

The Legends of Whiteknight



HERO CAT

Al Strano

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Hero Cat

Prologue

In a ramshackle hut at the edge of town, a gnarled old lady stirred her pot of concoctions, which she sold to gullible customers. She specialized in love potions, fertility remedies and sexual stimulants. The ingredients were very similar, but by putting them in different shaped bottles she managed a thriving business. Her only companion was a very pregnant cat. The old lady's eyesight was failing and occasionally she fed the cat one of her concoctions instead of the gruel it usually got. The cat had acquired a taste for the potions and started helping herself to what was in the pot. Eventually, the cat gave birth to four kittens, three black and one snow white. The old lady had promised cats to some of her friends, who dabbled in witchcraft. Her friends wanted black cats, so she was stuck with the white one. She pondered what to do with it, but then one of her more naive customers stopped by.

“I could really use a potion to get my fiancé to propose to me. I know he wants to, but he needs a little nudge,” pleaded the young lady.

Never one to miss an opportunity, the old crone offered, “I have something better than a potion – a magical cat! Give this kitten to your boyfriend and its purring will raise his passion and he will pop the question.”

The old woman did wonder how he was her fiancé, yet hadn't asked the question, but she really wanted to get rid of the cat; it was one too many mouths to feed.

As Eva left with her surefire remedy, the old Druid cackled, while counting her money.

Chapter One

A Cat Gets His Name

It all started when my girlfriend decided I needed some company. Of course, it was a thinly disguised plan to get me married. She thought about getting me a dog, but decided it would be too much trouble, all that walking and poop to pick up. A cat would be a whole lot easier to manage. Fearing marriage more than pet responsibility, I opted for the cat, which turned out to be a snowball-sized kitten of the same color. It came with a set of bowls: one for water, one for food, accompanied by a comfy looking cat bed. The food provided was several cans of very fancy meats whose ingredients sounded mouthwatering to me. A litter box and a huge bag of kitty litter was also provided. I dutifully filled the litter box, the water and food bowls, then relaxed. The unnamed kitten checked out all of the above and opted for the bed. Just like babies, kittens sleep a lot. I was enthralled just watching the tiny creature sleep. This won't be so bad, I thought. A few hours later the kitten awoke and wandered over to his food. I had discovered he was a male, my girlfriend not wanting any other females around. He had a few sips of water, sniffed the food and presented me with a quizzical stare.

“What’s wrong?” I asked. The cat didn’t answer. Oh well, I thought. He’ll eat when he gets hungry. That gourmet tuna even smells good.

Time passes, the kitten looks at the food and then me. Maybe he doesn’t like tuna? How about some chicken or lamb medley? Sounds yummy. Same result. He appears hungry, but is not interested in two dollar a can gourmet food. I scoop out the food and fill the bowl with milk. The cat laps it up. Problem solved for now, the cat curls up in his bed and goes to sleep, so do I.

At some wee hour I awake to a buzzing in my ear, it’s actually purring. I will have to close the bedroom door. The only company I would like in bed is feminine and human. I pick up the cat and take it to its own bed. It goes directly to its bowl and looks at me. I had frugally put the uneaten tuna, chicken and lamb in the fridge, so I scooped the new medley into his bowl, he didn’t even sniff this banquet. So I resorted to more milk.

I went to my bedroom and securely closed the door. Just around dawn I was awoken to a piercing howl from outside my bedroom door. It couldn’t be the kitten it wasn’t big enough to make that much noise. But there he was outside the door demanding attention. Maybe a dog would be easier? More milk, which didn’t seem

to really please him. I was up, so I saw no reason my girlfriend shouldn't be. I called her and explained the situation.

“Try a different brand, I know some cats are fussy.”

“It's 6 AM. The super market isn't open.”

“Try the convenience store at the gas station.”

Sure enough, they had bags of dry cat food. It didn't look as tempting as the gourmet stuff and it cost a lot less per volume than the canned stuff. Home I went, dumped some in the bowl and watched the cat devour the whole bowl. Yippee!

The still nameless cat and I settled into our co-existence, until I discovered the cat didn't like the litter box. Following my girlfriends' instructions, I emptied the box every week, even though I never noticed the cat using it and there was no evidence in the box that he did. One day I caught the cat in the act, he was using the pot of my miniature palm tree. One sniff of the pot proved this. What to do? I scraped his deposits out of the pot and replaced the dirt with potting soil. The cat watched this operation with interest and then jumped up on the pot and did his business. This was not the solution. I had toyed with the idea of letting the cat outside, so this made up my mind. I would let him out at night. I could sleep and he could relieve himself in the garden. So, that night as I went to bed, I shoed the cat into the back garden and went to sleep. At 3 A.M. the screeching yowl not only woke me up, but my next door neighbor also, who wasn't pleased. I guess I would have to control the outside visits a little better. A cat flap would be part of the plan. But before I did this, I was informed by my girl friend that the cat and I had an appointment with the vet. My little buddy was about to lose some vital parts. Why do women seem to enjoy this event.

So on a snowy morning in February I loaded my soon-to-be neutered roommate into his travel cage, also provided by my girl friend, and headed to the vet's. The roads were pretty slick, making me drive slowly on the four lane highway. I glanced over at the passenger seat to see if my little friend had any idea what was about to happen. He appeared to be oblivious. Some of the traffic also appeared to be oblivious to the road conditions. All of a sudden a huge oil tanker with the words Texas Oil printed on the side started to pass me and lost control. It slid sideways into my lane and pushed my Volvo through the guardrail and down into the ditch running alongside the highway. At least that's what I was later told, as I don't remember any of what happened.

