

THE CAT'S PANCY



Humans think they rule the animal kingdom, but cats know better. Every now and then, humans need a little help, and Max the Cat meets the challenge when his human Kari gets in deep doo-doo after losing her job. His solution? Kari needs a mate – and fast!

KariAnn Ingles loves her big black kitty Max, who seems to understand her so well, she suspects he can read her mind. Unfortunately, Max the Cat is very protective and runs off every date she brings home. As a result, Max is the *only* man in her life.

Max adores his human Kari. But suddenly she starts spending all day, every day, at home, not bothering to go to work. This seriously cramps his feline lifestyle, and it's time to take matters into his own paws. Kari needs a mate, and Max is on a big-kitty mission to find her the *purrr-fect* man – if there is such a creature!

Daniel Cole Jordensen is settling into his new apartment after a job transfer and breakup with his latest girlfriend. When a black cat shows up at his door and won't leave him alone, he follows him to the apartment of a charmingly unkempt young woman named Kari Ingles. Suddenly Cole's past troubles with women are eclipsed by Miss Ingles and her darned cat!

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~Author Foreword~

I'm an animal lover and enjoy injecting the crazy fun of animals into my stories. *The Cat's Fancy* is a light romance featuring feline exploits and how they affect humans.

While pet ownership can be a big responsibility, sharing the love of an animal has its own unique rewards. Pets can quickly endear themselves and become part of the family.

I support ethical treatment of animals. They may not always be able to speak up for themselves, but they deserve as much respect as humans!

Many of the antics described in my stories are based in part on my own interactions with animals. I'm sure pet owners everywhere will recognize similar traits and behaviors in the animals in their lives.

Animals have their own personalities and ingrained behavior patterns, and sometimes they do such a great job interacting with humans, we think they are telepathic. They may actually be – who can say for sure? It's a known fact they can sense things humans are unaware of, and in my world this ability gives them a near paranormal, magical ability well beyond the typical human.

I hope you enjoy the whimsy of animal-human interaction in this story.

In honor of some of the special animals who've been my friends or in some way touched my life, I dedicate this book to ... *Queenie, Pinky, Snowball, Lassie, Tiger, Fido, Pixie, Frisky, Jacques, Napoleon, Rusty, Daisy, Champ, Popcorn, Roscoe, Ham, Bean, Willie, Shep, Cleo, Chester, Tonka, Sassy, Morgan, Toby, Fluffster, and Shadow.*

Gwynn E. Ambrose

THE
CAT'S
FRANCY



A Cat Para-Abnormal Romance

by

Gwynn E. Ambrose

CHAPTER 1



Max's World

Humans persist in the notion that they are at the top in the animal kingdom, announced Big Buddha Pest, **but we cats know better.**

As I, Max the Cat, sat in the vacant lot claimed as the usual meeting place by our loosely organized social group, I gazed at each of my comrades in the warming light of early morning. They all agreed with the assessment frequently voiced by Big Buddha Pest. His words carried weight with our group – in more ways than one. The portly, long-haired male with large orange spots on well-maintained white fur had repeated this idea often enough that it had gone unchallenged since I first attended the group. And his favorite mantra, stating cats should be ‘large and in charge,’ was aptly demonstrated by his girth. Big Buddha Pest was extremely well-fed.

And I would be remiss if I failed to point out, added Big Buddha Pest, **that cats are far superior in intellect and manners to the other popular human companion choice. By any scale or measure, cats are well above the dog in every way. Dogs serve their masters,** he announced with disdain, **while cats are served by their staff.**

The gray tabby tomcat known as Charlie, perched on a pile of discarded wood to my right, yawned at the worn but still appreciated sentiment. For all cats of any breeding and social standing, it was ingrained in the psyche to deplore the unfortunate lowly dog, who had to grovel for affection, beg for food, and

perform tricks to entertain his human masters. As a matter of instinct and personal pride, no cat would ever knowingly stoop to such demeaning behavior.

Cats rule, dogs drool, chanted the unkempt black and white spotted longhaired neutered male known as Patches. Young and easily distracted, he pounced on a stray scrap of paper that fluttered in the breeze. We all showed appropriate signs of mild amusement, hoping that in time he would mature and curtail his boisterous outbursts.

