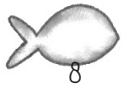


Lost and found

Libby lives with a school teacher. Everyone at school calls her ‘Miss Lewis’, so that’s what she’ll be called in this book. Miss Lewis lives with Libby and her adopted daughter, Mavis (Mae for short). Libby won’t care what we call either of them, cats aren’t big on names.

It was Miss Lewis who gave Libby her name. Miss Lewis had thought about getting a cat for a long time, but she always seemed to be too busy, what with teaching and marking and going on walking holidays with



her friends and one thing and another (and that was all before Mae came along). Then one day she noticed a skinny cat skulking around at the end of her garden. The next day the cat was there again, and this time she meowed at Miss Lewis. The meow sounded as if it might mean ‘Feed me!’, and Miss Lewis was thinking of having a tin of tuna for her supper anyway, so she went indoors and opened the tin and put some on a saucer.



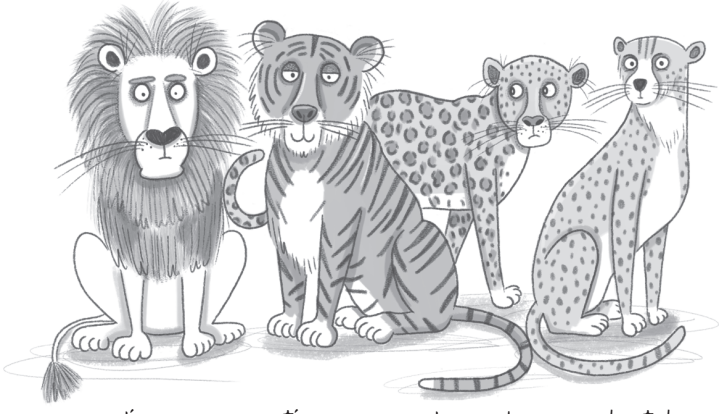
A few minutes later she realised she would have to change her plans for supper, because the cat had eaten the lot! Once the food was gone, the cat ran off again, but the next day she came back for more food, and the next day, and the next.

Soon, Miss Lewis and the cat became friends and started sitting in the garden together, though Miss Lewis wouldn't let her in the house, because she was worried that the cat must have a proper owner somewhere nearby. But the cat kept on coming back, so one day Miss Lewis got out her phone and took a photo of her. That night she printed lots of copies of the photo on to a poster that said 'Is this your cat?', and the next day she pinned them up around the neighbourhood.



But no one replied. The cat was genuinely lost.

So Miss Lewis decided she would adopt the cat herself. A pet cat needs a name, and Miss Lewis, being an educated lady, thought that any cat of hers ought to have a proper cat name. When she looked up 'cat' on the internet, the first thing she found was that around the world there are more than thirty different kinds of cat. Some are well-known, like the lion and the tiger and the leopard and the cheetah, mainly because they're big and fierce.



lion tiger leopard cheetah

But there are lots of kinds of smaller cats.

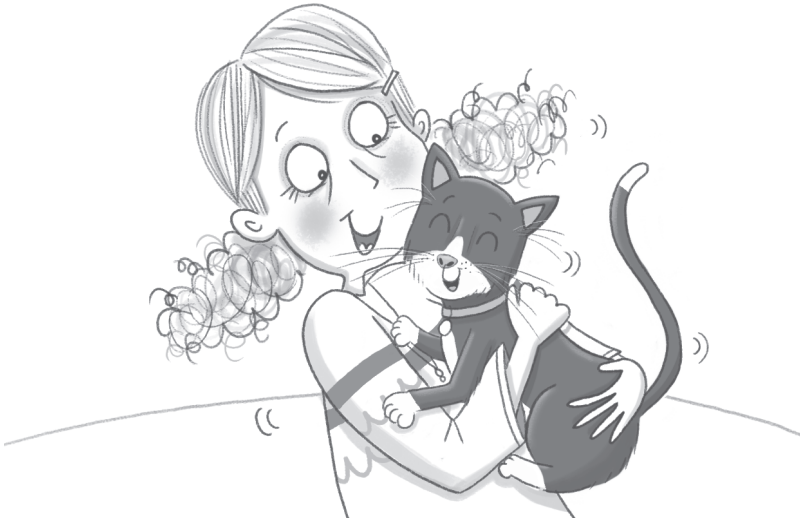


Some live at the tops of mountains, others live in swamps and swim around catching fish.

