

Fat Cats
By Ragnhild Scamell

Chapter One

Late one afternoon, something terrible happened: Sam got stuck in his cat flap. He couldn't get out and he couldn't get back in.

"That does it!" said Mrs Miller. "As from now, Sam is on a slimming diet."

Emma tried to pull him back in, but the more she pulled, the more Sam seemed to be pulling the other way. In the end, she had to go outside and wave a chicken nugget in front of his nose.

That did it!

As Sam stretched to reach the tasty food, the cat flap freed him and he ran down the garden path.

Mrs Miller shook her head as she watched him. Then she divided the portion that was to have been Sam's next meal, into two very small portions.

"He won't like it," said Emma.

"Tough," said Mum. "We can't have him going about looking as if he's swallowed a football."

And it was true. Sam was a very big cat. Not surprising really, because this is how Sam spent his day:

8.00: Breakfast (half a tin of cat food).

8.30-11.00: Quick wash followed by nap in best armchair.

11.00: Snack.

11.10-12.55: Sleep curled up in washing basket.

1.00: Lunch (plus scraps and plate-licking if lucky).

1.30-2.55: Sleep on Emma's bed.

3.00: Saucer of milk.

3.15-4.55: Another quick nap on Emma's bed.

5.00: Tea (the other half of the tin of cat food, plus anything else he could beg, steal or get a lick of).

After tea, he would yawn, stretch a couple of times and finally squeeze through this cat flap, down the garden path and into the fields beyond where he stayed all night.

Nothing and no one could stop Sam following this routine.

Chapter Two

Ben Brown lived the other side of the field with his mum and dad. Ben Brown also had a big black cat. Ben's cat was called Tom, and Tom never stayed out at night.

Tom stayed out all day, while Mr and Mrs Brown were at work, and Ben was at school. Ben had made him a bed in the shed, but Tom didn't like that bed, so he hardly ever used it.

They put Tom out every morning shortly before eight o'clock, when the rest of the family left. And every evening when they arrived home, at six o'clock, there here would be, waiting for them by the back door.

It was Ben's job to feed Tom, and Tom was a fussy eater. He refused to eat ordinary cat food and sulked until they gave him what he likes:

Tinned pilchards.

Fresh sardines.

Chicken.

It was pilchards today, and Tom could hardly wait. He rubbed himself against Ben's jeans and tried to snatch the food off the plate before it had reached the floor.

"He's starving," said Ben.

"We all are," said Dad. "You can help me lay the table, when you have finished feeding Tom."

Tom ate the pilchards in record time. Then he leapt silently on to his favourite chair, washed himself thoroughly and fell fast asleep.

"He's had a hard day chasing mice," said Mum.

"I wish I knew what he does when we are not here," said Ben. "Maybe he just sits in a tree."

"Emma Miller across the fields has a cat, doesn't she?" said Dad. "Maybe Tom goes to play with her cat."

Ben and Emma went to the same school, and one day when the class had been asked to draw a picture of their pet, both he and Emma had drawn pictures of black cats.

Chapter Three

"Listen, children," said Miss Harper at school the next morning. "I seem to remember that one of you has a black cat. Am I right?"

Ben's hand shot up in the air. "Me, Miss!"

"I have a ginger cat," shouted Hassan.

There was a general uproar, as everyone joined in.

"I need to borrow a black cat for the school play," said Miss Harper. "You know the scene with

the witch? Well, we thought it would be nice if she had a black cat. It needs to be a calm sort of cat that doesn't mind people clapping and laughing."

"Does it matter if he's a bit fat?" said Emma.

"My cat isn't fat, and he's very very calm," said Ben.

"So is mine," said Emma. "I could bring him in. He wouldn't mind."

"Mine wouldn't mind either," insisted Ben.

Miss Harper was beginning to regret that she had mentioned black cats. "If your mums and dads agree," she said reluctantly, "we could see how the cats react to the witch, at a sort of audition, and then choose. Bring them in on Friday, if you can. Then we'll see how it goes."

Chapter Four

Mrs Miller was struggling with two large carrier bags as Emma came skipping out of school.

"Mum," said Emma, "do you think Sam will have slimmed down by Friday?"

Mrs Miller laughed. "Shouldn't think so. That's only four days. Why the sudden rush?"

"I have to take him to school on Friday. Miss Harper needs a black cat for the school play," said Emma.

