

Tiger, the Royal Mail Cat

By Shirley Young



This is the story of Tiger, a cat who was once “employed” by the Royal Mail to patrol the Post Office at night. His job was to deal with any pesky mice who tried to chew up the letters and documents that were waiting to be sorted in the morning. When our story begins, Tiger was about to be made redundant because his services were no longer required. He did, however, go on to perform a great kindness and service. It happened this way. . .

One grey autumn morning as Tiger, a brilliantly striped marmalade coloured cat, sat watching on the window sill in the village postal sorting office, he overheard the early morning postmen talking among themselves.

What he heard shocked and stunned him to the core, causing his ears to stand up straight in instant alertness. Apparently, the company that ran the Royal Mail was making big losses and there were going to be thousands of lay-offs and redundancies. Some of the older men were to be offered early retirement, but others would just have to find themselves new jobs. But this wasn't what frightened Tiger so much. It was the news that this particular post office was going to be closed down entirely. The shock of that statement caused Tiger to tremble.

“Oh, what will become of me?” he wondered. He had diligently given eight long years of his life in faithful service protecting the precious letters and keeping the old building a “mouse-free” zone.

“I'll probably be thrown out on the street to starve!” he wailed to himself. Or what was even worse, they might take him to the big house along the main road that was called 'The Vet's House'. Tiger didn't really know what a vet was, but he did know that his friend Tubby had been taken there, and he had never been seen or heard of since!

"I won't let it happen!" he determined. "I'll run away first before they can capture me and take me to that awful vet's house."

It was as these gloomy thoughts were passing through his mind that he felt a gentle hand stroking his spine.

"Don't look so downcast old chap," said a kindly voice. "I'll look after you. I live alone, so you can come and live with me. We'll keep each other company because I'm being retired early too."

Tiger's green eyes flashed up, blazing with hope. It was Victor Penrose, his favourite postman. Victor always made a big fuss of him and shared a few polo mints with him every morning. Tiger loved the smell and taste of mints. He began to purr, his panic gradually subsiding.

All too soon the sad day came when the lights in the old post office went out for the last time and the postal workers bid one another a tearful farewell. Tiger was gently lifted into a pet travelling case and carried to his new home.

Victor set the basket down in his warm kitchen and opened the lid. Tiger cautiously peered out, his nose working overtime as he carefully sniffed his new surroundings. Within two hours Tiger had checked out the whole house and garden, and had firmly established his new territory.

That night Victor put Tiger into a large padded basket in the alcove next to the central heating pipes and wished him 'goodnight'. He then turned off the lights and went upstairs.

But Tiger couldn't sleep. He had been so used to being awake at night chasing mice that he felt he ought to be up and on duty. So he quietly stole out of his basket and softly padded up the carpeted stairs, not making a sound. However, it wasn't long before he began to realise that there were no mice in Victor's house and that he was just wasting his time.

As he sat on the landing listening intently, he heard a gentle snoring sound coming from Victor's bedroom. Tiger crept stealthily into the room and, spying the comfortable looking duvet on Victor's bed, lightly vaulted up and settled himself down in the cosy softness behind Victor's back. "Perhaps it wasn't going to be so bad living here after all," he thought. "It was a whole lot better than being in a cold sorting office all night." And with that thought in mind he drifted off into a deep sleep.

In the morning Victor half-heartedly scolded the naughty cat for being on his bed but he was secretly pleased with the feeling of companionship that Tiger provided.

The first two or three weeks passed pleasantly enough. Victor had a small pension from a previous employer so they managed financially. Even so, Victor went out each day looking for part-time work. However, as the days passed, Victor soon realised that he was now considered too old to get a job, even though he was only in his fifties, and he became very discouraged. He finally gave up and stopped looking for a job, and Tiger watched in dismay as he saw that Victor no longer bothered to get up early any more or even shave properly. Victor hardly ate anything and seemed to have lost all hope and purpose in life. Tiger thought that he looked very sad.

So one morning, as Victor sat slumped over the kitchen table in his dressing gown, drinking a cup of coffee but not eating, Tiger decided that this couldn't go on. He had to do something. "After all," he thought, "Victor had saved him from that dreaded vet's house so now he must in turn do something to help Victor." Then an idea sprang to his mind.

Tiger leapt from his basket with a blood curdling yowl. He ran across to the refrigerator and began rubbing against it furiously, all the time keeping up his loud cat-a-wailing!

Victor almost dropped his coffee in shock. "Tiger!" he exclaimed, "whatever's the matter with you?" Then he sat up straight as he saw the cat glaring meaningfully at his two empty food bowls.

"Oh all right! All right! I get the message. Now be quiet and I'll go to the supermarket and get you something to eat."

Half an hour later Victor was back downstairs, having washed and dressed. "I won't be long, Tiger," he said. "I don't need anything. I'll just get a few tins for you. You can sit in the garden until I get back."

After Victor had gone, Tiger let himself out through the cat flap and sat down under a tree in the garden. A long time passed and still there was no sign of Victor. Tiger dozed off. Then suddenly he came to with a start as he heard the back gate open and Victor re-appeared loaded with four large supermarket bags overflowing with groceries.

Tiger grinned to himself. His plan was beginning to work! He had guessed that once Victor went into the supermarket his appetite would be stimulated by the sight of all that delicious food.

So it wasn't very long before Tiger was munching his way through a bowl of smelly mackerel snacks and the kitchen was filled with the warm appetising smell of Victor cooking a meal for himself.

When spring came, Victor began to dig and plant in his large garden. Tiger was pleased to see him so happily occupied. However when Tiger tried to join in and began digging vigorously with his paws, he only succeeded in spraying soil all over the paths. As a result, Victor shouted at him and told him to go away because he was making an awful mess!