The next thing I did remember was a scratchy tongue licking my face and a loud purring in my ear. The cat's cage had been sprung open and it had crawled out and was perched on my chest doing what it had always been good at – waking me up. Looking around, I realized we were trapped under the tanker. Only the strong Swedish steel and side air bags had prevent us from being crushed. Gaining my senses, I became aware of the strong smell of diesel fuel and some voices nearby. I could hear what turned out to be firemen talking.

“The driver's a goner, luckily there wasn't another vehicle involved.” What did he mean no other vehicle, I was 'another vehicle.' We were completely covered by the tanker. Once again the voice said, “We can just leave it here for now and worry about containing the spilled fuel.”

I immediately tried to call out, but all I could produce was a weak croaking sound. The voices started to fade away. I tried again desperately to make myself heard, when suddenly my ears were struck with the loudest catcall I've ever heard.

“What the heck was that?” asked one of the voices.

“Sounds like a cat, there must be a cat under there.”

“What should we do?”

“Leave it, it's only a cat.”

Just then a third voice, a female voice, chimed in. “Did I hear you right? You're going to leave a cat under that tanker.”

Male voice, “Yeah, what's it to you?”

“Plenty. I'm a member of an animal rights group, and a reporter for the local paper. You leave that cat down there and everyone in town will read about it tomorrow morning.”

“OK, OK, lady, we'll see about rescuing a cat. The fire department doesn't want to look bad. It would be easier if the cat were up a tree.”

So the heavy equipment was brought in and with much grunting, groaning and the screeching of metal the tanker was lifted off my Volvo and one of the firemen

bravely crawled underneath.

“Holy mackerel!” he shouted to his mates, “there’s a car under here and there’s a guy with a little white cat on his chest. Get a stretcher down here ASAP.”

So, slowly I was pulled from my car with a cat stuck to my chest. The reporter was there as well as a TV crew. A microphone was stuck in my face and a reporter said, “You are one lucky guy, that cat saved your life.”

The female reporter made history by saying, “That cat is your White Knight.”

And my kitten had a name and the bedroom door is no longer closed.

Chapter Two

A Kitty Rescue

The next few days involved several command performances. First, the paramedics insisted I go to the hospital to get checked out. I had been concussed. They were nice enough to allow “Whiteknight” to ride along in the ambulance. However, the ER staff were not as kind and refused to let my hero come with me. The female reporter, Amy, had followed the ambulance and volunteered to watch him for me.

The hospital had found my girlfriend Eva’s name and number in my wallet and called her. So, an hour later when I came out of the ER, I found Eva and Amy having a first class stare down. Amy held the kitten and Eva was demanding she turn him over to her.

“I promised Al I would watch him. I don’t know who you are,” was Amy’s defense.

“I’m Al’s fiancée. I gave him the cat,” shouted Eva. ‘Fiancée?’ I puzzled. They then both noticed me.

“Tell her to give me the cat,” demanded Eva.”

“I was just protecting Whiteknight,” pleaded Amy.”

I took charge and reached for Whiteknight.

“What kind of stupid name is that?” snorted Eva. “I call it Snowball. Al never gave it a name.”

“That’s his name now and I’ll explain it all when you take us home.” I thanked Eva and Amy for watching Whiteknight and Eva drove Whiteknight and me to my house.

Once home, I filled the cat’s bowl, then realized I was also hungry. Declaring this to Eva, she demonstrated her culinary prowess by ordering a pizza. When the delivery guy arrived I handed her a fifty. While she was paying him a large tip, I couldn’t help seeing her flirt with him. I managed only one slice, but then felt a little queasy and needed to lie down. Eva wanted to stay, but I told her I wouldn’t be much company. So, she agreed to clean up the kitchen and call me the next day.

Indeed, the next day, I did feel a little better and went in search of the pizza, finding over half of it stuffed in the garbage pail. The box was stuffed in the trash bin along with the soda cans. Eva ignored the two recycling bins, not wishing to figure out what went in which container. There were several messages on my machine from major media outlets and two from local TV stations. I contacted my favorite station, arranging to do an interview in the morning. The paper had arrived and featured a picture of Whiteknight and the story under Amy's byline. I managed to avoid Eva for the evening.

In the morning, with the hero of the story in tow, I reported for the interview. Aside from everyone fawning over the kitten, I managed to tell what little I remembered of what had happened. The host for some reason wanted to belittle Whiteknight's achievement.

"All he did was lick you. What's the big deal."

"His licking and purring revived me. Without that I would have remained unconscious and every boy scout knows it is important to revive a victim. Besides, without his yowling the firemen wouldn't have come looking. There is something special about this cat. It sensed the problem and did what was necessary. He is, in fact, my White Knight."

The spontaneous applause from the studio audience put the host in his place. Before I left the studio, there was a message from the network office to hold me for a remote interview from New York. I put Whiteknight front and center making sure the interview centered on him.

Things settled down and we became last week's news. But Whiteknight was a hero to the local kids who loved to pet him whenever they got the chance. Whiteknight seemed to love it, too, tolerating lots of hands, but always ready to give a tail-puller a good swat when needed.

