



## When Stan Came Back by Gaye Jee

It was a warm summer's night and Stan suddenly found himself awake. He uncurled himself from the bottom of Gracie's bed and went to look at her face, but she was fast

asleep. Usually she was pleased to see him, but when he patted her face with his paw, she muttered something about bluebottles and turned over in bed. His brother Dweezil was curled up on the other side of her, snoring and twitching in his sleep. Stan (rather bad manneredly) gave his bottom a nip, but instead of being ready for a game, Dweezil opened one eye, gave a big sigh and then went back to sleep.

The room was full of a strange bluish light. It was coming from the crack in the curtains. Stan jumped up onto the windowsill and nosed the curtains aside. There was a bright white moon up in the sky and some big furry moths were whirring around busily outside the window. On the ridge of the roof sat a large white bird with huge round eyes and what looked like a very sharp beak. Stan had seen a bird like this in a book that belonged to Gracie – it was called an owl, she had told him, and in the picture, it was sitting very close to a cat in a little boat on the sea. Stan wasn't sure that he would like to be on the sea, or even if cats and owls really could be friends. But there was so much going on outside he couldn't resist hopping out of the window, crossing the flat roof and scrambling down the lilac tree into the garden. He sniffed the air and so many delicious smells flooded his nose, he felt quite dizzy. There was the scent of flowers, and burnt sausages, melted cheese and even, faintly, his favourite: fresh catnip! Now, usually, Stan did not venture outside the garden – and he suddenly realised it was the first time he'd ever been out in the dark on his own. But the night was warm, and he was full of the SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE, so he set off to find out where the catnip smell was coming from.

He clambered up the ivy-covered wall at the end of the garden and dropped down into the little field where some rusty old cars were parked. Then he wandered to the end of the field, through the fence and onto a path that led to some houses with very tidy gardens full of very tidy flowers. Still the catnip scent beckoned him. He was a little bit worried about getting lost, but he could see the wall of his garden when he looked behind him, so he carried on. Suddenly, just as he was crossing



a patch of neatly mown grass in front of one of the houses, the air was full of beating wings and Stan could feel something sharp brushing his fur. He looked up, and hovering above him with her frightening beak and big black eyes, was the owl! She did not look like she wanted to be his friend at all! Stan ducked away from her sharp talons and shot into the next garden as fast as his legs could carry him. The owl, realising that although Stan was quite a small pussycat, he was still far too big for her to pick up and carry off, shrugged her wings and went to sit back on the roof.

Stan's heart was beating hard and he ran and ran until he found himself in a place full of huge old trees. At last he stopped, turned round and looked for the garden wall. But the wall was nowhere to be seen! Just at that moment, the dark clouds that had been gathering for some time, covered the face of the moon, and Stan could no longer see where he was going. A chilly wind began to blow, and all the trees and bushes started to move as though they had big, bad tempered animals living in them!

Stan decided he'd better not panic. After all, he wasn't a kitten any longer – he was a grown-up cat more than a year old. And, he told himself, there were no tigers or bears in the trees (he'd seen those in Gracie's books too) and that grown up cats are DESTINED FOR ADVENTURE and it was only right that he should spend some of his time AT LARGE. So he decided to be brave, and to show he didn't care he began to wash himself very thoroughly. After about ten minutes, he'd washed all the places he could reach, and had even cleaned his ears twice. But when he'd finished, he was still sitting in the dark scary wood on his own with no idea of how to get home. He decided to call for help – perhaps Gracie would hear him and call him so he could follow the direction of her voice. He meowed as loudly as he could, but the sound seemed to get lost in the whispering of the trees as they moved in the breeze. At last, feeling very sad and tired, he curled up under a bush and went to sleep.

