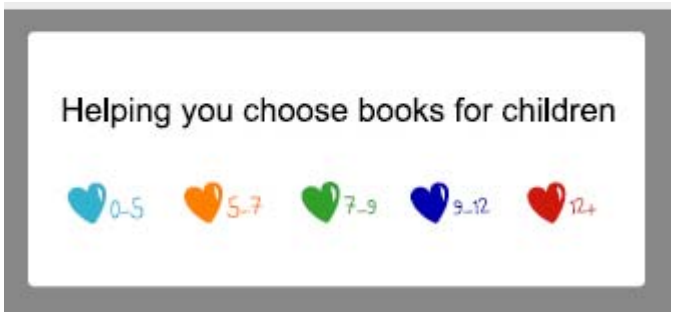
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Cat Tales: Shop Cat

written by

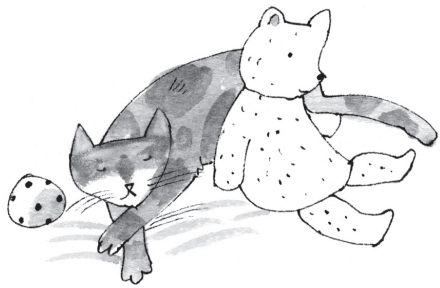
Linda Newbery

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Chapter One

The cat turned up one Tuesday lunchtime, and no one ever found out where she came from.

There she was, curled up fast asleep in the front window – a small, neat cat. Hattie stopped outside to look, thinking at first it was a toy she hadn't seen before.



A very lifelike one! Cat-sized, with real whiskers, and fur of a rich, dark colour – not black, not ginger, but a mixture of both. There she slept, on the patterned cloth Uncle Theo had spread out in the window where toys were displayed. She was snuggled between a big panda and a model lighthouse.

Hattie went inside. She came here every day after school, to help Uncle Theo until Mum collected her on the way home from work. She knew she was lucky to have a great-uncle with his own toyshop. Teddy and May, it was called. Teddy was Uncle Theo, and May was Aunty May, who'd died last year. But the shop would always be Teddy and May, because it sounded so nice.

On the shop sign, Teddy was a smart teddy bear, and May a smiling doll.

"No, I don't know whose cat she is," Uncle Theo was saying to a customer. "She just walked in."

"Cats are like that," said the man. *Ting!* went the doorbell as he left, carrying the jigsaw puzzle he'd bought.

Uncle Theo gave Hattie a kiss and a cuddle, then fetched her a glass of juice and a ginger biscuit from the back kitchen. With her mouth full, she went to the window for a closer look at the cat.

"How d'you know she's a she?" she asked her uncle.

"Tortoiseshells generally are," Uncle Theo told her. "A male would be ginger."

Tortoiseshell! Hattie liked the word –



though she'd never seen a tortoise with a shell of such rich, glowing colour. The cat was so still that it was hard to believe she *wasn't* a toy, like the panda next to her.

Hattie couldn't resist reaching out to stroke the lovely fur. At once the cat stretched and yawned, showing sharp white teeth.



"You *are* real!" said Hattie.

The cat certainly was. It looked back at her, with eyes that were bright and very green. At once, Hattie saw that this was a *clever* cat. Sharpness and cleverness shone from those green, green eyes.

I know you, those eyes seemed to say. *I knew I'd find you here.*

The cat jumped down from the window, and began to twist and twine herself round Hattie's legs – round and round, between her feet, in and out. Her back was arched and her tail high. She purred loudly, as if to say, *I'll be your friend*.



"She did that before, when she first came in," said Uncle Theo. "Nearly tripped me up."

"What will you call her?"

Uncle Theo shook his head. "Oh, I shan't give her a name. She belongs to someone, I'm sure. They'll come and find her."

Hattie hoped no one would. The cat had come here to find *her*. Those sharp green eyes seemed to say so, quite clearly.