One morning there was a bit of commotion in the park at the bottom of the hill where I lived. I wandered down to check it out and found a couple familiar faces – the two firemen who had rescued us. They stopped what they were doing to say hello and give Whiteknight a good pet. "This job is more like what we're used to," one said. "There's a cat up this tree and he won't come down. We're having trouble getting a ladder close due to the thick branches."

They were trying to get a basket up into the tree. They had a plan for coaxing the kitten into the basket, but needed to use a rope to raise and lower the basket. Whiteknight watched with interest. He then rubbed himself against my leg to get my attention. As I witnessed the firemen's unsuccessful attempts to get a rope over a high branch, I was reminded of a camping trip some friends and I took in bear country. We were told not to leave food in our tents, rather to put it up on a bear pole. A bear pole looks like a soccer goal post but higher. We tried for a while to toss a rock tied to thin line over the crossbar. Eventually, we succeeded. Then we tied a heavier line to the thin one, attached it to our food pack and hauled it up. Great work, except a squirrel climbed up the vertical post, crawled out the horizontal beam, jumped down on our pack and ate our breakfast muffins. If a squirrel could do that, certainly a smart cat could do something similar.

I approached the now frustrated firemen. "Try tying that cord to Whiteknight's collar and see if he can climb the tree."

The firemen were skeptical of my suggestion, but having experienced the half grown kitten in action, they figured it was worth a chance. They tied the cord to Whiteknight's new collar, which was a gift from Amy, who had gotten a promotion thanks to her story of our rescue. Whiteknight dutifully started climbing and quickly arrived among the branches, crawled over a sturdy one and climbed back down. The firemen attached a thicker rope to the one removed from Whiteknight's collar, pulled the thinner rope up and over and then tied the basket to the end of the thicker rope. The owner of the kitten came forward to provide the toy that was a favorite of the stranded cat. Up went the basket, the cat in the tree looked dubious, but once it saw it's toy, it climbed in and enjoyed the ride back down. The firemen lifted Whiteknight up and the crowd cheered. I swear the cat smiled.

Back home, the phone was ringing – it was Amy. Someone had called to tell her about the rescue. She wanted to come by to do a story for her paper. I readily agreed; both Whiteknight and I had taken a fancy to her. We were in the kitchen rehashing the morning's adventure when Eva arrived at the door. Without even a hello to me, she demanded, "What's *she* doing here?" That was the final straw. I had been growing tired of her attitude about our relationship and lack of understanding for the environment.

"She's here as a reporter and a friend. You have no business challenging whom I have in my home and I would thank you to leave your key and go." Boy, that felt good.

“What kind of a way is that to treat your fiancée?”

“I don’t know when you think you became my fiancée, but the engagement is over.” Thankfully, my door withstood the force of her exit. Amy was embarrassed by Eva’s outburst, but I told her not to be. I had needed a reason to break it off with Eva; her actions played right into my hands.

Amy wrote a really good story and managed to include one of the many photos taken during the second rescue showing Whiteknight up in the tree with the cord on his collar.

Chapter Three

Neighborhood Watch

I had wanted the cat flap installed weeks ago, but finding the right guy had taken a long time. He arrived early, then spent two hours measuring, sawing and installing. He and I stood together admiring his work, but the carpenter was a little dubious. “Some cats won’t use these, they just don’t like pushing their heads against the flap. And uninstalling one of these is a real chore. The training period might take a few weeks.” The guy wanted to prepare me for the worst. However, just then the flap was pushed in by Whiteknight striding into the house as if he’d been doing it all his life. He turned around and went back out through the flap. So much for the training period.

By now the six month old kitten had started running my life. He slept with me when I was alone, but if I was lucky enough to have company, he used his own bed. He still preferred the cheap dry food and the litter box stood unused.

A few days after the flap was installed, I was rudely awakened by one of Whiteknight’s patented howls, just in time to see him scurry down the stairs, soon followed by the sound of the cat flap springing open and snapping shut as he flew through it. I pulled on a robe and sandals, grabbed my cell phone and left my house in a less hurried pace. Looking left and right I saw a white blur streaking across the neighboring lawns. I paralleled his dash by taking the sidewalk, just able to keep him in sight. When he neared the third house down, he leaped onto the first floor wall and climbed up to the second story, starting to howl and pound on a window. His antics caused lights to come on in that house and the one next door. As I got closer I could smell smoke and quickly dialed 911. The 911 operator was on the line at once.

“What is your emergency?”

“I’m outside 217 Cherry Lane and I smell smoke coming from the house.”

“What is that horrible noise?”

“That’s my cat trying to rouse the people inside.”

“It must be Whiteknight!” The cats fame had spread.

Meanwhile, the residents, a couple and two small girls, evacuated the house. The sirens of the fire engines were soon heard. The firemen entered the house, causing little damage, and extinguished the source of the smoke, which turned out to be a short circuit in a beer fridge. The homeowner came up to me and thanked me profusely.

”Don’t thank me, all I did was follow Whiteknight. He woke me when he headed out and I knew enough to follow him.”

“Well, thankfully there’s one alert pet in the Neighborhood. My thirteen year-old black lab is still asleep in his doghouse in the back yard. Look, I’m a lawyer. If you ever need legal advice, I’d be glad to help either for free or at a reduced fee.”

“Thanks for the offer, but I don’t think I’ll be calling you,” thinking my life is now so safe and wonderful.