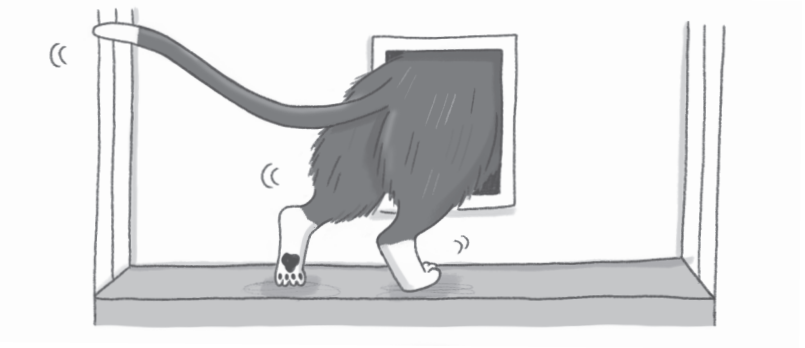


But they all live on their own, and none of them like humans much. There's only one kind of cat that lives with people, and

because it was first discovered in a part of North Africa called Libya, it became known as the Libyan cat. About four thousand years ago, a few Libyan cats who lived in Egypt (the country next door) changed their ways. Instead of living alone as their grandparents had done, they worked out how to make friends with people. Gradually, over hundreds of years, these special cats turned themselves into pets. Miss Lewis liked this story so much that she decided to call her new friend Libby, after the country where her ancestors might have lived.



Back to the story. It's quite light now and Libby decides it's time for breakfast.



In through the cat flap with a *click-clack* she goes, past her empty bowl, past a pile of schoolbooks on the floor in the hall, up the stairs and into Miss Lewis's bedroom. She leaps up on to the bed and starts purring, loud enough to wake Miss Lewis up.



Cats have two different kinds of purr. One is loud and a bit harsh to listen to. Some people think that underneath the rattle of the purr itself, they can also hear a sound like a baby crying. This is the purr that cats use when they want their owners to do something for them – and NOW, not in a few minutes! The other sort of purr is much softer and means 'Stay still, I'm happy here'. Kittens make this purr when they want their mums to lie quietly and let them feed, and their mums reply with the same purr to make sure the kittens relax and get plenty to eat.

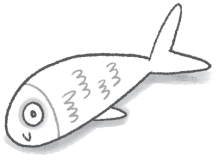


And of course, pet cats purr when they want to snuggle up to their favourite humans.

Miss Lewis knows this routine only too well. She knows that if she tries to ignore Libby's urgent purring, it will soon be followed up by a couple of head-butts and then some rough licking of her face. So she gets out of bed, pulls on her dressing gown and goes downstairs to fill Libby's bowl. She makes herself a cup of tea while Libby eats, and then goes back upstairs to wake Mae.

Mae has only lived with Miss Lewis for a couple of years. She was born in India, and she doesn't know who her real parents were. Her earliest memory is of living on the streets of a big city, and later she lived in an orphanage with lots of other lost children.

Then one day Miss Lewis came by, looking for a little girl to come and live with her. Miss Lewis stayed in a hotel near the orphanage, and saw Mae every day, so they could get to know one another really well. A few weeks later, when all the papers had been signed, Mae and Miss Lewis caught a plane back to England. To begin with, England seemed very strange to Mae – and cold! – but in her class at school there were other girls who looked like her, whose parents had been born in India, so she didn't feel out of place for long (but she still doesn't like the English winter!). And of course Libby was there, reminding her of the cats that lived around the orphanage.



