


KATZ TALES

Living under the velvet paw 



Ellen Whyte

Katz Tales: Living under the velvet paw

By Ellen Whyte

Dedication: *For Scoop.*

Foreword

The tales in this book have been written in the last 5 years but they cover the 13 years we have lived in Malaysia. Although it's not explicit in the book, we've moved about a bit during this time. The best way to understand the chronology is to know more about the stars of this book: Scoop, Bones, Au and Target.

Scoop was born in Kuching, Sarawak. He moved in with us during the first few months of our time in Malaysia. His friend Bones was also a Kuching kitty. Both cats came across the China Sea with us when we moved to West Malaysia.

Au was born in Malacca. He is also a well travelled cat, and has moved with us from there to Kajang and then Subang Jaya.

Target was born in Subang Jaya. He is a very shy cat so we'll have to be sneaky when the time comes to pack up and move again. Hopefully Au will hold his paw.

The idea for Tales was in my mind from the very earliest days when Scoop moved in with us. But there seemed to be no market for everyday stories about cats.

About 5 years ago I couldn't help myself any longer: I wrote a few columns and tried placing them again. About 3 years ago I was lucky enough to meet Sharifah Intan, editor of The Star Weekender section. She gave the column a chance, and I've been writing Tales ever since.

This collection features the stories readers seemed to like most. And because there are always more stories than column inches, this collection includes some tales you may not have seen before.

I hope you enjoy them.



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Scoop Moves In

Scoop arrived on our doorstep on New Year's Day in 1996. He decided he liked the look of our home and was determined to move in.

At the time we were living in Kuching, Sarawak. Although the city is called Kuching, the Malay word for cat, the origin of the city's name is a mystery. Some say it is named after a local tree. Others insist it is due to the river shape that, with one eye closed and from an aerial perspective, might just resemble a cat as Picasso would have drawn one.

Kuching has dozens of cat statues, and even a cat museum. But despite the predilection for symbolic cats, Kuching is host to lots of pathetic, semi-starved cats living as best they can on the streets. Tom and I both love cats, and despaired when seeing the abandoned ones. But we weren't sure if we were ready for the responsibility. We had just moved from Spain to Malaysia, and we weren't sure how long we would stay or where we would go next.

When Scoop marched boldly into the house, Tom and I pushed him back out saying "Shoo!", "Scat!" and "Go away". But this cat had made up his mind. We could scoop him out as often as we liked, but he would just turn around and come straight back in.

On the third day I turned my back for a few minutes only to find that Scoop was settled on Tom's lap, busily enjoying having his chin scratched. Hearing the loud, rusty purr I knew we were beaten.

Scoop is a smart cat. From the very first he realised that in return for being given a home, several meals a day, a constant supply of fresh water, medical care and unlimited cuddles, he would be expected to be clean. Right after his first dinner with us, he was told he would have to submit to a bath.

Cat lover Stephen Baker described the bathing ritual as needing: "brute force, perseverance, courage of conviction--and a cat. The last ingredient is usually hardest to come by." I admit that Scoop's excellently pointed claws did make me feel a little apprehensive. Nevertheless, it had to be done.

We bought some cat soap (guaranteeing a glossy coat and flea resistance for six weeks) and, while Tom prudently took Scoop away for a cuddle, I prepared for battle. Two ancient T-shirts to protect myself from scratches, a sink filled with



lukewarm water and a kettle of rinsing water seemed the right sort of preparation.

When Scoop saw the sink and the soap he struggled and howled. He cried all the way through the soaping up process, shivered while his paws were being cleaned and gave the most affecting yowls when being rinsed off. Being towelled dry afterwards by Tom was the only bit he really enjoyed.

I was expecting it to be a blood bath but Scoop never unsheathed his claws once. Sure, he made a lot of noise, but he seemed to know it was for his own good. In just 15 minutes he was transformed from a grubby street cat to a clean, although rather thin, feline companion.

When I look at him now, lying sleekly comfortable on the sofa like a browner version of Garfield, it's difficult to visualise the gritty kitty we tried so hard to scoop out of the house.

Scoop has given us so much love over the years that I can't imagine life without him. He's moved home with us three times, even flying from East to West Malaysia with insouciance. Everywhere we've lived this street cat or *kuching kampung* as the Malays call them, has captured the hearts of friends and neighbours.

I'm glad he was determined to move in with us. I'll just go and give him a cuddle.



Scoop Fakes An Illness

You can't outsmart a cat. It's not even worth the attempt. It's not just that cats are smarter; they also have the advantage of never feeling sorry for the patsy. Most of us ordinary, inferior human types just lack that sort of toughness.

Forgive me if I sound a little jaded. I have been the victim of an extended cat con.

Last month Scoop picked up a minor infection. The vet gave him an injection and some tablets, but it took old fuzzy a few days to get his appetite back.

Before his illness Scoop was well on his way to being a rather podgy, paw-at-each-corner type kitty. Our boy is at that stage of life where it isn't so easy to run off those extra bowls of biscuits. But the infection cured that. Poor Scoop lost weight rapidly.

