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opening extract from

Silly Cecil and Clever Cubs

written by

Jeanne Willis

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Cecil was one of those pompous pedigree cats who didn't see an animal when he looked in the mirror. What he saw was a person trapped in a furry suit and hat who just happened to have a tail.

It was his greatest wish to slip into some silk jodhpurs, saddle up a pony

and gallop around the grounds of Futtock Mansion, yelling 'yahoo!' just like Young Master Hooray, the pompous pedigree boy who also lived there.

Cecil wanted to be like Young Master Hooray so much he even wore his riding boots when he thought no one was looking. Unfortunately they came up to his armpits and no matter how hard he practised walking up and down he was fooling nobody. Least of all Cubby, the scruffy



little tabby who had strayed into the kitchen a few weeks back and refused to leave.

'Cecil, you don't look nuffin' like the Young Master,' he said. 'You look like a fat old cat who's fallen into a pair of wellies and can't get out.'

'I'd watch your step if I were you, Mr Cubs,' snapped Cecil as he slipped and did the splits trying to kick the boots off. 'It wouldn't pay to rub me up the wrong way. The only reason I allow you to stay here is because I'm a gentleman.'

'Silly me,' said Cubby, 'I thought it was because you were too feeble to fight

me off, but all along it was because you're a gent! Only I'd never have guessed, what with the way you keep threatening me with Master Hooray's spud gun – that's not very gentlemanly, is it?'

'You wouldn't recognize a true gentleman if he kicked you up the backside with a hand-stitched slipper!' exploded Cecil. 'Yet I only have to look at you to know you were born in the gutter. No doubt your father was a pickpocket and your mother was an alley cat.'

None of this was true. Cubby's dad might have come from the wrong side of town and his mum may have belonged to a lady who sold knickers at the market, but he wasn't born in a gutter – he was born in a box of woolly pants under the knicker stall and very comfortable it was too.

Unfortunately the Knicker Lady could barely afford to feed him, his mother and his fifteen brothers and sisters. She hardly sold any knickers because the kittens had torn them and

made them all furry, so Cubby was constantly on the lookout for food.

If he hadn't been so hungry, he'd never have sneaked into Mrs Dortmunder's shopping trolley, stuffed himself with the sausages at the bottom and fallen fast asleep. When he finally woke up, he found himself on the other side of town being unpacked along with the groceries in a very posh kitchen, and in the kitchen was a very posh cat asleep in a very posh wicker basket – it was Cecil.

Mrs Dortmunder – who was the Hoorays' housekeeper – was somewhat surprised to see Cubby sitting there with bits of sausage hanging off his whiskers, but she wasn't half as surprised as Cecil and not nearly as cross.

Cecil was so cross he pinned back his ears and puffed himself up until he spilled over the edge of his basket like a snowy owl that had outgrown its nest. At that moment, the elastic on his sapphire-studded collar snapped with a

loud ping, scattering the gems through the air.

'Wotcha, mate, you all right?' Cubby said, helping himself to Cecil's favourite Russian caviar, which had been served in a solid gold saucer.

'Who the fuzzy heck are you?' shrieked Cecil, jabbing the air with his paws as if they were chubby boxing gloves. 'Did I hire you? No, I don't think so. You can't just come waltzing in here and eat another cat's caviar. Now get out before I fetch Young

Master Hooray's spud gun . . . Don't just stand there looking gormless, Mrs Dortmunder! Chop those potatoes into pellets!'

Of course, Mrs Dortmunder could not understand a word Cecil said and, even if she had, she wouldn't have taken any notice. She wasn't impressed by airs and graces, and was not about to be told what to do by the likes of an overgrown pedigree cat.

Having put the groceries away, Mrs Dortmunder struggled into her

industrial decontamination suit and pottered off with a bucket of bleach, a blow torch and a gas mask to give Young Master Hooray's bedroom a thorough blitzing while he was at boarding school.

Cecil officially belonged to Young Master Hooray who'd had him since he was a kitten. He'd been a gift for his fifth birthday and for some years Master Hooray happily believed that Cecil was the polar-bear cub he'd ordered his mother to buy for him.

But when Cecil refused to grow to the required size and shape of such a bear, Young Master Hooray began to wonder if what he'd actually got was a miniature variety that happened to say *miaow* instead of *grrrr* because it was so small.

