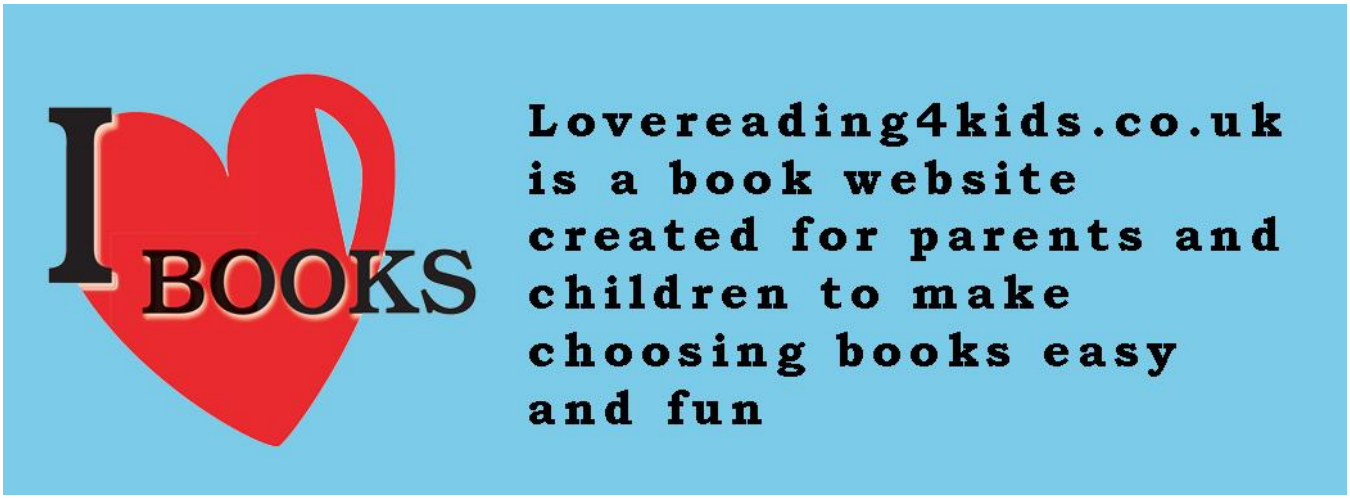


Opening extract from

The Home-Made Cat Cafe

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

for Maddie, Piper and Riley - KC

Thank you to my children, Ava and Max,
for being my inspiration - LT



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Isla Palmer loved cats. She loved their silky fur and little pink tongues. She loved how clever they were, and the way they purred when they were happy. But most of all, she loved how they made you feel. It was impossible to be sad when a cat was around.

Isla was sure she'd persuade her mum to let her have a cat of her very own one day. But until then, she'd just have to content herself with helping out at Abbey Park Vets,

where her mum worked as a veterinary nurse. Isla liked nothing more than sitting at the front desk and meeting all the people and their pets, and it gave her the chance to snuggle with any cat who'd come in for a check-up.

Isla glanced around the surgery and smiled to herself. The summer holidays had just begun and she was looking forward to spending every possible second at the vets, allowing for maximum cat-cuddling time in between all the chores that Mum had lined up for her.

"The thing about cats," Isla said to her mum as she helped put away bandages in the supply cupboard, "is that they are so loving. Not like a hamster who would rather chew on a stick than let you stroke it, or a bearded dragon who hardly even moves and eats live bugs."



Isla's mum sighed. "The thing about cats, Isla, is that I spend all day looking after them here at work. Cleaning up their mess, feeding them, giving them stitches after they've managed to get stuck in an old wooden fence. The last thing I need when I get home is more cats to look after."

Mum was always going on about how grown-ups didn't like to bring their work home with them. Isla couldn't understand this at all. If Mum worked in a pizza restaurant, Isla was sure that she wouldn't have a problem bringing her work home with her then.

Her mum placed the last of the bandages in the cupboard. "We've had this conversation a hundred times before, Isla. I'm sorry, but we are not getting a cat, or a stick insect, or any other type of pet. There would have to be a really good reason for me to say yes to us getting a cat – and being more loving than a bearded dragon is not a really good reason."