The spayed calico female named Miss Suzy-Q, lounging in the grass some distance away in our casual circle, finished licking her left paw and deigned to add, **Only by the grace of opposable thumbs do humans rule the world.**

I blinked at her with my yellow eyes, then busied myself licking a spot on my black coat ruffled by the breeze. Finished with my grooming, I looked around. No one else seemed eager to reply to Miss Suzy-Q's comment. Most of us had one or more humans dedicated to serving our wants and needs, and those who did not were polite enough not to complain. Only the snooty Miss Suzy-Q seemed haughty enough to voice that opinion aloud.

I glanced up, noting the summer morning sky becoming lighter and the air warmer. Quickly I decided to bid the group adieu and depart.

As I made my way down the alley toward my human Kari's domicile, I passed through a residential area of moderately sized older homes. The house with the faded green shutters and neglected backyard garden was the lair of an elderly human female who had kept the cat we all know as The Empress imprisoned inside her home for as long as anyone could remember.

I glanced up at the sun rising higher in the sky and chose to spare a moment to check on The Empress to see if she was about the windows of the old house. She usually resigned herself to spending a good part of each day ensconced in the bay window ledge at the front of the house.

I leapt onto the front porch railing covered with flaking, faded green paint. Casually strolling along the top rail, I glanced toward the window with its filmy pale green curtains parted to admit daylight weakened by the shadow cast from the porch.

Today The Empress appeared to be in a somewhat sedate but tolerant mood as she sat regally with her paws tucked under the great expanse of her thick, brown-tipped, buff fur. A Himalayan with the classic dark, flat face, she allowed her blue eyes to follow my movements with casual disinterest. She rarely acknowledged my presence beyond momentary eye contact, and today was no different.

I sat on the railing and gazed at her. She seemed always to be incredibly sad, and I empathized with her reluctance to show any sign of happiness after a lifetime of abuse and confinement.

She was understandably ashamed to display her paws publicly after having been 'declawed.' The removal of her appendages had forever scarred her, both physically and mentally. This I was able to glean from her pervasive aloofness and her reticence to interact with others. I had heard of this sort of thing before, and The Empress was a classic example of the terrible depression that could result from the painful injury and mutilation of having one's claws removed. I winced inwardly at the thought, but quickly recovered.

Hopping down from the railing, I hit the porch floor with barely a sound, and stretched upward on my hind legs to touch my nose to the window glass. The Empress immediately turned her head and looked away.

Unfazed, I departed and proceeded on my way home, thinking perhaps I might be cutting it a bit close to sneak back through the bent window screen and return to my human Kari's living room before she became aware of my absence.

In my infinite wisdom, I soiled the litter box a few times before leaving, to mislead Kari into believing I'd been cooped up in the apartment all night. Otherwise, she'd become suspicious over the lack of activity in the litter box, or fear I was suffering

from some ailment that would prompt her to take me to the dreaded vet's office. Luckily for both of us, I thought things through thoroughly enough to avoid such needless complications.

I amused myself with the irony of this situation as I trotted purposefully through the alley on my way home. I cared deeply for my human Kari, but sometimes she could be thoroughly irritating when she insisted on grabbing me up into her arms and hugging me tightly, showering me with silly nicknames like, 'my little peppercorn,' 'my little cricket,' 'Kitty-Kitty-Man,' or 'Mr. Kitty,' or 'Maxi Cat.' Especially annoying was her cooing reference to my activities in the litter box as 'a visit to Camp Kittypoopoo.'

Growling under my breath, I noted the regularity with which she verbalized the term, and fully expected her to say it again as soon as I returned home to find her scooping out the deposits I left purposely to ease her suspicions about my nightly forays.

The unexpected barking of a large dog startled me. With relief I saw he was confined in a sturdy fence. Another glance at the brightening sky urged me to hasten my trek home. My human Kari would soon depart for the place she called 'work,' leaving the apartment in quietude for my daily nap.

CHAPTER 2



Kari's Dilemma

KariAnn glanced at the clock on her nightstand, then looked around her bedroom, wondering where Max could be hiding. Knowing he'd show up when he was good and ready, she turned back to her laptop sitting on her desk and snickered as she skimmed the email joke, 'The Cat's Diary,' that Raschelle had forwarded to her. She'd seen it before, but the concept of 'day 487 of my captivity' still cracked her up. She could just imagine a cat cleverly trapping the dog in the closet and casually tripping human captors on the stairs. Whoever had authored this joke had certainly been wearing a cat-in-the-hat thinking cap.

