

My Favorite Stray Cat



Rosie knows not to feed stray cats. Even if they are cute, she isn't supposed to. She can't give them tuna. She can't give them milk. She can't give them even a little cat food. Her mother says, "No!" So when a cat slinks by Rosie's front porch, she waves hello, but that is all. When a cat creeps under her window at night, Rosie says, "Good night, Mr. Kitty," but that is all. When a cat approaches her on the playground at school, she shows him her math homework, but that is all.

Of course there is one exception. His name is Frankie. It's okay to feed Frankie, because he isn't a stray. Nobody knows it, but Frankie is Rosie's cat.

They met on the Fourth of July. Rosie was at the park with her family watching the fireworks. Rosie was bored. Each firework was the same. One was green, and one was red, but they were all just loud noises. As the whole town looked to the sky, Rosie looked at the ground. Frankie was waiting for her.

Like everyone else in town, Frankie was watching the fireworks. A skinny little tabby cat with a tail that went swoosh-swoosh-swoosh, he liked the orange fireworks the best. Rosie whistled—she had just learned to whistle—and the cat came to say hello.

"Hello," said Rosie. "What is your name?"

The cat said nothing. Rosie would have to name him herself. She thought about the Fourth of July. She thought about the founding fathers. She remembered her favorite: Benjamin Franklin.

While her family watched the fireworks, Rosie held out the end of a hotdog bun. Frankie ate it right up. She offered a chip, and Frankie ate that too. Finally, for dessert, she gave the cat half of her hotdog. Frankie meowed to say "thanks," and Rosie knew they would always be pals.

That summer, she fed Frankie every day. He came each day at four o'clock. She would take him whatever she could find—anything her mother wouldn't notice. Frankie was not picky. He ate cheese straws, tater tots, and corners of grilled cheese sandwiches. Once, on a very hot day, she let him eat the end of her Popsicle. As always, he meow-meow-meowed to say thank you. She did not know where he went after he ate, but she knew he would always come back the next day.

Soon, summer was over and school started. Right after breakfast, Rosie walked down to the corner to catch the school bus. She had to watch for Bus #2. The high school kids caught Bus #6 at the same corner, and Rosie did not want to end up at high school!

Each day when she got home from school, Rosie would wait for Frankie to show up at 4:00 and give him whatever food she could find. About two weeks after school started, Frankie did not come to Rosie's house. He did not appear on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.

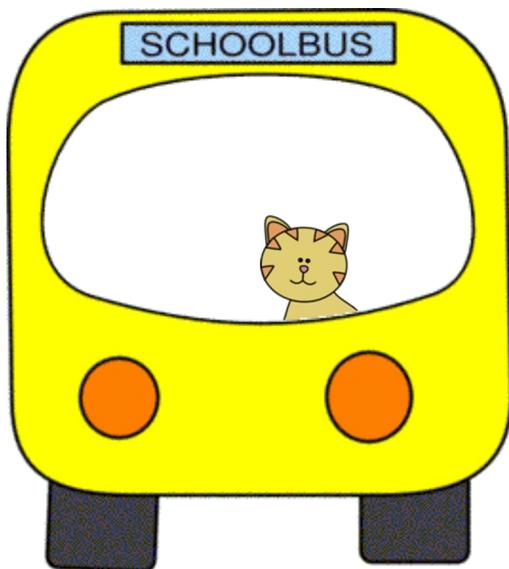
Rosie was scared. It's dangerous being a stray cat. What if something happened to Frankie? Each day of the week, as soon as she got home from school, Rosie stared out the window looking for Frankie. When no cat appeared, she got gloomier. By Friday, she was so gloomy that she couldn't hide it any more.

"What's wrong?" asked Mom. "You look pretty sad for a girl who is going to get pizza on this Friday evening."

Rosie couldn't help it. She told her mother everything: about the fireworks, the meowing, even the Popsicle! She was afraid her mother would be angry, but Mom looked sympathetic. "Well Rosie, let's put some food out for Frankie before we leave to get the pizza."

As they backed out of the garage, Rosie saw Bus #6 pass their house. The high school kids were just getting home. Mom followed the bus down the street and stopped behind it while the kids got out at the corner. Rosie looked up at the bus and couldn't believe her eyes. There was Frankie in the back window looking right at her! She could almost hear him meow.

"Mom, mom look! Frankie's on the bus! I've got to get him." Mom said, "Just a minute, Rosie. The bus is about to leave. Let's follow it to the next bus stop." As soon as the bus stopped down the block Rosie unbuckled her seat belt and ran to the bus door. After the high school kids got out, she hopped up on the step. She heard Frankie say, "Meow." Suddenly she didn't know what to say.



The bus driver said, "Did you want something little girl?" Rosie blurted out, "Sir, there is a cat on the bus that used to come to my house every day. I saw him looking out the back window. Is he your cat?"

The bus driver smiled. "Well, he's not exactly mine but he hopped on the bus on Monday, and he's been riding around with me ever since. The kids have been giving him food because we all think he's a stray. Will your parents let you take him home?"

Rosie was worried. What would her mother say? She ran back to the car and said, "Mom, can we bring Frankie home with us?" Mom smiled and said, "Only if he likes pizza."