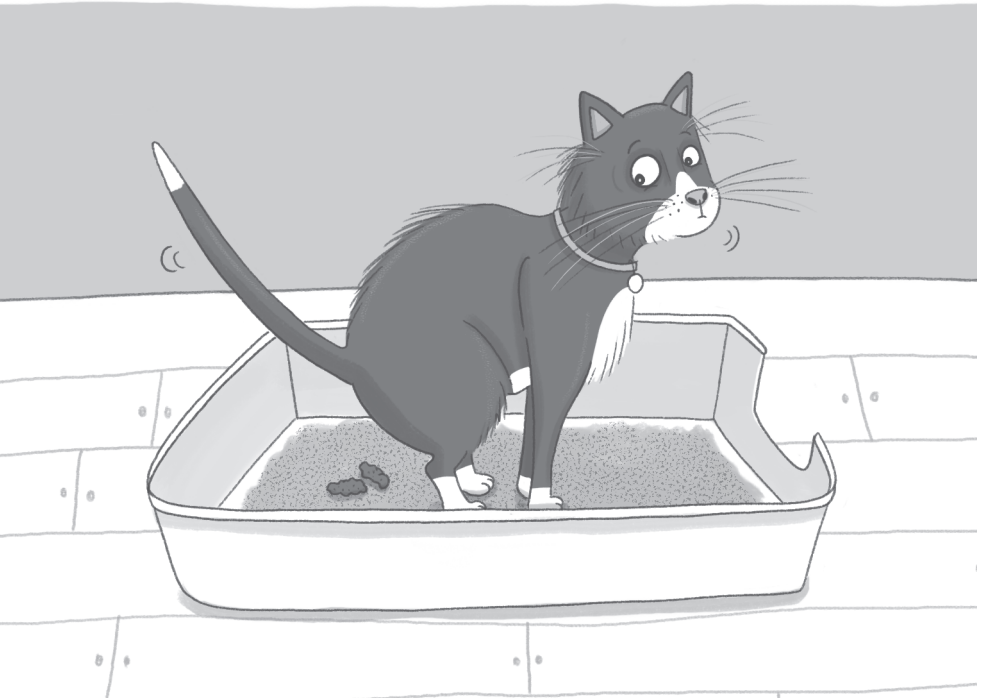


Wee and poo (and pouncing, too)!

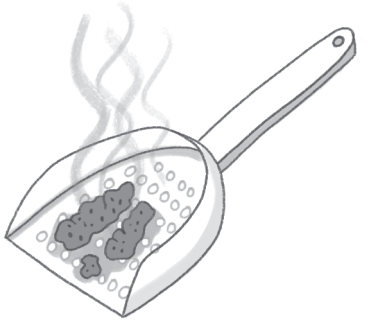
Meanwhile downstairs Libby has just finished her breakfast, and needs a poo. Some cats poo outdoors, often in next door's garden, but Miss Lewis doesn't want to upset her neighbours, so as soon as she'd decided to keep Libby, she bought a litter tray. Libby didn't use it at first, but Miss Lewis had read that some litters are better than others, so she tried a few different brands. It turned out that Libby didn't like the gravelly kind because her paws hurt when she walked on it.

The pads on the underside of cats' feet – their 'toe beans' – are the most sensitive parts of their bodies apart from their lips and the tips of their noses. That allows them to tread delicately wherever they go, and helps them keep their footing when they're walking along the top of a fence. It also means they don't like sharp gravel.

Once Miss Lewis had found a litter that Libby liked, Libby was happy to use the tray.



Because she is quite a nervous cat, she had always worried about being jumped on by a dog or another cat while she was weeing or pooing out of doors. Unfortunately one day when she was using the litter tray she was scared by an unfamiliar cat peering in through the window. That quite put her off the tray, and she started weeing in a corner of the hall instead. By now Miss Lewis had done a lot of research into what cats like and don't like, so she bought another litter tray and put it in a quiet corner. Now Libby sometimes uses one, sometimes the other: she seems to like having a choice of where to 'go'. Miss Lewis keeps an eye on both trays, and scoops out the wees and poos as soon as she sees them. Cats don't like dirty litter!