When he woke up, it was getting light. The wind had dropped and the catnip smell was back and stronger than ever. He felt a bit cheered up. Then he heard a funny noise. It was very high and quavery, but also rather familiar. Then he realised! It was someone singing! Gracie was always singing and Stan quite enjoyed it except when she picked him up and danced round the room with him doing something called the Macarena. He started to creep towards the sound, hoping that it was Gracie out and about looking for him. He crept through some long grass and arrived at a low fence. Peering through, he could see someone moving about. But it wasn't Gracie. It was someone very different, someone bent over, with grey hair. She was pouring water on some flowers and singing to them. She told them they were "her sunshine, her only sunshine", which didn't make any sense at all. Suddenly, the scent of catnip was almost over-powering and it seemed to be coming from just

where the lady was standing. Without thinking, Stan hopped up, over the fence and trotted across the lawn.

“Hello, Young Sir, where did you come from?” said the lady. She had a kind face, covered in wrinkles and very stiff looking hair with a funny purple hat perched on top.

Stan knew from experience that most humans were rather stupid. They’d ask a question like, “What would you like for your tea?” and when he meowed “sardines” as loudly as possible, they smiled knowingly and gave him tinned cat food. So instead of trying to tell her he was lost, he just tried to look as sad as possible so she might get the idea for herself. The lady went back into her cottage and a few minutes later came back with a big saucer of milk and, to his delight, a bowl with lots of bits of delicious roast chicken! She hadn’t understood he was lost, but at that moment he didn’t mind.

“Well, what am I going to do with you?” said the lady. Stan got the feeling she wasn’t expecting him to reply. “I wonder if you’re lost?” She definitely wasn’t as stupid as most humans, after all. Stan decided to wait and see if she had any other ideas. She potted around her garden, and Stan realised that the smell of catnip was coming from a plant on one side of the lawn. She was definitely a very special human, one that really understood how to treat a cat. Stan decided, that as he’d lost his old family, the lady would do very nicely instead, so when she opened the door into her house again, he trotted inside and found himself a comfortable spot on a cushion in a pool of sunlight.

When he woke up again, the house was quiet. He decided to explore. There were lots of soft places to settle down, but he’d been well fed and had a good snooze, so it was time for a game. He looked round for Dweezil, but of course he wasn’t there, and suddenly Stan felt very sad. He decided to cheer himself up by GOING UP HIGH. There were some pretty curtains at the window, with flowers and stripes on them. They looked like they might be fun to climb, so Stan took a run and swarmed up one of them. He got right to the top, and just as he was wondering how to get back down again, there came a creaking, cracking noise

from the curtain rail and suddenly he found himself on the ground with the curtain on top of him. He wrestled with the curtain for a while, pretending it was Gracie’s bed cover where he often played when she



covered him up. Then he crawled out from underneath and decided that had been so much fun, he would go up the other curtain too. He hung near the top for a tantalising few seconds before that curtain fell down too. When he’d crawled out from under the second curtain, he was pleased to see that the

whole rail was lying on the ground. He was sure the lady would prefer the curtains on the carpet – he certainly did – and he was pleased he could do something nice for her to say thank you!

Then he noticed a nice high shelf on one side of the room with lots of little things on it. He jumped from the back of a chair and found that the shelf was much narrower than he’d expected and he almost lost his balance. Luckily, he didn’t fall off, but a couple of the things on the shelf did – a china lady with a parasol and a loud ticking thing that went quiet as it hit the hard tiles just under the shelf. The china lady’s head had come off too. Stan had enjoyed watching the things hitting the floor, so he worked his way along the shelf, patting the rest of the things with his paw. Some of them were more difficult to move than others, but he managed to clear the shelf of a small vase with a pretend flower in it (he knew it was pretend, because he tried to bite it), a photograph of a human baby in a silver frame, three little wooden ducks and finally, at the far end of the shelf, another china lady like the first one he’d knocked off. This one broke in half and the parasol snapped off and skittered away across the carpet.

