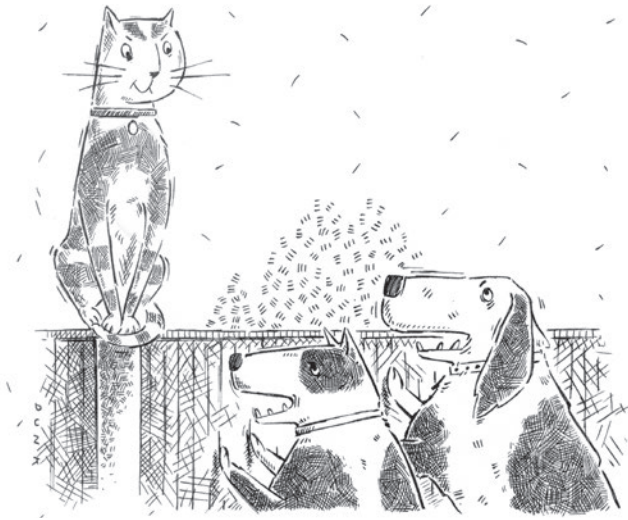


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*in which Tiger and Alexander move to Greenhouse
Place*



When Alexander first let him out of the cat cage, Tiger wanted to catch the first plane back to Adelaide.

‘I know the yard’s a bit small,’ Alexander said, stroking Tiger’s fur, ‘but now we’re in Canberra – the capital of Australia – and things are bound to be different.’

And then he went back inside the house to unpack boxes. Just like that.

With one leap and a scramble, Tiger was up on the splintery fence to get a better view. The grass was high. Tufts of dandelions were poking up. The shrubs provided no elbow room. On the other side of the yard was an old plum tree. Good for climbing, Tiger noted. The fruit had already dropped to the ground where some of it had split open. The bees and ants

were having a good time.

Just then he heard a noise in the next yard. Two big mongrels were snoring under the shade of a wattle tree. Tiger's whiskers twitched with disdain. He couldn't understand why people kept watchdogs when they could have cats to look after them. But people were a bit slow sometimes.

Tiger dug his claws into the fence and edged back down to the ground. All this work had made him feel rather peckish. Where was the cat-door? In Adelaide, it had been on the back verandah. But this house didn't have a verandah. Only a concrete slab for a patio on the side, with steps leading up to a door.

Let's check that out, thought Tiger.

He bounded up to the landing and found only a solid door. Hmm. There was no point looking hungry if Alexander couldn't see him through the door behind the screen.

His tummy began to grumble. He hadn't had a good meal for days, it seemed.

Before they left Adelaide, Alexander had lured him into the cage with Cat Gourmet – his favourite, Salmon Paté. From then on, there'd been nothing but dried food. Dried food was OK for afternoon tea. It had the faint scent of beef, peas and potatoes. But Alexander had tricked him with the bowl and put him behind bars. Alexander needed to be taught a lesson, but there wasn't much Tiger could do except put on his Sad Cat Look and turn up his nose at the dried food.

He kept up the hunger strike until they put his cage in the cargo hold with the luggage. After they shut the door, though, it was dark and lonely. Tiger didn't know what to expect. He missed Alexander. And there wasn't much you could say to a suitcase. Then there was a roar of engines, and suddenly they

were zooming along. Tiger curled up into a little ball and put his head beneath his paws. His whole life flashed in front of his eyes. This was it – game over!

When the world didn't end right then, Tiger discovered he was still hungry. If he had just a *little* food, Alexander might not notice. But one bite led to another, and soon it was all gone.

Alexander probably wouldn't have learned his lesson anyway.

You have plenty of time to think when you're lying awake in the dark, so Tiger thought about Adelaide. He didn't understand why they'd had to move from South Australia, but it had something to do with Alexander being a writer. Humans always thought the grass was greener somewhere else. It was no good telling them that grass was grass no matter where it grew, and, if it was brown, all you had to do was wait until the next rain fixed it.

He should have gone walkabout again when Alexander first brought the packing boxes home from the grocery store. The first time he went walkabout was after Alexander got him 'fixed' at the vet's. He was sore for days. So he took off on a real adventure to teach Alexander a lesson. He walked in the cool of the mornings and the evenings and slept out under the stars – wondering if there were cats on other planets, and if they were as smart as he was. For food, he just waited until dinner time and sniffed the air. It helped being well-groomed when you turned up at a stranger's house looking for scraps. He knew how to make the most of his fine long ginger fur and big cool grey eyes.

When you're good-looking, he told himself, you never get left out in the rain. And there's always full cream milk in your bowl.

Tiger liked being a free spirit, but then he got to

thinking about Alexander and how he would worry. He'd probably called the animal rescue people and taken out full-page ads in the newspaper offering a reward for anyone who found him.

So Tiger went back. Of course, Alexander was pleased to see him. As he strutted in through the front door, Tiger noticed that Alexander's eyes were moist.

'I missed you,' Alexander told him. 'You and I are a team, you know.'

When the time came for them to move from Adelaide, Alexander tried to explain that it was for the best.

'I'm sure I'll get more writing done there,' he said. 'And you'll like it, too.'

We'll see about that, Tiger thought.

Back on the landing, Tiger was getting tired of waiting to be let in. He could have miaowed, but he didn't want the dogs next door to think he was a whiner. Besides, Alexander wouldn't hear him anyway – he was probably too busy unpacking his books somewhere. The only question was *where*? Tiger trotted around to the other side of the house to look. There was a big jacaranda tree next to the carport.

Now we're getting somewhere, he thought.

He scampered up the tree and dropped lightly onto the carport. From there, he had a commanding view. He couldn't see Alexander at first, but it was rather nice up there. The branches of the tree gave a bit of shade, and there were plenty of dead leaves for him to make a little nest with. If he kept still, birds might flit by. They would be scared of him at first, but after a while they'd see that he meant them no harm. Tiger hadn't hunted birds for years. Not even at times like this when he was hungry. The last one he'd eaten had given him worms. As if the worm pills he had to take weren't bad enough, he'd had to put up with

stern words from Alexander.

'We must get on with our fellow creatures,' Alexander had said to him, right in front of the vet. 'The world's having enough problems without us making things worse.'

By 'us', Alexander meant cats. It was true that cats had had a lot of bad press lately. Especially those cats who'd gone bush. It didn't matter that they might have been dumped there when they were kittens and were just trying to get by. Still, Alexander had a point. The birds were just trying to get by too. Besides, as long as he spooned out Cat Gourmet on demand, Tiger didn't need to hunt — there was no need to end up with feathers stuck between his teeth.

Tiger had to admit that life *was* easier when you got on with other living things. With the possible exception of dogs. But even dogs could be all right once you showed them who was boss.

From the front end of the carport, Tiger could see across the road to a big park with lots of gum trees and long grass. It seemed to stretch on and on, and there was no sign of stray dogs. Hmm, thought Tiger. Now that looks promising for a stroll — after dinner, of course.

The front door opened just then and Alexander came out with Tiger's bowl.

'Sorry about that, chum,' he said, as Tiger bounded over. 'Couldn't remember where I'd packed your bowl. It was hidden under the recipe books!'

That scent was unmistakable — Veal Parmesan.

All is forgiven, thought Tiger. Yum!



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