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An extract from

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For Lizzie

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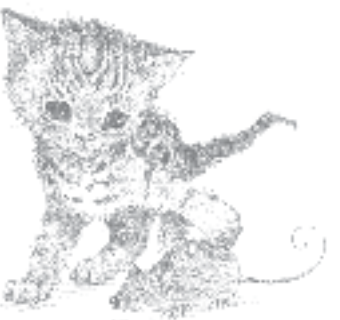
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Chapter Two



"Are we sure about getting a Bengal kitten?" Dad asked, looking at the Glimmershine website. Tia had found it for him on his phone, so he could read it while he ate his toast. "It says here about them being *very individual characters*. That sounds like the kind of thing teachers say when they don't want to say *just plain naughty*."

Tia giggled. “Laura said Charlie’s a bit like that.”

“Mmmm. But he’s so friendly with you and Christy,” Mum said. “Some cats aren’t that keen on children.”

“Laura said Bengals can be naughty when they get bored and lonely,” Tia added. “But Mum’s around in the mornings, and we can play with the kitten after school.”

“I suppose so,” Dad agreed. “Well, there’s no harm going to see this kitten, anyway. What time did she say we should come over?”

“Any time from ten.” Mum looked at her watch. “We should probably get going, actually. It’s about half an hour away.”

Tia jumped up from the table, nearly

tipping over her cereal bowl. Even though it was the weekend, she'd been up since six.

"Slow down," Dad chuckled.

"Sorry…" Tia said. "It's just so exciting!"



The car journey seemed to take far longer than half an hour. Tia was much too jittery to read a book or listen to music. They might actually be getting their kitten! She wriggled delightedly at the thought.

The house they pulled up at looked surprisingly ordinary – apart from a small sign, with a drawing of a cat on it. Somehow Tia had expected

something different, although she wasn't quite sure what. She followed her mum and dad up the path, feeling oddly disappointed.

Then Christy clutched at her arm. "Tia, look!" She was pointing at the window on one side of the front door.

The windowsill was lined with kittens. They were all sitting watching the girls walk up the path, their ears pricked up curiously.



"So many of them!" Tia gasped. They seemed to be different ages, too – some of them were much bigger than the others. She tried to count them, but Dad had rung the doorbell, and the kittens clearly heard it. They hurried to jump down from the windowsill – there had to be a chair or something underneath it, as they were all queuing to get down. Except that they didn't queue very nicely, they were all pushing and barging into each other.

Someone had answered the door, but Tia and Christy hardly noticed – they were too busy watching the kittens.

"If you come in, you'll be able to see them even better!" A grey-haired lady looked round the door, smiling.

Tia went pink and hurried in, hauling Christy after her.

The door to the room with the window was closed, and Tia could hear squeaks and bumps from behind it. She stared at it hopefully, while Mum asked about the kitten Laura had mentioned.

The grey-haired lady – Helen, Tia remembered she was called – nodded. "She's a lovely little thing – she'll make a very friendly pet." She beamed at the girls. "So would you like to meet them all, then?"

Tia just nodded, she couldn't even speak. Christy jumped up and down as Helen carefully opened the door.

"I have to open it slowly," she explained. "They get so excited about

people visiting, and they *will* stand there just behind the door. I'll catch their paws if I'm not careful." She bent down as the door opened and scooped up a small kitten with golden-brown fur and the most beautiful leopardy spots, who was making a run for it.

"There's always one," she told Tia, "and actually this is the little lady you've come to see."

Tia gasped as the kitten peered down at her. She had enormous round eyes, not green or yellowy, like most cats, but a soft, turquoise blue. Her ears were massive, too, and she had a great long trail of white whiskers.

"Come on in, and we'll shut the door before they all try and escape," Helen said.

The room had been a dining room, Tia realized. It still had the table and chairs, but now there were soft, padded baskets, food bowls and litter trays everywhere.



"It's a kitten room," Christy cried, looking round. "There's so many!"

"Eleven of them," Helen said. "Two litters. The smaller ones are ten weeks old, and the bigger ones are twelve weeks. Ready to go to their new homes."

"Oh…" Tia breathed. "She's old enough to come to us already?" She was still staring at the pretty dappled kitten in Helen's arms. "If she wants to, I mean," she added. Somehow it seemed quite clear that it wasn't only her decision. The blue-green eyes peering over Helen's arm were determined.

Helen nodded. "Why don't you try and stroke her?" she said, lowering her arms a little to make it easier for Tia to reach the kitten.

Very gently, Tia held out her fingers, and the kitten sniffed them thoughtfully. Tia rubbed her hand over the kitten's silky head. "Oh, she's so soft. Like satin."