Stan surveyed the room with satisfaction at a job well done! He was just noticing that there was a basket full of balls of wool that would be so much prettier if they were scattered around the room, when there came a noise from the hallway. He recognised it



straight away! It was the noise the door made just before a member of the family came back into the house. He was excited to see who was coming in – it might even be Gracie, and he hoped and hoped it was, because although he’d been having fun with the curtains and everything else, he did miss home. But it wasn’t Gracie, it was the lady who’d taken him in. She was wearing a raincoat and a different funny hat and had two bags of shopping. When she reached the door of the living room, she stopped and looked at what Stan had been up to. She didn’t seem as pleased as he’d been expecting. In fact, she looked quite frowny and was muttering under her breath. She said,

“Just as well you won’t be staying long, my lad!”

Stan didn’t know what that meant – he thought this was his new home, and although he missed his old one, he was getting to like it here. The lady opened the door to the garden and Stan went out to have a chew on the catnip. Then he lay on the grass and watched bees going in and out of the flowers. Soon he fell asleep again. He was awoken by the sound of the lady’s voice. She was saying,

“He’s just here, in the garden!” and the next moment, to his horror, the worst thing in the world happened. Someone came out into the garden with the CAT BASKET! Stan knew that what would follow would be a visit to the VET and that was something to avoid at all costs. Almost before he knew what he was doing, he was out of the garden and running for his life. He hid under some bushes at the edge of a patch of trees for a long time. He thought he could hear someone calling his name but he wasn’t taking any chances with the cat basket, so he stayed hidden until it was thoroughly dark.

It was another warm night, but Stan felt sad and lonely. He had run so far from home, he felt like he’d be lost forever. He remembered how much better he’d felt earlier in the day when he’d GONE UP HIGH, and finding himself under a tall tree, he started to climb. Up he went, clambering from branch to branch, until he reached the very top. It was the highest he’d ever climbed and he felt excited and dizzy. A wisp of warm breeze wafted into his nostrils. It smelt like – yes, it smelt like the blanket from the sofa where he and Gracie often sat to watch television. He crept carefully towards the end of the branch he was sitting on and craned his neck in the direction of the blanket smell. Suddenly the moon came out from behind a cloud, and there, not so very far away, was the ivy-covered wall of his garden, and the roof of his house where the owl had sat! The next moment, he’d scrambled down the tree and within a few minutes he was back in his own garden.



The house was in darkness, and nobody came when he meowed at the back door, so he scrambled up the lilac tree and across the flat roof. Grace’s window was open a little bit, so he meowed, hoping she’d wake up. The first thing that happened was that a black shape on the end of the bed sat up and meowed back at him. It was Dweezil! Then Gracie woke up too and rushed to let him in! She was so happy to see him she squeezed him quite hard, and then she woke everyone else up to tell them he was home. Suddenly everyone was crying and laughing in a most confusing way.

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The next day, the doorbell rang, and who should come in but the old lady who’d taken him into her house!

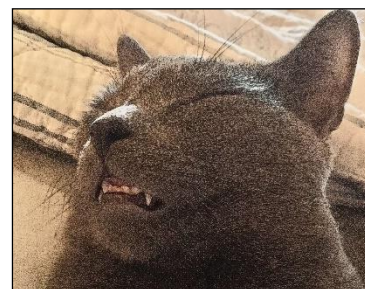
“I’m so pleased he came back,” she was saying. “I really thought we’d lost him again when you came round yesterday. When I saw the posters you’d put all round the village, I had to let you know straight away.”

“The posters were Gracie’s idea,” said Gracie’s mum. “Everyone’s been asking after him, he’s quite famous in the village now!”

Stan wasn’t really listening, and nor, it seemed, was Gracie. They were curled up together on the sofa with Dweezil. Their usual blanket wasn’t there, but he didn’t really care.

“And she had the idea of putting the blanket outside in case the smell of it helped him to find his way home. I don’t suppose it did any good, but I’ll get it in and give it a good wash now!”

Stan rolled on his back and closed his eyes. He didn’t care about the blanket, or being famous in the village – he was home and that was all that mattered.



## STAN IS MISSING!

He’s been gone since last night and we are all missing him lots! If you see him, please give us a call.

Many thanks!