The firemen were soon rolling up their hoses and preparing to leave. My favorite first responder came by. While looking at the small girls holding Whiteknight, he said, “Looks like he’s at it again – a one cat neighborhood watch.”

He was soon followed by Amy. With her sources at the 911 center, she had been alerted to the situation. “OK, what did he do now?” she asked in a very positive way.

“I don’t know how he sensed the fire. I couldn’t smell the smoke till I was almost to the house. He was asleep with me and somehow smelled it. He is some special cat that has almost supernatural abilities.”

I was to regret that comment because along with the photo of the little girls holding him, Amy quoted me in the paper.

Chapter Four

Whose Cat is it?

Returning from work the next day, after surviving all the questions and compliments, a good day turned sour. As I tried to pull into my garage I found my way blocked by Eva's car. This wasn't going to be fun. She jumped out of her car, came running at me screaming, "I want my cat back!"

"Your cat. When did he become your cat?"

"When I bought him, that's when. And I have the receipt to prove it! So hand him over and I'll be gone."

"I remember you giving him to me six months ago and I've been taking care of him ever since. You can't have him."

Just then, displaying his always perfect timing, Whiteknight came out the cat flap and headed toward me. Eva rushed toward him meaning to scoop him up. She never got close. The cat arched his back and let loose a nasty hiss that startled even me, because I had never seen him do that. Eva came to a quick halt.

"Get his cage and put him in it. I'm taking him whether you like it or not."

"Not happening. He's mine. You gave him to me and I'm keeping him."

Eva wasn't done yet. "You also gave me a key and when you broke our engagement you took it back. I'm taking back the cat. It's only fair."

She kind of had me there, but I wasn't going to admit it. "You're not getting him and that's that."

With that she whipped out her cell phone and dialed 911. I stared incredulously. "You can't do that! Are you nuts?"

"We'll see who's nuts." After the 911 operator answered with the normal, "What is your emergency?" Eva said, "I wish to report a robbery." The exasperated operator having received way too many of these calls, calmly told her that she couldn't report a robbery on 911.

Eva said. "I want cops here now."

"O.K. You'll get cops there. Where are you?"

"That's better – 223 Cherry Lane and tell them to hurry."

I couldn't believe what I had just heard. Eva actually thought she had won.

While Eva waited, I went into the house followed by Whiteknight. Eva stewed for half an hour. Finally a patrol car pulled up; two of the city's biggest doughnut eaters climbed out. Eva still thinking she was in charge advanced toward the cops.

"It's about time. I've been waiting for half an hour."

"And you are?" asked one cop as he took out his note book. "Eva Brown. I need to report a theft. The man in that house has stolen my cat and I want you to get it back."

"Well, I'm afraid that will have to wait. We've been sent here to arrest you for making nuisance phone calls to 911. Please put your hands in front of you."

Eva went bonkers and the cops had to subdue her. I had watched all this and finally came out of the house.

"Hi guys, could you do me a favor and move her car before you take her in; she's blocking my driveway." The cops asked for her keys and a now docile Eva did as asked and I was able to move her car to the curb.

Thinking I was done with Eva, I called Amy to see if we could spend some personal time together. She came by and I was relating my adventure with Eva and how it was resolved.

"Whoa. You are certainly a naive little boy, if you think you're done with that woman. Haven't you ever heard the saying 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' She doesn't really want the cat; she doesn't want you to have him. Getting arrested will only make her more determined." I listened, but hoped she was wrong.

Time passed and just as I relaxed, thinking all was clear, a guy knocked on the door and handed me an envelope. "You've been served," he announced. It was a

subpoena. I was being sued by Eva for Whiteknight or \$10,000. I immediately remembered the generous offer from my neighbor. I called his office and he agreed to come by that evening, keeping our business between us.

After studying the subpoena, my lawyer friend was furious. “She wants to take our cat!” Normally, I might not like someone claiming ownership for Whiteknight, but having an angry lawyer on my side seemed like a good idea. He asked me to go over the details of our relationship and how I obtained Whiteknight. He wasn’t thrilled, but felt we could still win our case, and then offered to loan me \$10,000, if necessary.

The hearing was set for two weeks later in small-claims court. Lawyers weren’t necessary, but mine insisted on attending. Eva, overconfident as ever, was her own lawyer. The small-claims courtroom normally doesn’t attract the press or observers. Today was an exception; the room was packed. Whiteknight attracted a lot of attention. The judge, a gray haired woman of about fifty, initially seemed a little put-off, but soon adjusted to the situation. The bailiff called the case and the judge called Eva to state her case. As the plaintiff, she went first.

“I bought that cat and gave it to the defendant as a sign of my affection. He then broke off our engagement, but kept the cat. I want the cat back.”

The judge turned to me and told me to state my case. “We were never engaged. She started telling people we were and after awhile I told her to stop saying it. Then I asked for my key back. This was six months ago and she didn’t want him back then. Besides, the cat doesn’t like her.”

It was now Eva’s turn. “We were engaged. He even said it was over when he asked for his key back. The cat doesn’t have to like me.” When Eva said those words a smug look came over her face. Both the judge and I noticed this.