To test this theory, he waited until winter and took Cecil for a swim in the frozen carp lake. It was only when Cecil showed no signs of enjoying the icy water whatsoever that Master Hooray realized that he was no polar

bear and that his ghastly, cruel parents had fobbed him off with a fluffy, fat white cat. It was a very expensive cat but, even so, it was not what he'd asked for at all. Master Hooray was deeply disappointed and, forever after, Cecil felt so guilty about being completely the wrong species he went out of his way to please him.

Young Master Hooray loved being the boss of Cecil and, for some strange reason, Cecil thought it was an honour to be used by him as a hot water bottle,

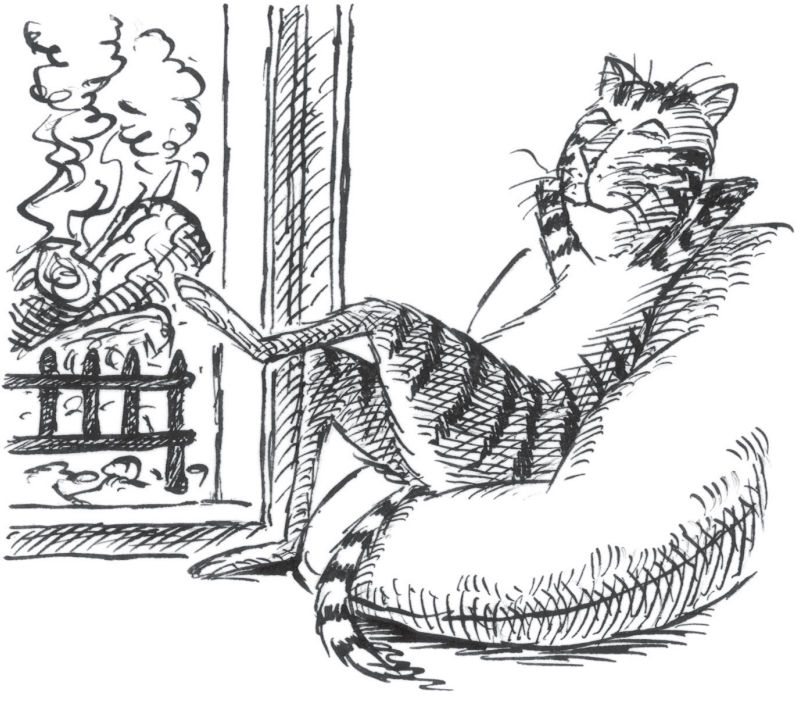
a foot rest, a hand towel or a tea tray. He worshipped the lad and though it was obvious to everyone else that he was a mad, spoilt, stuck-up little boy, Cecil couldn't see it. His only regret was that Master Hooray spent so much time away.

'Just you wait until he gets back from boarding school, Mr Cubs!' screeched Cecil. 'He's a frightfully good shot. One word from me and you won't know what's hit you! Run along . . . Shoo!'

But Young Master Hooray wasn't due home until Easter and Cubby – who was afraid of nothing and nobody – was going nowhere. He knew which side his bread was buttered, and at Futtock Mansion they had the best bread, the best butter, the best of everything.

If he stayed here, he would no longer have to eat the fish guts and chicken gizzards that the market traders dropped, nor raid the litter bins for half-eaten kebabs. He could dine on

pheasant and quail instead. Stuffed skylarks in jelly! He could drink double cream and champagne. He could lie on a silk pillow stuffed with the hair of baby



angels and fall asleep in front of a roaring log fire, just like Cecil.

But he was nothing like Cecil and their differences became more obvious with every passing day. They were opposites in almost every way: Cecil's whiskers were long and droopy; Cubby's were short and curly. Cecil's nose was pink and shiny; Cubby's was covered in stains. Cecil's tummy looked like a woolly football; Cubby's was so flat it looked as if Mrs Dortmunder had pressed it with her steam iron.

It wasn't just their looks that set them apart – it was their likes and dislikes. Cecil liked to study the newspaper, but Cubby preferred to pee on it. Cecil liked to listen to classical music while Cubby preferred a good old sing-song round the piano.

But the thing that caused the biggest arguments was which programme to watch on telly and it was this that finally made the fur fly.

It happened the week before Young Master Hooray was due home. His

frightfully rich parents had gone to Scotland to visit the queen, and Mrs Dortmunder had been instructed to pop into Futtock Mansion twice a day to feed Cecil and freshen up his jewel-encrusted litter tray.

