

# Small Miracles

## By Karen Lynch

The first time I saw April, as I would come to call her, she was nothing but a blur darting from the cat feeding station I call “The Hovel” into the blackness of the night.

For the next two months, I would catch a glimpse of her, both in the wee hours of the morning and late at night, edging her way warily to “The Hovel.” She would eat her fill and be on her way. Though I tried to befriend her, she remained an elusive, distrustful visitor, who only wanted a quick meal and no companionship.

April was one of several cats that partake of the food I set out and that is available around the clock.

Of all my feline visitors, Scooter, a brown tabby with white markings, is my favorite. I believe, for Scooter, the best part of a visit to my house, as well as the gourmet meals I serve him, is the companionship he and I share. Scooter patiently waits for me to notice he has arrived before eating. I then join him in my outside sitting area, and while he eats, we converse in a language only we understand. It doesn’t hurt our relationship that I love him. He especially appreciates being groomed with a soft brush.

Scooter has a mission in life. He tries to ensure that all the homeless Mother cats, and their litters, in the neighborhood are guided to my door. He, rightly, believes that thus he is insuring their safety, and is a means of ensuring good homes for them and their kittens.

It was in March, that I began to notice April’s physique had changed. The once sleek body was beginning to show signs of a protrusion in her midsection. I redoubled my efforts to befriend the now pregnant cat, but she was not interested. April continued to take her meals and run. Though, now, her ever expanding belly and her familiarity with my non-threatening presence made her departures less a blur and more a saunter. So when she came and went on the morning of April 24th, I thought nothing of it.

Scooter and the other regulars had also paid their morning visit and departed, leaving me to go about my morning chores. Since a trip to the store was on my list of things to do, I picked up my purse and headed out the door and across my front yard to my pickup truck.

Halfway across the front yard, I caught sight of Scooter coming up the driveway. He was not alone. About three feet behind him, tagging along, was April. It was the first time I had seen her in the daylight and saw that she was not black as I had thought, but black and orange...a tortoiseshell, often referred to as a “tortie” and a pretty one, at that.

I came back to my outside seating area and took a seat. Scooter came right up and did his usual hello rub up against my legs. Then, he sat down in front of me and began to talk. Not in words, of course, but in various meows, which I took as serious cat speak, given that he had April in tow.

April had taken a seat a short distance from us and was observing Scooter’s and my interaction. When Scooter paused for a moment, I assumed that she took that as her cue to approach me, and just as Scooter had done, the previously unapproachable April began rubbing against my legs. I reached down to pet her, and this time, she offered no resistance.

Introductions concluded, April set out to make her purpose known.

My front door is glass from top to bottom. Seated inside the house and peering through the door were three of my biggest house cats, Tuff Tuff, Ch'eng and Mosi Max. April, undaunted by the unfamiliar felines eyeing her up, proceeded to walk to the front door and rub up against it. The cats inside, ever the gentlemen, sat their ground and did not make any attempt to approach the pregnant stranger at their door.

When I did not respond to her performance, she returned to where I sat, rubbed against my legs and returned to the front door, indicating with a very stern meow, that she wanted in.

Now, I know what your thinking, this is a great tale, and I have a vivid imagination, but on my life, I swear all of what I am writing is true...and this is not the half of it.

By this time, Scooter, looking very pleased with himself at having completed another successful mission, had taken a seat off to the side, his demeanor indicating that the ball, or more correctly, the pregnant cat, was now in my court. I got up, walked past April and into the house. I returned to my seat with a cat carrier, which I placed on the ground next to me, its door ajar.

"Okay," I said to April. "You want in. This is how it has to go down. "See all those cats in the door?" I went on. "Well, there are more like them inside. They don't know you from Adam, so you can't just up and walk in the front door. If you want in, the first step is to get in the box."