Whiteknight had sat quietly in his box during all this. The judge shocked everyone by asking me to take him out of the carrier and bring him to her. As we got near Eva, she was obviously a little nervous. I handed the cat to the judge, and of course Whiteknight went into high purr mode. The judge petted him and he licked her hand. The judge then offered him to Eva, who backed up quickly. “Come, take him,” the judge said. “You want him, don’t you?” Eva reached for the cat, my heart skipped a beat. If the judge had calmed Whiteknight too much, he might go to Eva. No problem. When Eva got five feet away, Whiteknight let loose with a big hiss and bared his teeth. Eva backed up so fast, she stumbled and fell on her butt. The

judge gave the kitten a last pet to calm him and handed him to me.

The judge straightened her robes and pronounced her verdict. “I find for the plaintiff.” There was a gasp from the gallery and a whoop from Eva. I was stunned. “And I award Ms. Brown \$20.00 to compensate her for the loss of the cat. The defendant should make payment now and retain Whiteknight.” I couldn’t help noticing she had used his name.

“You can’t do that, I’ve been offered \$10,000 for him. I’ll appeal,” was Eva’s last gasp.

“Sorry, this is small-claims court; there is no appeal.”

The gallery finally catching on as to what had just happened became mixed with cheers, laughter and ridicule for Eva. Justice had prevailed.

Chapter Five

Child Care

My new, best friend lawyer held a big neighborhood barbecue to celebrate our court victory. He had invited the judge, but she elected to stay home with her six cats. I sure hope Eva doesn't hear about that. It was a great day. All of our favorite people were there, especially Amy. We had seen a lot of each other and are very comfortable with the situation.

With the warm summer weather upon us, the park nearby was a popular place. During the week, mothers and nannies spent many hours watching their charges and gossiping. Whiteknight was there a lot of the time entertaining the kids, allowing many to pet him, but repelling any who tried to pull his tail. A large sign announced NO PETS; however, by unspoken agreement this did not apply to him.

One afternoon my assistant came running into my office. "The police are on the phone, they've got your cat."

I picked up my phone, said my name and asked, "You have my cat?"

The voice on the other end answered, "Not exactly. We had him, but we turned him over to animal protection services. They're holding him pending a hearing. The guy he attacked wants him destroyed."

"Are you sure it's my cat; he's a gentle little guy."

"We had to pry him off the guy's face. Your cat really tore him up. The guy's in the ER!"

I dropped the phone and headed for the door, then realized I didn't know where I was going. I stopped short, calling my assistant. "Where's animal protective services?" She had already started looking it up, so I soon had the address.

When I finally found the place, I rushed in and excitedly asked, "What have you done with Whiteknight?"

Talk of destroying him had me all wound up. The woman in charge didn't even ask what kind of animal I was referring to. "We have him in a dangerous animal kennel."

“He’s not dangerous.”

“Tell that to the man in the ER.”

“Can I have him, please.”

“That’s up to the police. They called us in after they subdued him.”

None of this made sense. The bravest, nicest cat in the world was being treated like a criminal. “Can I see him?”

“Only if you don’t try to touch him. The police want him left as is for evidence.”

The poor little guy was the dirtiest I’d ever seen him and he looked like he had been beat up. I spoke to him and tried to sooth him. Of course, the one that needed soothing was me.

“You’ll have to go to the police station, but I doubt they’ll release him. The victim is demanding he be destroyed.”

“I’ll see him in court first.”

I got to the station and, after the usual run-around, I was taken to a detective who was handling the case.

“There has to be some mistake. Whiteknight is a hero to all the kids in the neighborhood.”

“Well, your hero apparently attacked a man without provocation and sent him to the ER.”

“How can I get him out? I’ll post bail.”

“I don’t think you can post bail on a cat.” Just then a police officer came to the door.

“There’s a little girl and her mom at the front desk. I think you should talk to them.”

The little girl, a cute four-year-old I recognized from the park, and her mom were shown in. The little girl had been crying. “My daughter has something to tell you. Go ahead Molly, tell the nice man what you told me once you stopped crying.”

“Whiteknight attacked that man after the man offered to give me a ride in his car to get ice cream.”

“There you go. I knew he wouldn’t attack someone without reason. Let him out of that jail.”

“Not so fast, we need more than the word of a child in this situation. Malone,” he called to the officer who had escorted the mother and child to the office, “Call the ER and tell them to bring that guy in here. He has some questions to answer.” The cop returned in a few minutes.

“The guy skipped out. According to Donaldson, he was there one minute, someone mentioned fingerprints and the guy was gone.”

The evidence was mounting, the “poor victim” was a pedophile and was trying to grab this cute little girl and do ‘God only knows what’ to her.

“There, is that enough. My cat is locked up and the bad guy is on the loose!”

“Not so fast. Malone, go over to animal services and get the cat. We’ll want to scrape the cat’s nails for DNA. I wish we had gotten prints; the DNA test will take days.”

“Donaldson just called back. They captured a soft drink can the perp was drinking from. They should be able to get prints off of that.”

When Whiteknight arrived back at police headquarters, I was not allowed to touch him. “That cat is loaded with evidence. If you were to touch him, it would break the chain of custody and we couldn’t use it in court.”

I was able to watch through a small window as the evidence technicians did their thing. First they scraped his nails placing the results in plastic bags, then came his teeth. “Wow!” shouted one of the women techs, “I got a piece of meat, must be from the guy’s nose. We got him for sure.”

They continued by combing his hair and collecting hair and skin follicles. He was

as calm as could be, co-operating with the techs the whole time. As soon as they finished, Whiteknight started cleaning himself. Nobody would probably believe me, but that crafty feline knew he had evidence on him and patiently waited for the process to finish. Half an hour later, he was his sparkling self.