The kitten let out a mighty purr, a huge noise from something so small, and Tia burst out laughing. The kitten laid back her ears, her eyes getting even huger, and Tia gulped. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," she murmured. But the kitten purred again, and Helen slowly held her out to Tia.

"See if she'll let you hold her," she said quietly.

Tia glanced nervously at Mum. But Mum gave an encouraging smile. "She does seem to like you, Tia. You're so good at being gentle."

Tia carefully took the kitten from Helen. “Look at her gorgeous spots,” she whispered to Mum.

Dad and Christy were crouched down by the dining table looking at one of the smaller kittens, who was perched on a chair. “She’s not quite like Charlie though, is she? Her spots are in rings. Like pawprints!”

“She is lovely,” Helen said. “You aren’t worried about her tail, then?”

“Oh! I forgot.” Tia peered round the little kitten, who was snuggling into the front of her top. It looked pretty much like a normal tail to her, only a little bit bent at the tip. “I love her tail,” she said firmly. “It’s so dark! Nearly black, and the rest of her looks like – like honeycomb toffee!”

"She does," Mum nodded.

"So … we can really have her?" Tia asked hopefully. She giggled as the kitten hooked tiny claws into her top and started to mountaineer up her shoulder and round her neck until she was standing with her front paws on one shoulder and her back paws on the other, like a furry scarf.

Mum glanced over at Dad, who nodded. "I think she's perfect."

The kitten purred in Tia's ear, as though she agreed.





Tia had hoped they might be able to take the kitten home with them, but Mum and Dad said they needed to get everything ready first. Tia supposed they were right. They didn't even have a cat carrier. So after they'd finally coaxed Christy away from the tiny kittens, they stopped off at the pet shop on the way home.

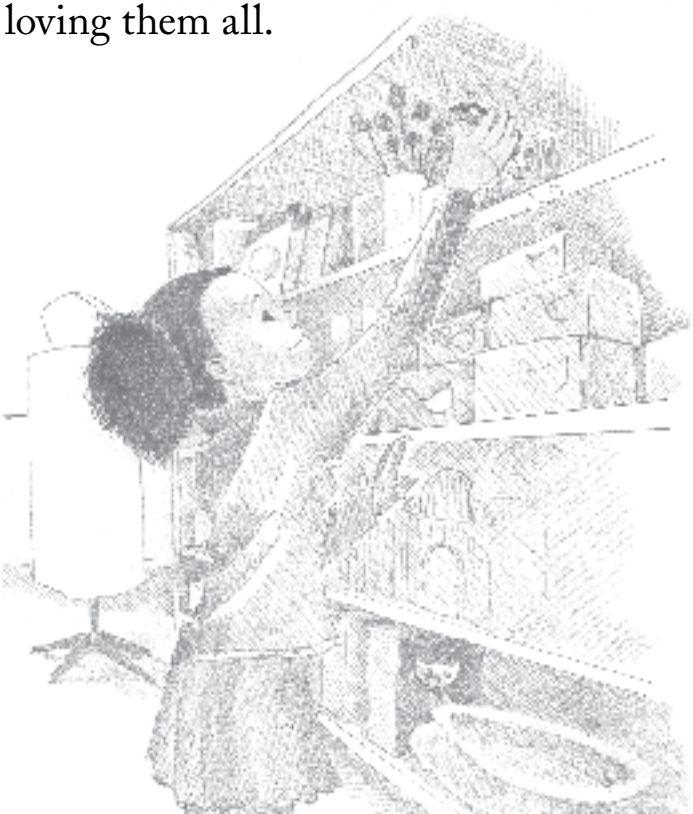
"Can we buy some toys as well?" Tia asked. "They had lots of toys at Helen's house. I don't want the kitten to be bored at ours."

"What are the chances of that?" Dad laughed. "I don't think her paws are going to touch the floor."

"A couple of toys," Mum agreed.

"But we're not going mad with them, Tia."

"I've got my birthday money from Gran still," Tia pointed out. "I could use that." She stood in front of the cat toys, looking at catnip fish, laser pointers and jingly balls. What should she get? Tia could imagine the kitten loving them all.



She was just trying out a clockwork mouse, when a poster hanging at the end of the aisle caught her eye. It was for the Cats Protection League, asking for donations to feed all the stray cats they took in. Tia looked at it thoughtfully. If her family had adopted a kitten from there, they would have made a donation…

She looked down at her basket and put back the feathery cat dancer and the catnip monkey. She could make a bunch of feathers, and Mum had lots of knitting wool. She would buy the mouse, but that was all. The rest of her money she dropped into the collection box at the till. The bag the lady gave her to take home was very light, but Tia didn't mind.