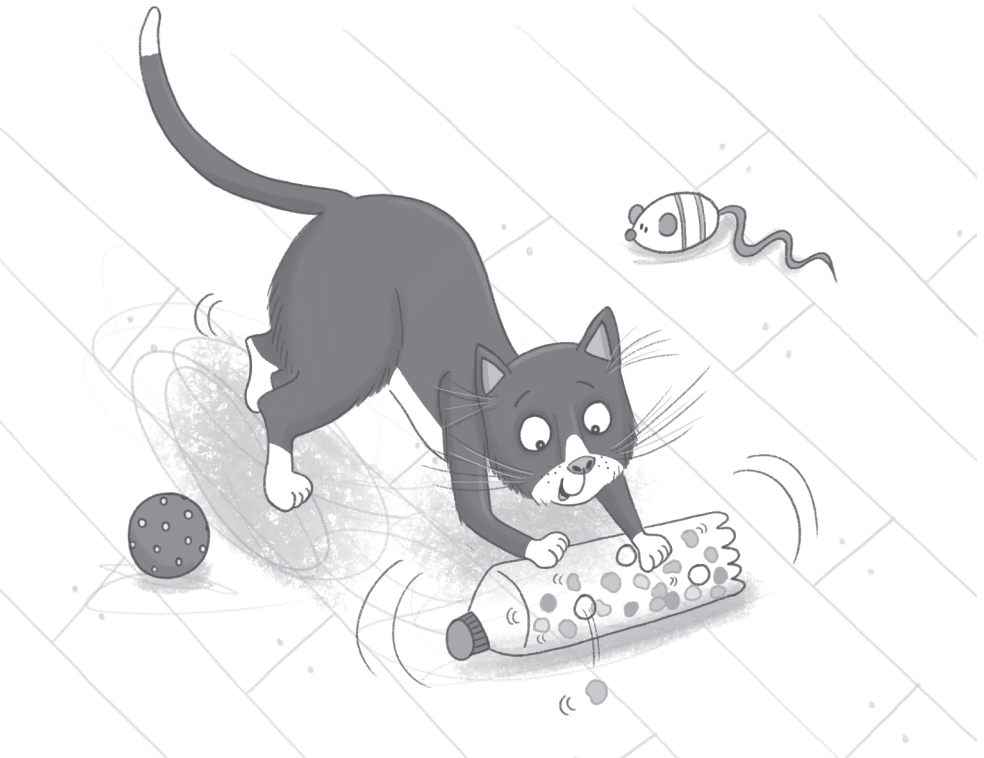
Lots of cat owners get cross with their cats if they wee or poo outside their litter tray, thinking that the cat is doing it on purpose just to upset them. But Miss Lewis knew better than that. She'd read that sometimes cats get so scared that they forget where the litter tray is. Getting cross with a cat that's stressed out like that is only going to make things worse.

Soon it's time for Miss Lewis and Mae to leave for school. Before they go, Mae goes to the cupboard under the sink and gets out what looks like an old fizzy drink bottle. Well, it actually is an old plastic bottle, but Miss Lewis has cut a few holes in it just big enough for a cat biscuit to get through. Mae unscrews the cap from the bottle, shakes about twenty biscuits into it, and puts it

down on the kitchen floor. 'Goodbye, Libby,' she says, and gives her a little rub on the top of her head. Libby purrs her happy purr and looks as if she might want to follow Mae out of the front door. But only for a moment; Libby remembers that the street outside is not a safe place to be during the day, and she turns back to investigate the bottle with the biscuits inside.

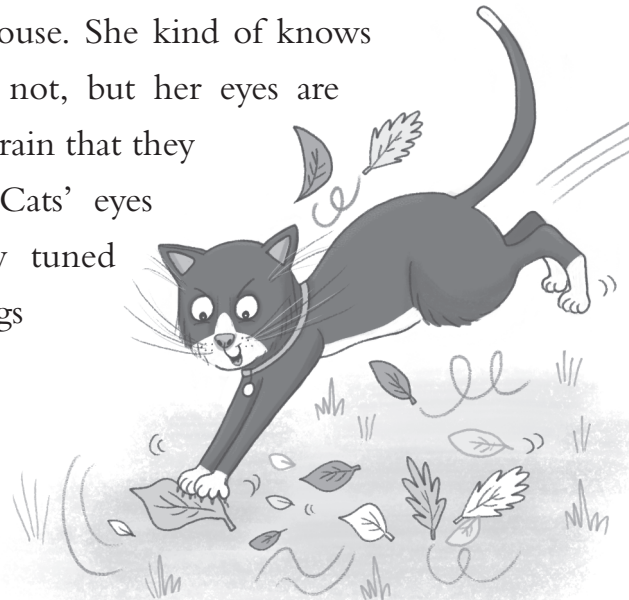


Cats are hunters at heart, but nowadays we don't like cats killing innocent birds and mice. A puzzle feeder like the one that Miss Lewis has made for Libby is a good way of giving a cat all the fun of hunting but without anything having to die. Libby pounces on the bottle, and it scoots away across the kitchen floor. As it goes, a biscuit falls out of one of the holes, and Libby gobbles it up.