To cheer him up and to make sure he got the necessary energy to heal, we fed Scoop a selection of gourmet foods. We baked him chicken (without salt and garlic but with tarragon) and we boiled fish. We offered other goodies supposed to be good for invalids like milk and soft-boiled egg yolks.

When Scoop got back on his paws, we heaved a sigh of relief. But we continued adding baked chicken and other goodies to his normal ration of tinned cat food and biscuits, just to give him that extra boost.

After ten days of pampering Scoop was putting on weight and his coat was glossy again. However, I was worried because he didn't seem to have an appetite for the cat biscuits he loved so much before his illness. He was also off his favourite tinned food. Even those expensive foil packages of gourmet fare didn't seem to tempt him.

I worried in case he had sore teeth, weak gums or lost his sense of smell. I tried him on cat biscuits dipped in water. No luck. I chopped up his tinned cat food carefully before presenting it in his favourite bowl, the ceramic one I bought in Segovia in Spain. He wouldn't touch it. All he liked in any quantity was baked chicken, boiled fish and slices of ham from the delicatessen.

You will probably have grasped the point by now, but it took while for my poor noddle to twig. As it happened, it took a shopping trip to reveal what was really going on.



As we live in suburbia, I do most of my errands locally. I have a 1967 pink Beetle that takes me to the market, the post office and so on. But when I go into town, I take a taxi to avoid traffic jams and parking hassles.

Both Scoop and Au recognise the sound of my car, and rush to greet me when they hear me come home. But because I go into the city rarely, they don't associate the sound of a taxi with my coming home. Returning from town by taxi yesterday, I took Scoop completely by surprise.

When I walked into the house, Scoop was sitting in the kitchen, hunched over his bowl, cheeks bulging with cat biscuits. It was obvious he had been having a major munching session. When he saw me his eyes opened wide with surprise. Turning his back to me, Scoop tried to swallow them surreptitiously. He then turned back to me, trying to pretend I hadn't seen anything. But the game was up.

In a flash I realised Scoop had been running an extended con game: eating cat biscuits on the sly and pretending to be an invalid in order to get his paws on unlimited amounts of food usually reserved for special treats.

When I accused him of malingering, of unprincipled behaviour, and of sheer cheek, old stripy managed a muffled *mreowf* but didn't look in the slightest bit guilty. Now the little fuzz is comfortably asleep on the sofa, paws in the air, a picture of complete relaxation. Au is lying next to him, no doubt planning on running a similar rig soon.

While part of me is furious at being cheated in such a professional manner, the other part of me is laughing along with Scoop. If I hadn't taken that taxi, who knows how long he would have been able to pull the wool over my eyes?

There is one certainty in all of this: there is a piece of roast chicken that was bought to tempt Scoop's failing appetite. Although the game is up, and I should put it on our own dinner table, I have no doubt that our fuzzy will commandeer it for his dinner without the slightest hesitation. Somehow he'll talk me into handing it over.

Machiavelli must have been a cat in spirit.



About Katz Tales

ISBN 978-967-3035-64-9.

Recommended price in Malaysia is RM28

When Scoop the cat with the curly tail from Kuching city in Sarawak decides he doesn't like living on the streets, he moves in with the author. From that fateful day Scoop and his cat pals Au and Target rule the author's life with a firm but gentle velvet paws, proving the adage that dogs have masters while cats have staff.

Katz Tales is a collection of light hearted stories that celebrate the antics of the wise yet wily Scoop, his sturdy and inventive cat companion Au and the kitten Target who enslaves the family with a single friendly *meep*.

Stories include the one where Scoop fakes an illness in order to reach a secret goal, the time Au is outsmarted by the neighbourhood birds, and the near disaster as Target is trapped behind a giant wall. In addition, Tales includes a handy cat FAQ for new cat lovers that gives advice on how to train kittens, prevent disease, bathe cats, keep indoor cats in good mental health, support grieving animals and other common issues.

http://www.marshallcavendish.com/marshallcavendish/genref/Katz-Tales_B24052_Malaysia.aspx

Price US12.80

<http://www.mphonline.com/books/nsearchdetails.aspx?&pcode=9789673035649>

Price RM28



About the author

Ellen Whyte was born in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Since then she's lived in Scotland, Spain, Indonesia and Malaysia. She read psychology at Stirling University but that hasn't helped her gain the upper hand in her dealings with her cat companions. She began writing fulltime about 14 years ago and considers herself extremely lucky to be able to make a career out of a hobby.



Her Katz Tales appears in the Malaysian national daily The Star. A compendium of stories called Katz Tales: Living Under The Velvet Paw was published by Marshall Cavendish in 2009.

Ellen also blogs at <http://blog.lepak.com>



Want more cats?



Katz Tales is published in the Malaysian national daily The Star on the first Saturday of every month - print edition only. The companion column Dog talk is out every third Saturday of the month - print edition only.

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