The parents knew nothing of Cubby and no doubt they would throw him out if they caught him, so he had to do a lot of sneaking around. Luckily, Futtock Mansion was huge, so it wasn't hard for a little cat to make himself invisible, secretly sleeping on the canopy over a

four-poster bed, or camouflaged on a tapestry pouffe, or lounging in the linen cupboard.

The only person who *did* know about Cubby was Mrs Dortmunder. She had a very soft spot for him – which is why she didn't push him off the sofa and switch off the television the day all hell broke loose. Instead, she left him where he was, watching his favourite cartoon in peace.

The peace didn't last long. As soon as Mrs Dortmunder had closed the

front door behind her, in came Cecil. He snorted at Cubby, then plonked himself down on the remote control and changed the channel with his bottom cheek.

'I was watching that,' sighed Cubby.

'Not any more!' boomed Cecil. 'It's my mansion and my television and I'm not watching that rubbish. I like a bit of culture in the afternoon.'

Cubby yawned. He didn't like a bit of culture at any time of day and this programme looked as if it might be

extremely boring. It was about something called 'reincarnation', which he'd never heard of, presented by a man with a long grey beard called Professor Birtwhistle.

Just as Cubby suspected, the show was as dull as a wet weekend. But, as it really was a wet weekend and he didn't fancy going out in the rain, he stayed where he was and tried to amuse himself by interrupting Cecil, who'd insisted that he called him 'Sir'.

'Sir Cecil, what is reincarnation? Is

it a sort of flower? Only when I lived with the Knicker Lady there was a flower stall next to hers which sold carnations. Luvverly red ones there were, and pink ones, and yellow ones . . .'

'Do shut up,' grumbled Cecil.

'Orange ones . . . blue ones. Get your luvverly carnations, two pound a bunch.'

Cecil glared at him. 'If you *listened*, instead of carrying on like a street seller, you would know that

reincarnation isn't a flower. It's the belief that when we die we come back to life as someone else.'

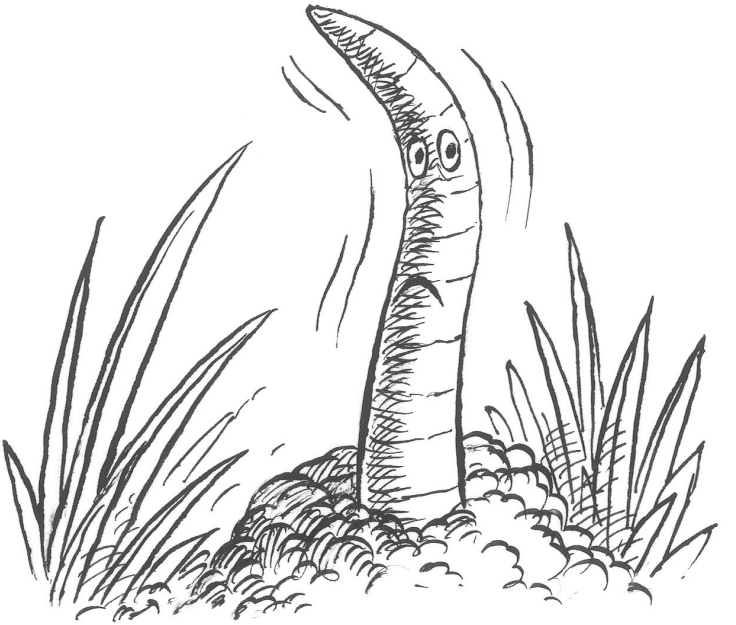
'Like who, Sir Cecil?' asked Cubby, rather hoping he'd come back as a tiger.

Cecil turned up the volume.

'If you listen to Professor Birtwhistle, instead of pulling the tassels off that cushion, you might find out,' he groaned.

Cubby did as he was told. According to the professor, when someone died, who or what they came

back as in the next life depended on how they'd behaved before. If they'd been bad, they might be reincarnated as a weed or a worm. If they'd been good, they might come back as something



better, such as a kangaroo or a king. But Cubby wasn't convinced.

'This is boring,' he said. 'Can I watch the footy now?'

For a moment, Cecil couldn't speak – he was far too excited. Ever since he was a kitten, he'd dreamed of being human so he could be like Young Master Hooray. He'd thought he was stuck with being a cat forever, but now Professor Birtwhistle had given him an idea. Cecil had got it into his fluffy head that as he was such a perfect cat, if he

died tomorrow, he was bound to come back as a perfect gentleman or possibly a prince. He could hardly wait to be reincarnated.

'Mr Cubs,' he said, slapping his podgy thigh, 'I should like you to kill me!'