I know, about now, you're thinking I'm really snorting some serious stuff, if I think this cat, that I couldn't lay hands on previously, is just going to up and march into that carrier. Well, she did just that...without hesitation. She panicked for a moment when I shut the door. But, Scooter was quick to come over and sooth her fears with a gentle meow, and that was that. I thanked Scooter, picked up the carrier, and April moved in to my house.

The cats that reside in my house are all foundlings. On occasion, when they are ill and in need of a little TLC and privacy, I put them in a 3' by 5' dog crate I have set up in a corner of my bedroom as my infirmary. It has a vinyl covered padded floor, a pyramid shaped, soft-sided cat bed with a plump pillow to rest in, food and water dishes and a litter box. It is roomy, comfortable and safe.

I set April in the carrier on the living room floor and covered the carrier with a beach towel. This would allow the inside cats to get a sniff of the new member of the family, but not get too close and scare April. Then, I went about disinfecting the infirmary and trying to figure out how best to turn it into a maternity ward. I decide I would let April decide if it met with her approval.

I brought the carrier upstairs and opened the carrier door just inside the entrance to the crate. April walked right in and set about checking out her new digs. She stopped when she got to the pyramid cat bed and looked at me as if to say, "You don't expect me and my family to fit in that measly thing?"

To make her point, she climbed on it and flattened it to the floor. It was quickly replaced by one of those high-sided, foam dog beds. It fit the width of the crate and offered all the amenities a pregnant cat could hope for in which to give birth.

The next afternoon, we were five kittens richer. However, as is often the case in litters, one kitten did not survive the birth. I could tell it was a female kitten by its tortoiseshell coloring. I removed it from the crate and gave it a proper burial in my front yard garden.

Momma April proudly displayed the remaining four kittens; one black, two tortoiseshells, “torties”, like herself, and one bright orange tabby. All had four white feet and white on their chests.

The new arrivals were a bright spot in what had been a very trying month. My elderly husband, Gray, has been very sick. A week after the kittens were born, he ended up in the hospital, where he remained for a month.

Everything was going great with the kittens. When they were too young to go anywhere, I let April have the run of the bedroom, so she could get some exercise and a little down time from kitty sitting. It was a great experience. By the time that the kittens were almost five weeks old, it appeared that they and their mother were thriving.

A week after Gray returned home from the hospital, his congestive heart failure, which had plagued him on and off for years, took a turn for the worse. We decided he needed to go to the emergency room. It was late in the afternoon, I fed April and all seemed well with her and the kittens. Then, I drove Gray to the emergency room. At 2:30, the next morning, they admitted Gray back into the hospital and I returned home.

Having been gone so long from home, the first thing I checked on was the kittens. Something did not appear right. April was laying half in and half out of the bed. I said something to her, but she didn’t move. Quickly, I opened the crate door and touched her. To my horror, she was dead.

Suddenly, what had been the bright spot in my life turned to an overwhelming sense of sadness. The kittens, huddled around their dead Mother, were wailing, their tiny voices adding to the misery of the situation.

How could this be, I implored the empty room, as there was no one but me to share the anguish I felt. She was perfectly all right when I’d left her, and had never displayed any illness whatsoever the entire time she had been with me.

I put aside my feelings and set about cleaning up the crate. I wrapped April’s body in a towel and placed her in a plastic tub that once held kitty litter and that would protect her from the other cat’s curiosity until I could get her to my veterinarian the next morning. Then, I sat down on the floor; the kittens snuggled in my lap, and cried.

The elusive April must have known she was dying, that’s why she asked to be let in the house. How brave she was to risk the unknown, so that her kittens would have a chance to survive. How trusting of her to know that I would care for them when she was gone. How generous of her to make me such a precious gift, her tiny family. How very sad that such a dear soul is gone.

The kittens, having grown close to me in the five weeks before their Mother’s death, were doing just fine. They had accepted me as their surrogate Mom, and are affectionate, sweet, wonderful, little babes, full of life and joy.

It has been my habit that when one of my feline family members passes on, to have them cremated. When my time to leave this earth comes, I have requested that their ashes be placed in my coffin, so that we will be together for eternity.