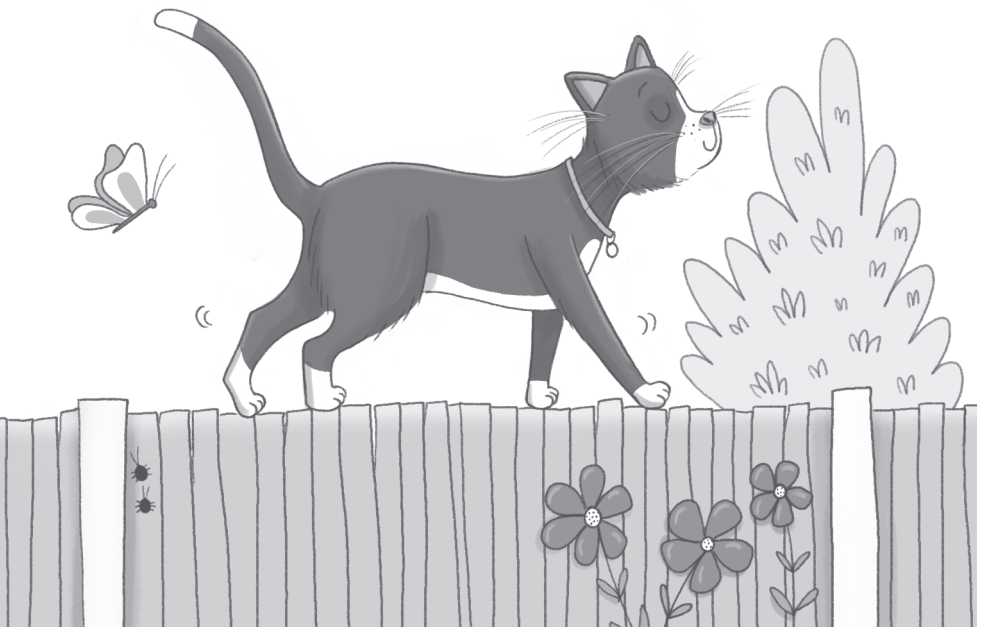
Then she's off again, batting the bottle around the floor just as if it was a rat she wanted to kill. Every now and again a biscuit falls out, and Libby munches each one down, until she gets bored.

The sun comes out, and Libby's ready to go outside again, out through her cat flap and into the back garden. Loads of dry leaves have fallen, and when a gust of wind catches them and blows them across the lawn, Libby gets super excited, chasing them and pouncing on them as if each one was a bird or a mouse. She kind of knows that they're not, but her eyes are telling her brain that they might be. Cats' eyes are specially tuned in to things that move.