"Well, all I can say is that I have just spent a lot of money in the supermarket buying slimming food for Sam, but I don't think he'll have lost a great deal of weight by Friday." She paused for a moment. "Oh, and I have given all his tinned food to Mr Brown. He was waiting for Ben outside school, and I know they have a cat."

Back home, Sam looked relieved to see them. He was starving, having had no elevenses, no scraps, no milk, and very little breakfast. What was going on? he wondered. His routine had been turned upside down. Emma gave him a very small portion of fish, which he wolfed down so greedily that he felt quite sick. Then he followed her around, miaowing in a way which meant: give me some cream. But she no longer seemed to understand his language.

Oh, dear!

Sam stared unhappily at his cat flap. Then he jumped through it and disappeared down the garden.

"I wouldn't like to be a mouse tonight," said Mum, as they watched him move away.

Ben ran all the way home from school that day. He could hardly wait to start grooming Tom for stardom. Ben was going to brush Tom's coat until it shone.

Tom was already sitting on the windowsill waiting, as usual, but he didn't purr when Ben stroked him.

"I think he's in a bad mood," said Ben.

"Try him on some of this cat food," said Dad. "Mrs Miller gave it to me at school. Their cat's on a diet."

"Tom doesn't like cat food," protested Ben, but he opened the tin, nevertheless, and offered it

to Tom in his dish. Tom sniffed it suspiciously. He looked at Ben and miaowed. Finally, he ate.

“He likes it!” said Ben.

“Looks like it,” grinned Dad.

“You’re going to become the most famous cat in town,” said Ben, but he wasn’t sure that Tom was listening. He seemed more interested in polishing the sides of his bowl with his pink tongue, making sure that not a bit of food was left behind. Afterwards, he jumped on to his chair and fell fast asleep.

Chapter Five

As the days went by, Sam became more and more confused. Things were no longer what they used to be. There was no longer what used to be. There was very little breakfast, no elevenses, only a few hard biscuits for lunch, and a tiny portion of food for tea. Sam didn’t like it.

He lay stretched out on Emma’s bed with his ears pointed towards the kitchen. It was time for tea, and yet there were no delicious smells coming from the kitchen. No clatter of tins either.

Sam could hear Emma and her mother talking in the sitting room.

“He isn’t getting any thinner,” Emma said.

“No, I don’t understand it. I would have thought he’d have lost a bit of weight by now,” said Mum.

Sam decided to get up. He clawed the side of the bed. That usually got them going. But not today. Fancy sitting there when they knew full well it was time for his tea.

Sam went into the sitting room and began clawing the carpet. That did it.

“I suppose he’s got to have something,” said Mum. “Give him that bit of fish in the fridge.”

Emma put his dish in front of him. He looked at the small piece of white fish, then at Emma and again at the small piece of fish.

“I don’t think he likes it,” said Emma.

“Tough,” said Mum.

Sam sniffed the fish suspiciously, but ate it anyway.

Emma stoked him. “We are just trying to slim you down a bit, Sam. Maybe you can get that part in the school play. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

Sam snorted and with his tail held high, he walked across to his cat flap and squeezed through it with as much dignity as he could muster.

“What if he dies of hunger?” said Emma, sadly, as she watched Sam disappear into the field, his belly wobbling from side to side.

“I don’t think there’s much chance of that,” said Mum.

Chapter Six

Across the fields, the Browns were just arriving home. As usual, Tom was sitting on the windowsill waiting for them.

Tom purred for all he was worth and allowed Ben to tickle his tummy and ruffle the fur on his head.

“You hungry, boy?” asked Ben. Tom gave a long, complaining miaow. But as soon as Ben put him down and waved the tin opener in the air, he started purring again. Ben scooped out an extra large portion which Tom ate greedily, begging for more.

“Funny he suddenly likes that tinned stuff,” said Mr Brown. “Better not give him too much, though. You know what happened to the Millers’ cat.”

“You won’t get fat, will you?” said Ben. “You are going to become a star!”

Tom purred louder than ever. And he allowed Ben to comb and brush him for a long, long time. They all smiled as they watched him lying there on their best blanket. Perhaps he was getting a bit fat, but anyone who has to stay out all day deserves a little extra comfort at night. Especially a handsome, shiny-coated cat like their Tom.

“I’m sure he’ll be chosen on Friday,” said Ben.

