms and face and grabbed another shirt. He turned and surveyed his room. No one would ever think he was hiding a cat. His room was so messy, he could have hidden a pride of lions.