

A Boy, a Cat and a Ham Sandwich

I'm sitting in the driveway of our house the first time I see it. My mum and dad are fighting inside, so I don't want to go in, but I don't want to go to the park either because Daniel will be there and he's trouble, even though he's only in year 4. Wherever he goes, sooner or later there's a fight there too. So I'm just sitting with my back to the wall that separates our drive from next door, picking up pebbles and chucking them at the opposite wall. Her from next door but one comes out to put a bag of rubbish in her wheelie bin; she sees me and goes back inside, tutting and shaking her head. Mum says she's a right nosy parker, always peering out of her window at what everyone else is doing, and Dad says if he had his way he'd ship all her lot straight back where they came from.

Out of the corner of my eye I catch a movement, and when I turn to look there's a little grey cat I haven't seen before sticking its head around the gatepost. I hold my hand out and say "Ps, ps," but it just sort of flattens itself down against the ground and won't come any closer. I get up and start to walk over to it, but it runs away.

Next time I see it, I'm on my way to school and it's sitting under the bush that hangs over the pavement by the corner. It miaows as I get near it and gets ready to run. I stop walking and crouch down, unzipping my lunch bag. The cat watches me like it can't decide whether to stay or go. "Here you are, cat," I say, pulling the ham out of my sandwich. It can obviously smell the ham – it stretches its neck towards me but it won't come closer. "Here, have it." I put the ham down on the ground and back away. The cat dashes forwards, grabs the ham and runs off with it.

I'm late to school that day, and my sandwich at lunchtime is pretty boring. I swap my cake for Liam's crisps and put some of them between the slices of bread, which makes it better.

On the way home, the cat comes up to me, miaowing again. "I haven't got anything for you," I say. "I'll bring some more tomorrow, OK?" It follows me most of the way home, but every time I try to touch it, it backs off.

Next morning it's waiting for me almost outside our house. I look over my shoulder to make sure Mum's not watching from the window, but the only person I can see is Mrs Nosy Parker, so I crouch down and give the cat another slice of ham. It takes it quicker this time. I think it must be really hungry.

Just as the cat snatches the ham and starts to run away, there's a loud noise that makes me jump. A car guns its engine and roars past, making my heart thump and start pounding like when I have to do a race on sports day. It's only after it's gone past and I've started to relax that I realise there's something small and grey in the road. I feel sick. It mustn't be, it can't be, but as I get closer to it I

can see that it is. The cat is lying on its side and one of its back legs looks all wrong, but it's still alive because as I get close it miaows at me again.

My eyes sting and I start to panic. I have to do something, I can't just leave it there, but I don't know what to do. I get down next to it and for the first time I touch its fur. It miaows again, and I can see blood oozing down its leg. "Please don't die," I whisper.

"Hey!" Mrs Nosy Parker is running over. I quickly scrub my eyes with my sleeve. "Hey," she says again, and she's holding out a phone to me. "You phone, you talk." She's looked up the number of a vet. I touch the green button and hear it dial, then start ringing. It seems to take forever, but eventually a woman answers and I explain what's happened.

"You need to bring it to the surgery," she says. "Wrap it up, try to keep it warm."

I have no idea where the surgery is or how to get there, but I do as she says and wrap the cat in my coat. It mews when I move it, and I feel sick again. "What they say?" Mrs Nosy Parker asks.

"You have to take it to the vet," I say.

She picks the cat up. "I take. You go school."

I can't concentrate all day. Mr Headingly tells me off for staring out of the window during maths, but all I can think about is whether the cat's going to be alright. As I walk home I wonder if she'll be there, or if I'll have to go and knock on her door, but when I get close I see she's waiting for me by her gate, holding out my coat. It smells like she's washed it.

"Will the cat be OK?" I ask.

"They do op-er-a-tion." She pronounces it carefully. "Leg bad but will be better. Is..." she hunts for the word, "no people. No home. You know?"

"A stray?"

"Yes. stray." She gestures to the house behind her. "I also, no people, no family. So I keep. I bring home tomorrow." She hesitates. "You want visit?"

I hesitate too. I don't know if I should, but I want to see the cat. "Yeah, OK. I'll come after school."

"Good." She smiles, like she's really pleased. "You come." She points to herself. "I Marina. I make very good cake."