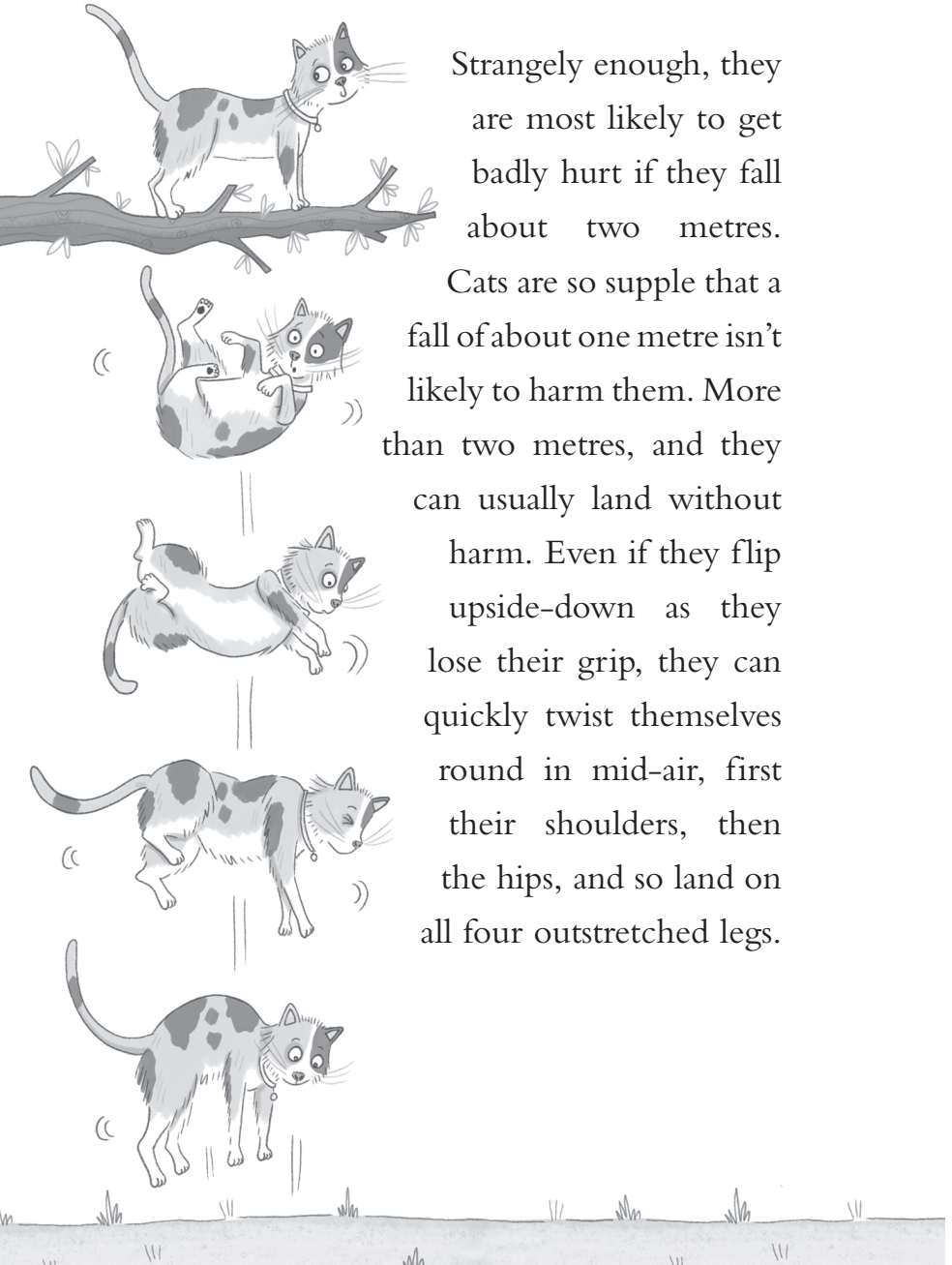
Is that a mouse, or a fox, or a leaf, or something that looks as if it might move, but doesn't, like a garden gnome?

Tiring of chasing leaves, Libby leaps up on to the fence at the bottom of Miss Lewis's garden. Unlike dogs, who usually have to go where their owners want them to, cats are too athletic to have much respect for walls and fences. They can easily walk along the top of the narrowest fence, feeling their way along with their super sensitive paws.



Of course, having four paws to balance on helps a lot, but cats are also much more supple than we are. They can put one front paw right in front of another with ease because their shoulders are only joined together at the back. Their collarbone, the bone that connects the shoulders just below the neck, is tiny. Dogs are the same, as are most mammals that run on four legs and can go faster by swinging one shoulder in front of the other.

If a cat feels that it's losing its balance, it can swing its tail the opposite way to bring itself upright again, just like a tightrope walker does with a pole at the circus. And if that doesn't work? Cats do fall from time to time, and sometimes even damage themselves, just like you would if you fell out of a tree.



Strangely enough, they are most likely to get badly hurt if they fall about two metres. Cats are so supple that a fall of about one metre isn't likely to harm them. More than two metres, and they can usually land without harm. Even if they flip upside-down as they lose their grip, they can quickly twist themselves round in mid-air, first their shoulders, then the hips, and so land on all four outstretched legs.

Libby can remember that happening to her a couple of times, but not very clearly. It's pure instinct and over in a flash. Cats are less likely to break a leg from falling than you would be, but because their heads are the heaviest part of their bodies, they sometimes bang their chins on the ground and break their bottom jaw. That needs a trip to the vet to get fixed.