Two of Tom’s whiskers twitched a little.

Chapter Seven

On Thursday morning, things were not right. Tom refused to go out when the Brown family was ready to leave.

“I don’t think he’s very well,” said Ben.

“There’s no reason why he shouldn’t stay in, for once,” said Mr Brown.

Ben looked worried. “I hope he’s not ill! It’s Friday tomorrow,” he said, putting a blanket over Tom, who was lying there trying to look as sickly as possible.

The Browns decided to leave Tom some biscuits and a bowl of milk and then just hope for the best. Tom watched them fussing around him through half-closed eyes.

“You’ll be all right, boy.” Said Ben as he pulled on his anorak.

And then they were off.

Tom waited until he heard the key turn in the lock and the car doors slam. Then he got up, stretched, ate a few biscuits, drank all the milk, pushed open the door to Ben’s room, jumped on his bed and snuggled down for the day, next to a large teddy.

Across the fields, the Miller family was in a panic.

Sam had disappeared.

“Sammy!” called Emma. “Sammy-Sammy-Sammy!”

“Tomorrow is Friday,” she whimpered. “If he’s not back by then, I can’t take him to school,

and then Ben's cat will get that part in the school play."

"He'll be here when you come back from school... you'll see," said Mum.

Emma left with a heavy heart. She didn't tell anyone that Sam had disappeared, although she thought of nothing else all day.

When she saw her mum's face outside the school gate that afternoon, she knew that Sam was still missing.

Emma went round the garden clattering a fork against the side of a tin of cat food, calling so loudly that even Tom heard it, across the fields. He paced restlessly around the room.

But when the Millers went to bed, there was still no sign of Sam.

"He'll be here in the morning," said Mum, but Emma could tell that she didn't really think he would be.

"I don't mind if he doesn't get the part," said Emma. "As long as he comes back." But before she went to bed she made up Sam's traveling basket with the softest towel she could find. Just in case.

Across the fields, Tom was desperate to go out, but soon changed his mind when he smelled pilchards.

Ben put a soft blanket in his traveling basket, ready for the morning.

Chapter Eight

The Millers didn't sleep much that night. On Friday morning, Sam was still missing, and they were all out drumming his feeding bowls and tapping forks on tins of cat food.

"We'll have to go and look for him in the fields," sighed Mrs Miller.

"Sammy-Sammy-Sammy!"

"Come on, Sammy!"

Over at the Browns' house, Tom heard them.

So did the Browns.

"What's going on out there?" said Mr Brown and opened the back door.

Before anyone could do anything about it, Tom had shot out of the door.

"Come back," shouted Ben. He charged after Tom followed by his mum and dad.

"Tommy-Tommy-Tommy!"

"Come on, Tommy!"

"Tom!" they all shouted.

"Sam!" hollered the Millers, running towards them from the opposite direction.

They met by the big tree in the middle of the field, just in time to see a very big, very muddy,

black cat disappear up its strong branches.

“Sam!” panted the Millers.

“Tom!” gasped the Browns.

Emma was the first to speak.

“He’s not called Tom,” she said, “his name is Sam.”

“No, that’s Tom,” said Ben. “I’m taking him to school this morning.”

“Rubbish!” said Mr Miller. “This is definitely our cat Sam. Look how fat he is.”

They all looked up.

Sam – or was it Tom? – looked back at them, washing himself calmly. “He’s not fat,” said Mrs Brown, “he’s just a big cat. And he’s definitely ours.” The Browns and the Millers looked at one another. “You don’t think...?”

“Could it be...?”

“It’s Sam!” said Emma.

“And it’s Tom!” said Ben.

High up in the tree, the black cat had finished washing himself.

He didn’t care who he was. His black fur shone in the morning light and his tummy had started to rumble.

Chapter Nine

Miss Harper was relieved that neither Emma nor Ben had brought their black cat to school. She knew that it would have been impossible to choose between them. But Hassan had brought his ginger cat and everyone agreed that it looked more or less like a witch’s cat.

That evening, the Browns invited the Millers to tea to discuss their cat. Tucking into an extra large bowl of pilchards, Tom heard them agree to share him and not to upset his carefully planned routine again.

Tom jumped on his chair, purring contentedly.

“He’s two cats in one,” said Ben.

“No wonder he’s fat,” said Emma.

And the next day, Mr Miller fitted a new cat flap for Sam.

An extra large one!