Isla tried to hide her disappointment. She didn't want any other type of pet. All she wanted – all she'd *ever* wanted – was a cat of her own.

"I *do* have a really good reason," Isla protested.

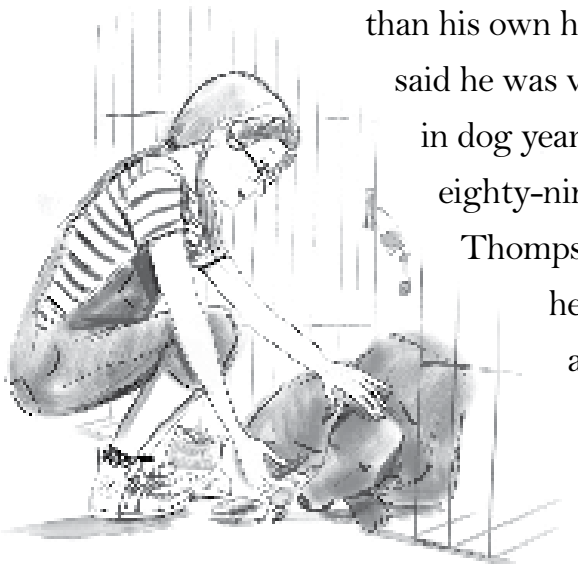
She searched through her backpack for her *I Heart Cats* notebook where she had written nine more really good reasons to have a cat, but before she could continue

with reason number two, Mum was called away by Lucy, the vet.

Isla sighed. She should have started with something better than the loving thing. Maybe reason number six – a cat could save your life. Isla had heard about a cat who had woken its owners in the middle of the night when there had been a house fire. This was just one of the hundreds of reasons why cats were so amazing. She couldn't understand why her mum didn't feel the same.

Isla stuffed her notebook into her backpack and made her way to the holding cages behind the consulting room where they kept sick or injured animals who were recovering from a procedure or waiting to be treated. She hoped there were some cats there today.

In the first cage was Thompson – a grumpy, overweight black Labrador who seemed to spend more time at Abbey Park than his own home. Mum said he was very, very old in dog years – almost eighty-nine. Isla patted Thompson's head as he snored loudly, and left a few dog biscuits for when he woke up.



The next few cages were empty, but a little further along, inside a glass vivarium, was a large python called Cecil – another regular patient – wrapped around a log. Isla knew that snakes liked to eat frozen mice. She shuddered, glad that she didn't

have to feed Cecil. It wasn't that she was afraid of snakes exactly, she'd just rather not touch the dead things they ate. Although Cecil didn't only eat dead things. The reason he was at the vets so often was because he was always eating things he shouldn't – this time he'd swallowed his owner's glasses. Isla thought that maybe Cecil wasn't *that* fond of dead things either.

Isla readjusted her own glasses, which had slid down her nose slightly, and went to wash her hands, thinking that there were no more animals to see. Then she heard a quiet meow coming from a cage at the end of the corridor. She hurried down to take a look. A beautiful cat sat with a thick bandage around one of its back legs. It had bright green eyes and its fur was mostly black, with white paws like little socks and a furry white chest.

Unusually, there was no name on the chalkboard outside the cage. It only said *Nil by Mouth* which meant that the cat wasn't allowed anything to eat or drink as it had either just had an operation or was about to have one. Isla gave the cat a wistful look, holding her hand up against the bars. The cat batted its front paw in the air as though it was trying to give her a high-five.



Isla giggled with delight. She'd never seen a cat high-five before. "Hiya, I'm Isla. What's your name?"

The cat meowed in response, then nudged its head against the cage door.

"Oh, you poor thing!" Isla cried. She tickled the cat's nose with her fingertips. Its rough, pink tongue licked at Isla's fingers as it purred contentedly.

Isla glanced at her watch – it was almost one o'clock. She'd promised Mum that she would leave at lunchtime to pack up her bedroom, ready for Gran's arrival. It had taken them ages to persuade Gran to come and stay for the summer and Isla wanted everything to be perfect. It was the first time Gran had visited since their beloved grandad had died in January. They all missed him so much and Isla knew what a big step it

was for Gran. For ages, she'd hidden herself away, turning down invitations to visit, and refusing help of any kind. As the weeks had turned into months, it had felt like they'd lost Gran, too.