But not all cats were devious and twisted. Her lovable Maxi Cat would never plot against her and try to deliberately trip her on the stairs in an attempt to get away from her. Max loved her, and he was way too cool and smart to do anything really mean like that. Okay, so sometimes he wove in and out between her legs, rubbing himself against her. But that was just his way of showing affection. He was her big black kitty-man. Her *only* man.

She sighed and closed her laptop as she shoved up from her desk chair. She needed to hurry and get to work on time. Thanks to Max, she was in hot water with her supervisor. *Really* hot water. Okay, it wasn't exactly Max's fault. Jeff Braswell was a jerk and deserved what happened Saturday night.

She giggled as she headed into her bathroom and turned on the shower, recalling the prelude to the incident, when Jeff had called and asked if he could come over. She thought it was weird

that he'd treat her like crap at work and then think it was perfectly all right to start trying to date her when he was technically her boss. But he denied that it was a date, saying he just wanted to be 'friends,' to make up for his crabbiness at work. He made it all sound so innocent and unrehearsed. How could she not let him come over to share popcorn and watch a movie with her?

She should have known better.

It didn't take him long to ask to use the restroom, insisting he preferred the privacy of the master bathroom in her bedroom. After a few minutes, he called out to her from the bedroom. She was stunned to find he'd taken off his clothes and was waiting for her beside her bed in only his underwear and socks. While she was trying to think of a way to appropriately defuse the situation, Max took care of the problem for her – by strolling over and urinating in Jeff's shoes.

Whatever amorous plans Jeff had in mind immediately went out the window. He wasted no time vacating her apartment and tossing his soiled tennis shoes in the garbage dumpster.

Shaking her head, Kari snickered again as she peeled off her pajamas and stepped into the shower. *Good ol' Max!*

Of course now she'd have to be extra careful around Jeff. He already felt threatened by her because she'd had to train him when he was brought in as her supervisor. She still did the work he was supposed to do, while he spent most of his time surfing on the internet, only now he took credit for everything that got done in the department.

No telling what the sneak would do to get back at her after the little fiasco this weekend. She still didn't have any idea how she'd handle the awkwardness once she saw him at work. Well, maybe there wouldn't be any awkwardness. Maybe Jeff would just continue to treat her like pond scum and ignore her when he wasn't on her case about screwing up something that he'd done wrong himself.

Moments after she'd stepped out of the shower and was still drying off, she heard the phone ring. Ruffling her blonde

locks with her towel, she strolled into the bedroom, wondering who'd be calling this early. As soon as she picked up the phone, she heard the velvety chocolate voice of her best friend and coworker Raschelle rasping, "Kari!"

"Raschelle, what's—"

"Lori said she saw Jeff-the-Jerk and VP Kendall walk into the HR director's office and close the door. My guess is, Jeff's trying to get you fired."

A chill riddled Kari from head to toes, and not because she wasn't wearing any clothes. "What makes you think their meeting has something to do with me?"

"Let me see ... it's before your regular shift work hours. And didn't you call me Saturday night and tell me Jeff came over and tried to get busy with you? Hello!"

Kari huffed. She'd called Chelle after Jeff left Saturday, hoping to get advice about how to handle the situation. All Chelle could do was laugh like a hyena when she told her what Max had done to Jeff's shoes, then holler about how gullible she'd been to let Jeff into her apartment in the first place. Then she reminded her that workplace romances were a bad idea on so many levels, there wasn't sufficient time to list all the reasons.

"You'd better get your white-bread butt to work right now and make like a busy little bee!" Raschelle ordered. "I heard we're getting a new district supervisor to replace Ferber, who was 'asked' to retire, and you don't want to get caught strolling in late with a new sheriff in town."

"I'm not supposed to be there for another—"

"Come in early."

"Yeah, okay, I'll be there as soon as I can."

"I'll try to find out more before you get here. Have your cell phone turned on so I can get hold of you."

"Okay, Chelle. Thanks."

"No prob, girlfriend. Gotta go. I see Jeff coming this way."

The phone went dead, and Kari hung it up, realizing this was the main reason workplace romances were never a good idea.