Meanwhile, there was lots of police activity going on. They did get a print off the pop can and started running it through databases. It didn't take long; they got a hit in the sexual offenders list. His name, of all things, was John Smith. He was a convicted child molester under court order "not to go within 100 yards of a school or playground." The slime bag was in the sand box. A broadcast was made to all neighboring law enforcement agencies to be on the look out for: John Smith, 45 years old, 5'10", 160 pounds, light brown hair and ... a heavily bandaged face.

John Smith lived with his mother at a local address. When police visited, his mother said, "You just missed him. He's gone shopping for some pain pills. He's been mugged. Isn't that why you're here? I hope you catch who did this to my poor boy. People are always picking on him. He's a good boy." The cops remained mute.

Sure enough, a call came in from a security guard at a local mall. "Your guy is sitting by the merry-go-round. I'll keep an eye on him until you get someone here. If he moves toward a kid, I'll shoot him."

When two officers arrived, Smith stood up and put his hands out in front. After the cops cuffed him. He said, "I knew you would come. I love to watch kids. I would never hurt one."

The court had three options: try him again, revoke his parole or have him tested for mental illness. Whatever they decide, he won't be in our park again.

Amy actually got a picture from one of the mothers showing Whiteknight clamped on the creep's face. Which, of course, went viral on the Internet. The press and police never released Smith's name or Molly's to protect them both for different reasons.

Once again I'm faced with the question 'How the heck did he know the guy was bad news?' Several mothers, nannies and passersby noticed nothing. Yet my pussycat knew what to do and things turned out OK.

Chapter Six

A Final Solution

Unbelievably, Smith's mother filed a lawsuit asking a million dollars from me and having Whiteknight put down. After all the police and press did to keep her name out of the paper, she made it part of the public record by filing a useless lawsuit. What lawyer was dumb enough to take her as a client was mind-blowing. The first result was a mob of angry people outside her house demanding she leave, as well as hollering threats about her son.

My lawyer felt the suit had no merit and was a nuisance case. The mother's lawyer was fresh out of law school and had just passed the bar. The newbie was unemployed and had nothing to lose, but his reputation wasn't going to come out of this untarnished.

Amy and I were watching the news on TV. They were showing the mob scene in front of Smith's house. The mother foolishly came out on the porch and tried to shoo the people away. This only enraged the crowd more. All of a sudden, Whiteknight jumped up on the TV stand and started licking the TV. He was licking Mrs. Smith's face and purring.

"What the heck is he doing?" I'd always heard that cats and dogs couldn't see images on televisions. Of course, with Whiteknight anything is possible.

"I think he feels sorry for Mrs. Smith and is trying to make her feel better," was Amy's contribution.

"That's the woman who wants him dead. How big-hearted can he be?" Whiteknight started to whine like he wanted something. He very seldom acted that way and when he did it was important.

"What does he want us to do?" asked Amy.

"He probably wants to go see her."

"O.K. lets go," declared Amy as she got up and headed for the door.

"Are you crazy? Those people out front of her house are looking for blood.

“They won’t bother us if we take Whiteknight,” Amy pleaded.

When we arrived at the house, the mob seemed larger and angrier. At the sight of Whiteknight, it was like a calming cloud had covered the area. People stared and oohed over the cat. We were given a clear path up the steps to the front door. Mrs. Smith was peeking out the window so she knew we were there and opened the door before we could knock. “What do you want? My lawyer told me not to talk to you.”

“Whiteknight wanted to come to see you, because you’re so upset.” I offered the cat to her and her initial reaction was to back up. But the purring of the cat seemed to assure her and she eventually reached out and stroked his fur. When he licked her face, she shed some tears: tears of sorrow, not hate.

We turned to leave, much of the mob left also, just a few die-hards remained. We heard from the lawyer. He was very upset, accusing us of tampering with his client, who had withdrawn the part of the lawsuit asking to have Whiteknight destroyed. But, not the million dollar claim. He was still trying to squeeze me. My lawyer laughed. “That fool thinks you have deep pockets and will pay him to go away. We’ll just wait and *he’ll* go away. He has no case.”

The next day my pockets almost got deeper. A representative from a pet food company called and offered \$10,000 for Whiteknight to appear in a commercial for their expensive canned food. I told him the cat wouldn’t eat it; I still had several cans that Eva had given me.

“Well, that doesn’t matter. We just want to use his picture. He doesn’t have to eat any of it.”

So much for truth in advertising. My refusal on behalf of my cat was “No way.”

“Well, how about if we buy him from you? How does \$100,000 sound?”

“Out of my house, while you can do so safely.”

When it rains it pours. My next call was from a pharmaceutical company. They offered \$250,000 for him. It wasn’t for advertising, it was for research. I shuddered to think what they had in mind for him.

“Won’t hurt him. If things work out, we’ll give you one of his clones; you’ll never

know the difference. Think of the scientific side of it”

“Yeah, my Frankenstein cat. Just go.”

Even worse, a Chinese representative wanted to also know what it would take to buy him. My bragging about supernatural powers had come home to roost. Saying ‘no’ to the Chinese was difficult; they did not understand the word.

When my next door neighbor suddenly sold his house for a sum twice it’s value, I really became concerned. And when the new occupants were three young Chinese men, I locked the cat flap and filled the litter box. Whiteknight was staying inside. I wasn’t being paranoid, they had set up an observation post watching the cat flap.