Because of April's gallant, unselfish deed, I rechristened her Lady April. And, though she had only been with us for five short weeks, I had her cremated, so she, too, could be with me forever, a most honored member of our family.

The other day, I got a call from my vet to tell me Lady Angel's ashes had been returned.

"Lady Angel?" I asked. I was about to correct the misnomer, when suddenly I was struck by the irony of the mistake. Indeed, she was Lady Angel and this was the Lord's way of telling me her real name, and that she was now safe in his loving care.

Time has passed since Lady Angel left this life. Her surviving four kittens are doing very well. Oreo, the black kitten found a home with a young girl that lives up the street. The two Tortie sisters, I call them the Fairy Slipper Sisters, Angel and Amber, and their ginger tabby brother, the Magic Leprechaun Cat, Finn McCool, remain with me. They are now a little over seven months old.

About a month ago, I was outside in my front yard serving the night meal to my feline friends. Scooter, the cat who brought me Lady Angel, was, as usual, supervising my efforts. Suddenly, Scooter became very alert, his attention drawn to a dark area in the garden.

I turned in the direction he was looking and I saw something move. Out of the high grass sprung a small kitten. The kitten ran off a few feet, stopped, and ran across the street. I followed close behind and called to it. It stopped and faced me. I crouched down, so as not to frighten it, and called to it again. It straightway came back, and right up to me.

I scooped it up in my arms, and held it close. It started purring and rubbing against me. I knew it had to be hungry and had come to eat, so I took it inside the house.

There, I have a permanent set up for just such an occasion. It is a small crate, that contains a bed, a litter box and water and food dishes.

Once inside the house, I was able to get a good look at the kitten. To say I was surprised at what I saw is an understatement. The kitten in my arms was a perfect match for the Fairy Slipper Sisters, the same Tortie color, four white feet and a white bib and tummy. The fact that she had come from the place where I had buried their dead kitten sister only added to the mystery.

I put her in the crate and got her a meal that she promptly ate. Then, I let her rest for the night sleeping safely in her warm bed, and headed back outside to finish feeding Scooter and his friends.

The next morning, I took the new arrival upstairs to where Finn and the Sisters were staying. There was absolutely no difference between the kitten that I held in my arms and the two female kittens, Angel and Amber, who met me at the top of the stairs. They had the same tortoiseshell color, the same amber eyes, the same white markings and were even the same size, an indication that they were probably about the same age. The lone difference between them was that the kitten in my arms had a long, silky coat and a very fluffy tail.

I did not set the new kitten down, as I wanted to have the vet examine her before I exposed the other kittens to her. When I took her to the vet, everybody there was amazed by the similarity. In fact, they thought I had brought back one of the original kittens. She got a clean bill of health, save for some fleas and the fact she had not been neutered. The fleas were easily dealt with, and the neutering put off for another day.

Then, the important decision had to be made. Would she stay and become a member of the family? Finn McCool settled that by becoming totally enamored with the new arrival, fawning shamelessly over her to the exclusion of his two sisters.

The next question was what to name our mystery lady. It was a tradition when I was growing up for the youngest in the family to be called Punkin as a term of endearment. I was called Punkin, and so too, was my daughter, Elizabeth, and more recently, my granddaughter, Amy. So, since she was the newest arrival, I named her Punkin.

Punkin is now a full member of the McCool clan. But, I am sorry to report that Finn is no longer enamored with her. He was all for looking after her when he thought she was a helpless orphan. He soon learned that she was a wildcat in disguise, leaping and pouncing on everyone in turn. After he got his clock cleaned a time or two, Finn decided he best be leaving her alone.

She has since mellowed and fits in perfectly. But, what does one make of the mystery of her sudden appearance from the exact spot where the kitten, which had perished at birth, was buried? From where did she come? How could it be that she is a perfect match in appearance and age for the Fairy Slipper Sisters? Cats are said to have nine lives. Could it be she still has eight left?

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