But last week, after lots of begging, Gran had finally agreed to come and stay. Isla couldn't wait to see her – Gran was almost as cat-crazy as she was, and didn't mind listening to Isla's constant ideas for persuading Mum to get a cat. The only downside was that it meant Isla had to share a room with her older sister Tilda, who wasn't at all keen on having a roommate.

"I have to go, but I'll come back later," Isla promised the cat, trying to tear herself away. It meowed loudly and she hesitated, glancing around to check that they were alone.

"OK!" she whispered. "You can come out

for a little while, just don't tell Mum. I'm not supposed to let the animals out – not after Basil. She thinks it could lead to some kind of disaster!"

A while ago, Isla had accidentally let a ferret escape, not knowing how fast a ferret can be. She had frantically chased it up and down the corridor for what felt like forever until she managed to coax it back into its cage with a piece of her ham sandwich. Unfortunately Mum had caught her in the act. She'd been so angry that Isla hadn't been allowed to come back to the vets for a week. Even Lucy – who never got mad with anyone – was ever-so-slightly cross with her.

Isla dropped her backpack, opened the cage and gently lifted up the cat, making sure she didn't hurt its bad leg. She hugged

the cat so close that she could feel its heart beating, and rested her cheek on its soft fur, sighing happily.

"Your owner is the luckiest person in the world," Isla whispered.



The cat meowed, batting at the air again with its front paw. Isla giggled, holding up her hand to meet it in another high-five. Down the corridor, Lucy's office door opened suddenly.

Isla hurriedly put the cat back into its cage, making triple sure that the door was secure, then leaned against the wall in what she hoped was an I'm-not-doing-anything-wrong kind of pose. Lucy and Mum

stepped into the corridor, but they were so deep in conversation neither of them even noticed her.

"There's definitely no owner?" Mum asked.

"I'm afraid not," said Lucy. "There was no collar or identity chip, and we've had no reports of a missing cat. She was probably a stray in the wrong place at the wrong time when the car hit her. She might end up with a slight limp, but otherwise she'll make a full recovery. Hopefully someone will adopt her. She's such an affectionate cat."

Isla's eyes widened. A cat … *this* cat … needed a home! It couldn't be more perfect. How could she convince Mum though? Isla grabbed her notebook from her backpack, searching for her list again.

"Isla? What are you still doing here?" her mum called. "Shouldn't you be on your way home by now?"

"I was just coming to find you," Isla gabbled, hurrying over. Lucy gave her a smile. "I … um … couldn't help overhearing your conversation. I wasn't listening on purpose, I promise. I was just visiting the cat over there and I heard you say that she needs a home."

Isla's mum groaned. "Isla, honey, I've already told you—"

"I know, I know." Isla jumped in before Mum could say no again. She held up her notebook. "Just hear me out – I've got all these other ideas about why we should have a cat."

Her mum glanced at the notebook and gave a little smile. "I don't have time now,

Isla. We've got an emergency about to come in any second and you've got some packing to do – it's time you went home."

"But—"

"We'll talk about it later," Mum said.

"You promise you'll listen to me?" Isla asked.

Her mum nodded. Isla looked back sadly at the cat who had been watching them through the bars of the cage. It gave a small meow. "What's going to happen to her?"

"I'm taking her to the sanctuary tomorrow afternoon after we pick up your gran," Mum said. "Now off you go, and ask Tilda to make sure that Milo eats more than a packet of crisps for his lunch."

"I'll try," Isla said. "I'm not sure that she'll take any notice though." Isla was used to being ignored by her older sister.

Mum frowned. "Well, tell Tilda I'll be checking up on her later."

"I'll see you soon," Isla whispered to the cat as she left. Her mind was already buzzing with ideas. She was determined to convince Mum that the cat belonged with them. She couldn't bear the thought of her going to the sanctuary – not when they had a perfectly good home to give her. But Isla was going to need more than just a really good reason. She had to find the best reason *ever* … and before tomorrow afternoon.