My next visitors wore dark suits and carried FBI identification. They were special agents and, like myself, concerned about my new neighbors. This was turning into a Ludlum novel.

“We can’t do anything about them; they all have legal visas.”

Whiteknight was going bonkers. He would look out the window at the observer and growl. He knew what was going on.

The FBI wanted to put a tracking device under Whiteknight’s skin, hoping the Chinese would take him. Then they could follow them and make the arrest.

“What if there is a shoot out and Whiteknight gets shot?”

“No, they wouldn’t do that over a cat.”

“Says you. They have a three man team and have spent big money to buy the house next door. You aren’t taking a single chance with my cat.”

“Well, how about witness protection?” said Amy.

“You’re not witnesses unless they steal the cat.” The senior agent shook his head.

“O.K. Let us think about it.” Amy had a glint in her eyes when she said that.

“Well, what is your plan, smarty?”

“Let’s do our own witness protection or pussycat protection. We’ll find three cats that look just like Whiteknight, make a secret deal with all three buyers, then take the money and disappear.”

This had all the markings of one of Eva’s marriage ploys. But from Amy, I didn’t mind.

The search for three look-a-likes turned out to be fairly easy. White cats had become very popular. Matter of fact, we bought four. One was a female which Whiteknight took a fancy to. Getting the buyers to keep it secret was simple – they all thought they were pulling a fast one. All the money was wired to an offshore bank and quickly moved to another. This really is like a Ludlum novel.

The first priority in our new location was getting married under assumed names. And soon White Princess made Whiteknight a father.

Chapter Seven

More Hero Cats

Sure enough, three months after moving to our secret hideaway, White Princess gave birth to four snow white kittens, two males and two females. Amy and I were delighted and Whiteknight seemed very proud. Unlike other male cats, he helped in the raising of the kittens. I was so happy that Amy couldn't hold back any longer, "Would you like one of your own?"

"What do you mean? I have six; they're all mine."

"No, dummy. I mean one of our own?"

The shocked look on my face told Amy that I finally understood, "We're having a baby?"

"Yes, I probably got pregnant the same time White Princess did. It's just going to take me a bit longer."

I hugged her and cried, "Yippee" so loud it scared all the cats. Then rushed into the bedroom and got her a pillow, placing it behind her.

"What are you doing?" she quizzed me.

"You need to take it easy. You should quit your job and stay in bed."

"You silly man. I'm not fragile and don't need to take it easy. In fact my obstetrician says I need to get plenty of exercise and I can keep working until the last few days."

Amy had gotten a job at the local paper, which was a far cry from the big city paper at which she had worked. The newspaper staff was just the owner editor, who could not believe his luck in getting someone as experienced as Amy for next to nothing, and herself. Money didn't matter now, after the deals we had worked with the many suitors for Whiteknight. Of course, Whiteknight sensed something was going on and climbed up on my lap and gave me a good lick while purring in my ear.

Everything seemed perfect, the kittens were growing bigger every day and Amy's

belly was doing likewise.

After six weeks, the kittens were weaned and started playing with each other to the delight of everyone. As time went by their play got more and more boisterous until it was getting out of control. Their favorite game was chasing each other through the house, out the front cat flap, around the house and back in through the rear cat flap. After one particularly violent collision involving a lamp, Whiteknight jumped on my lap and stared at me while shaking his head. 'What's he trying to tell me,' I pondered. "What do you want?"

"I think he wants you to bring a little peace to the house. I know I do," said Amy. "We need to find homes for these guys."

"Well, okay, but where?"

"I'll use my sources at the paper. We don't want to just give them away."

Next evening, Amy was very happy to report she had found homes for the two females. The small local orphanage had a problem with mice and one of the kittens would be great for the kids. Being Whiteknight's daughter, we were sure the kitten would be gentle with the kids. Secondly, Amy's boss was an old bachelor and needed some company. This sounded a lot like how this all got started, but Amy wasn't trying to play Cupid.

"Two down and two to go," said Amy.

"Not so fast, I want to keep one. I think one kitten by itself will be all right. Whiteknight and White Princess will keep it in line."

Two days later, one of the males disappeared. We were both very concerned because none of the cats had ever wandered off. Could the Chinese have found our hideaway and catnapped the now-missing kitten? At this point, we couldn't risk advertising for him, we'd be giving our location away.

Two worrying days later, a call came from the local fire department. "We've got your cat," said the voice on the phone. All of the cats had collars with our home address and phone number on them. "He wandered in here a few days ago and settled in. He's sleeping with Smokey, the firehouse dog. Smokey is the meanest dog I've ever known, but he lets your cat sleep on top of him. Can we keep the cat?"

My mind flashed, 'What is it with us and firemen?' "Of course you can. We were looking for a good home for him and it looks like he figured it out for himself."

The remaining kitten proved to have behaviors contrary to his father: he stayed inside, used the litter box, ate only gourmet food and hardly ever purred. But things were quiet without his siblings around.

About a month later, Amy's boss asked her to cover a house fire nearby. When she arrived, she wasn't really surprised to see the male, firehouse kitten on the scene. What shocked her was to see him charge into the house. "Oh my! He's going to die," she screamed." Within seconds, the half grown cat emerged with a tiny kitten held by the scruff of its neck. He unceremoniously dropped it at the feet of a fireman and returned to the house. Repeating this heroic maneuver twice more, he finally collapsed at the same spot. Amy rushed over, scooped him into her arms and was greeted by a loud purr. He had a few singed hairs and was covered with soot.