THE CAT'S PANCY

GWYNN E. AMBROSE

Not that she would ever have considered Jeff-the-Jerk Braswell as a potential romance partner.

Consequences, consequences.

She looked around frantically. “Maxi! Where are you, my little cupcake? Mommy’s gotta go to work early!”

CHAPTER 3



Cole's New Beginning

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad living in Baltimore, Cole decided as he rummaged through the boxes stacked in the corner, looking for his bathroom items. As the morning sunlight peeked in from the balcony, highlighting the beige carpet underfoot, he straightened from the mess he'd made of the boxes and rubbed his stubbly chin. It wouldn't do to show up unshaven his first day as the new district office manager. Not that he was that excited about showing up at all.

Sighing, he looked around the small, drab living room of his new apartment. In the brightening light of day, it seemed smaller and more depressing than it had when he'd arrived late last night. And it would seem even smaller when the rest of the rental furniture arrived.

This is just temporary, he told himself, renewing his search for his toiletries. Until he was settled in with his new job, he didn't want to rush into buying property and moving everything he owned. Things were still up in the air – except where Beth was concerned.

It was definitely over with her. She'd said some pretty nasty things when he'd told her about his transfer. Why couldn't she understand he didn't have control over where the company sent him? If Manning Industries wanted a regional corporate office tightened up, he was their go-to man. He'd evaluate the personnel and thin the herd if necessary. It wasn't like he'd *asked* to be sent to Baltimore.

He located a travel bag containing a razor, shaving cream, toothpaste, toothbrush, and deodorant, then headed for the bathroom.

Maybe it was for the best. The six months he'd spent with Beth had been a roller coaster ride at best ... more downs than ups. Now that he was away from her constant badgering, it was easy to admit she was vain, selfish, emotionally high-strung, and riddled with petty jealousy – too high-maintenance to make her beautiful package worth the cost. He would have found a way to break things off anyway. The job transfer just made it quicker and easier.

Sighing with relief, he patted down his slick face, then shed the tee-shirt and sweats he'd slept in. As he stepped into the shower, he tried not to think what kind of hell he'd be walking into at work. If rumors had started around the water cooler – and he was sure they had – he'd already be branded as the company hatchet man. That would only make the work he had to do more difficult. In an atmosphere of fear and distrust, he wouldn't get any straight answers from anyone. There'd be the finger-pointers who'd say anything about anybody, just to divert attention from themselves and save their own jobs. Of course there were always a few yes-man suck-ups who'd whisper unfounded gossip and skewed factoids to make it seem they were the sole saviors of the company. And the list went on.

He scrubbed his sudsy hair vigorously, trying to make that horrible list in his head go away. Working for a corporation that had grown too big for its britches definitely had its disadvantages. When he'd first started at Manning ten years ago, he'd been fresh out of college and eager to learn the ropes. Back then, the company had been Cooper & Pauley Associates, much smaller, with just one main office. He'd known the owners personally and was on good terms with them. But then they got bought out by Manning Industries.

Manning had expanded into service and software contracts in a time when that industry was in a whirlwind of technological

upheaval. They'd taken over smaller companies and hired too many extra people too fast to keep up with the exponentially increasing demands of the business. But as soon as the economy took a nosedive, they'd had to unload overhead expenses, and the fastest way to do that was cut personnel.

Only by the grace of being a steady producer and keeping his division productive, had Cole hung onto his managerial position. In trying to stay out of the *mêlée* of corporate cutthroat backbiting, he'd managed to get himself shuttled to a position that required him to go in and do 'housecleaning' in other divisions. It was not a position he enjoyed, but to remain employed, he'd had little choice. And trying to salvage what was left and make it work, he sometimes had to make unpopular and unpleasant decisions. That was exhausting and demoralizing. He no longer enjoyed his work.

Maybe it was time to look for a different kind of job, or think more seriously about going into business for himself. If only he'd done that two years ago when the economy was still booming, instead of waiting. Now it seemed he was stuck being Manning Industries' hatchet man.

Cole stepped out of the shower and dried off with a towel he pulled out of a half-unpacked box. He tried not to think of the unpleasant side of things, but right now he couldn't help it.

When his work was done here in Baltimore – the last district office Manning wanted 'streamlined' – what would become of him when there was no longer a need to swing the hatchet?

What, indeed?