"Well," thought Tiger, "if people were going to cast aspersions on his digging skills he would take himself off. He knew when his efforts were not appreciated!" So with a flounce of his tail Tiger stalked off to go and sprawl on the front garden wall.

However Tiger was a very kind hearted cat, and soon his normal humour returned and he began once more to think about Victor and his situation.

Victor was now eating properly and he had an occupation with his garden, but Tiger sensed that Victor was really lonely for human companionship. He scarcely ever saw the friends with whom he had worked at the post office and he had no family. Of course, why human companionship should be superior to that of a cat's companionship Tiger failed to understand, but that was humans for you - no accounting for taste!

Tiger settled himself down into his intense meditative position and furrowed his brows in thought. The cogs of his brain began to whirr as his eyes roamed up and down the street, mentally reviewing the occupants of each house as a possible companion for Victor.

It was then that the door of No. 10 opposite opened and Mrs Appleby came out to clean her windows. Tiger sat up with a jolt. Of course! She was just the person he was looking for!

Tiger knew her name was Mrs Appleby because he had overheard her talking to the milkman. Tiger always maintained close ties with the milkman - after all, he was the man with the cream!

Tiger also knew that Mrs Appleby lived alone and seemed to have few visitors as her son lived in New Zealand. She was a plump little grey-haired lady in her fifties, but had a very pretty rosy cheeked face and a pleasant manner.

Tiger jumped down and ran across the street. Lightly he vaulted her gate and trotted up the path. He plonked himself down on her porch step before the half-opened front door.

"Hallo," she said, smiling. "You're that handsome cat from across the road, aren't you? You look so lovely and bright in this sunshine - just like a golden pot of marmalade."

Tiger purred at this high praise and, taking it as an invitation to enter the house, slipped through the door. Then, before Mrs Appleby could stop

him, he shot off down the hall and headed unerringly for the kitchen, guided by the delicious smell of cooking.

Mrs Appleby hurriedly followed him. "You naughty puss!" she scolded. "I didn't say you could come in, but I suppose you smelt all my baking. I always make far too much for just me." Plates of meat pasties, cheese scones and lamb rolls cooled on the kitchen bench.

Tiger licked his lips and standing up on his back legs, stretched meaningfully up the side of the counter.

"Oh all right," she chuckled. "You can try one of my meat pasties." And she crumbled one onto a dish for him. Tiger wolfed it down, giving the impression that he hadn't eaten for a month, which was quite untrue. This was quickly followed by a cheese scone. His little red tongue cleaned the plate of every last crumb.

"Well now that you've been fed, you must go home," Mrs Appleby said firmly. "You don't live here and I expect your owner will be wondering where you are." She opened the back door waiting for Tiger to run out, but Tiger had other ideas. He turned his back to her and ignored this blatant hint. He stayed exactly where he was.

"Now come along!" she said sternly. But as she tried to pick him up and forcibly eject him, Tiger stubbornly dug his claws into the carpet, clinging on with surprising strength. He refused to budge.

"All right then," she said, "If you won't go home on your own four legs I shall just have to carry you over the road on my two legs!"

Tiger grinned to himself. This was just what he wanted. His little scheme to get Mrs Appleby to meet Victor was working!

On impulse, Mrs Appleby put some of her baking into a basket to take with her. She then picked up Tiger and held him tightly against her as they crossed the road. Tiger was now perfectly willing to go.

When Victor answered the door to Mrs Appleby's knock he was astonished to see the little lady standing there clutching his cat.

"Hallo," she said smiling. "I live just across the road. Your cat came into my house and didn't seem to want to return home so I thought I'd better bring him myself."

Victor laughed. "The naughty boy! I scolded him about something earlier so I expect he thought he'd go and find himself a new owner!"

The two chatted amiably for a little while and then Mrs Appleby offered Victor some of the pasties and scones that she had baked. He was very pleased to accept them.

As the two seemed to be getting along well Tiger felt that his mission had been accomplished, so he lightly leapt out of her arms and trotted off indoors.

The next day, having enjoyed Mrs Appleby's pasties and scones, Victor felt that he should in some way repay her kindness, so he picked some of his new garden peas and took them across to her. Tiger sat on the front wall watching with interest, a smug expression on his face. Things were all going to plan!

As the days passed, Victor and Mary could often be seen criss-crossing the street to each other's houses. Their friendship blossomed at a rapid rate.

Early one evening, as Tiger sat diligently washing behind his ears, Victor came quickly down the stairs. Tiger stared unbelievably. Victor was all dressed up in a new suit of clothes with his hair freshly cut, smelling of after shave.

"Er, Mary and I are going out to dinner tonight, Tiger," he said as he caught sight of the cat goggling at him. "Then we are then going to see a

film, so you be a good boy and go to sleep in your basket." Victor went out the front door and clicked it shut behind him, leaving Tiger alone.

Tiger smiled to himself as he noticed that Victor's friendship with Mrs Appleby was now on a first name basis. He felt very pleased that he had been able to introduce them to each other, and in that way repay Victor for rescuing him from the 'vet's house' and giving him a new home. It was clear to Tiger that Victor was nearly back to his normal self, now that he had a purpose in life and companionship again.

Then Tiger creased his brows with a frown. "But what about me?" he mused. "Don't I need companionship too?"

It was then that he paused in his washing, remembering the pretty little grey Persian cat that had just moved into No. 20 in the same street. "And," he sighed to himself, "she has the loveliest blue eyes!"

Tiger grinned. His mind was made up! And with a final flick of his tongue he fluffed up his coat and let himself out through the cat flap. Then, with a jaunty swish of his tail, he set off down the road at a brisk trot, purring happily to himself.

The End