"White Smoke sure looks like his name," said a beaming fireman. "Smokey will be real proud of him."

Amy now had a problem in that this was a great human interest story. However, if she wrote about it, it would probably get a lot of attention, which was the last thing we wanted. When she turned in her story, minus any mention of the kitten rescue, her boss was mystified. "Why did you omit the cat's heroics? I would think it was a reporter's dream. And it was your cat."

"We kind of don't want any publicity," she replied meekly.

"You guys aren't in trouble are you?"

"No, we just want our privacy."

"Well, I don't like it, but I'll respect your wishes."

The next cat adventure was equally brave, but didn't need to be hushed up. The nuns at the orphanage liked publicity less than we do. In the middle of the night, there was a disturbance in the infants' section. Upon investigation, the Mother Superior found the cat with a rat as big as itself clamped in its jaws. The rat had gotten into one of the cribs and was about to bite a day-old little girl when Holy

Smoke came to the rescue and nabbed the ugly vermin. After hearing about her brother's exploits, the nuns decided it wouldn't be sacrilegious to recognize the family link with such a name.

What next you ask? Amy's boss was a cigar smoker. Amy didn't care for it; he wasn't supposed to smoke in the office. But he felt, if he was alone, what could it hurt? This particular night he was working very late, so he decided to light up. After all, it was just he and the cat. Who would know? Of course, you can guess what happened – he dozed off and his cigar fell into the wastebasket. Fortunately, his furry roommate was quick to take action. The cat jumped on the man's chest and gave him a good old caterwaul. The editor was shocked awake and quickly extinguished the small fire. Unfortunately for him, when Amy arrived for work the next morning, he couldn't hide the smell. Thus, he had to listen to a lecture about his filthy habit.

Two days later, he called Amy into his office. "Watch this," he commanded gleefully as he reached for the humidor that held his cigars. Immediately Smoke Alarm jumped on the lid preventing him from opening it. "I always thought about quitting, but needed convincing. I am committed to giving it up and now have a monitor to keep me straight."

As Amy's time approached she and I realized that our lives would change forever, meaning no more free and easy vacations or weekend trips. So, we decided to take a weekend trip to the mountains, which would get us away from the humidity of the coast as well. We took Whiteknight and White Princess with us, but left the housebound cat behind; our neighbor agreed to care for him. What we didn't know was that this event was closely watched by another individual, who had been following our comings and goings for quite awhile. His interest was not benign. This had been his house before he had been sent to prison for robbing a jewelry store. His loot was hidden in our home and he needed time to unearth it. That night after we left, unbeknownst to us, the man stealthily approached the house. Using a glass cutter, he cut a hole in the rear sliding door, then carefully opened it. His treasure was in the basement under a cement floor, which he had poured right before his arrest. It would take several hours and a lot of heavy pounding to reach the diamonds he had secreted there. The intruder was totally unaware that there was a cat in the house, since the cat never went outside. He probably wouldn't have cared if he had known. What could one cat do? The villain was hard at work with a sledge hammer busting up the floor. He hadn't noticed the cat watching him, until he took a break from his labors and the cat let out a friendly meow. This startled the man and he kicked the cat, which caused it to flee up the stairs. The cat

sat in his bed licking his sore leg thinking of a way to get revenge. Finally, he decided to do something unheard of – he left the house through the cat flap and went to the neighbor’s house and scratched on his door. The neighbor was surprised to see the cat at his door.

“What’s up, Puss? I fed you earlier, is something wrong?” Taking the keys that I had left he walked across the lawn and opened the door. He barely had it open when he heard the pounding. He quickly closed the door and called the cops. Within minutes, the police arrived, entered the house and arrested the jewel thief.

Upon arriving home two days later, we were surprised to see our house surrounded by crime scene tape, shocked to learn of the break-in and that our stay-at-home cat had spread the alarm. Our neighbor generously shared the reward with the cat, now called Home Alarm. He will be paying for his own gourmet cat food from now on.

What ever secret ingredient made Whiteknight the cat he was, his children had inherited it and the world was better for it.

Finally, the time had come – Amy was ready to deliver. I wanted her to have the baby in a big modern hospital. However, Amy was warned against flying in her final trimester. She had kept a secret from me, in that she wanted to have our baby at home using a midwife, a gnarled old lady she had known before and in whom she had total confidence. When she went into labor, I tried to shoo the cats out of the room. “Oh, no!” proclaimed the midwife. “The cats will sooth the delivery. The purring has a very calming rhythm for the mother, it’s an old Druid tradition.” With a definite sign of arrogance, Whiteknight crawled up on the bed, followed by White Princess and Home Alarm. Amy beamed with delight. Not long after, the birth occurred, as predicted, with no pain and little difficulties for the mother. The midwife proudly displayed a beautiful boy with almost white blonde hair.

With Amy resting in the bedroom, I sat in my chair. I was experiencing total bliss when Whiteknight crawled up in my lap, did an about face and presented me with his still existing male parts. I was at first taken aback and then realized the significance of the gesture.

“So you’re done with fatherhood.”

The delayed visit to the vet took place for both Whiteknight and White Princess with the further expansion of the family left to their offspring.