

Meow! My Best Friend

By Ellen Kan

Age 11

The school bus pulled away with a dreadful screeching sound from its dull, gray tires and sent out a puff of stinky exhaust that sent me reeling. Once it was gone and I had taken a breath of much-needed fresh air, I glanced around for cars – left, right, and left again – nope! I bounded swiftly across the asphalt road, backpack, lunch box, and jacket swinging. My feet pounded steadily, and I gave a small hop as I landed on the sidewalk.

I walked up my driveway to my house, which was located directly across the street from my stop. I flipped open the little panel on the side of the garage door and punched in the four digit code. I waited for the door to slowly creak open.

But I wasn't watching the door. A slender, white fur ball had launched itself off the curb across the street. It raced across the asphalt, white against black, day against night, a little blur. It ran up to my yard and streaked without hesitation across the grass and into the open garage. I walked in and found it staring up at me with huge eyes. "Meow," it said.

Mia has been my best friend for nearly four years, despite the fact she is, well, a cat. But she isn't just a plain old tabby. Mia is covered with the softest, thickest white fur that feels like strands of silk between my fingers. Patches of the lightest brown and the darkest black are speckled here and there, especially on her forehead. But Mia's tail, as fluffy as a feather duster, is the most gorgeous part of her. It is a golden brown with streaks of black and white running through it. Her coloring makes her a calico cat.

Sadly, though, Mia is not my cat. Her owners are two kids who live in a cul-de-sac around the corner. She has no collar, even though her owners let her wander all over the neighborhood. Her main transportation system is the sewers. A lot of people know Mia extremely well. She is famous in our neighborhood for her exceptional beauty, her confidence near dogs, and her adorable nature.

I can't remember the first time I met Mia very well. I was young, in second grade. One day my family found this little, white cat wandering randomly around in our yard. She wasn't a stray, because she was so carefully cleaned, but we didn't know from where she came or whom she belonged to. But a few days later, I caught sight of some neighborhood kids playing with her and calling her "Mia". That's when our friendship started.

Mia came back every day after that. Before I knew it, my mom had gone to the pet store and bought a whole jar of cat food and a feathered stick. Before, we had fed Mia dried squid and milk, but she seemed to like the cat food better.

I remember Mia's energy. She loved the feather toy. I would hold the stick and shake it a few feet from Mia. Her eyes would rivet to it, and I could see her muscles coil. Her haunches would wiggle, and then she would spring forward and catch it between her little paws and gnaw on it. She also enjoyed harassing my shoelaces, as well as little sock balls tied to strings.

Fall came quickly and went by. Winter crept up and ravaged us with its fierce winds and high-piled snowdrifts. I despaired, wondering if Mia would ever come again. I had no pets of my own, so she was very special to me. Finally, one snowy afternoon, I saw Mia struggling through the snow, up our driveway into the garage for food, warmth, and shelter.

She came every year, even during summer vacation, when my whole family packed up and went abroad for two months, as we always did. Those weeks were horribly lonesome without Mia, and I missed her so much that my heart ached and I cried at night. But somehow, when we got home, Mia would be there, always waiting for that garage door to open.

Time passed. One year, two years went by. I grew up, and went to GT in a different school, but my little kitty never failed to come every day. When I was sad and discouraged, I would stroke her fuzzy head and talk to her. She would lift her pretty head to look at me with her beautiful, green eyes and it seemed like she understood every word.

Mia was a wanderer. At least once a year, she would get lost. I knew when to expect those signs that announced the missing cat everyone was so fond of. The first time she disappeared, everyone was dreadfully worried. All day, I could hear her owners calling, "Mia! Mia!" It nearly broke my heart to have Mia, the closest thing I had to a pet, go missing.

Eventually, they found her. It became a regular thing for Mia to get lost, only to be found no more than ten days later. Still, though, everyone thought Mia's return was a miracle each time. It was often when somebody found her meowing in their garage, or stuck in their tree.

She greeted me at my bus stop often, prowling next to me and purring whenever I stroked her long fur. The bus, the great, yellow monster, never scared her. She would watch me as I boarded, and as the school bus roared by, she would sit at the bottom of a tree, waving her tail at me in a fond goodbye.

One day, the accident came. It was time for spring cleaning, and everyone was outside mowing their lawns, planting seeds, and shearing bushes. Mia was across the street, padding onto the asphalt confidently. She looked left and right – Mia knew how to watch for cars. She began to walk across the street slowly.

I never saw what happened next, but my parents did. A huge van rounded the corner and headed straight forward. The driver saw Mia a little too late – he tried to hit the brakes. The cat saw him alright. She bolted, but not before the car struck her. My mom described Mia as a blur of white, fur all over the place, the tire just hitting her. There was a horrible screech, and then Mia bounded full speed back toward her home, trailing white hairs. I cried my heart out when I heard that.

One month, two months, three months passed. Mia didn't come back. I stared out the window toward her silent house, willing my kitty to come out and play again. She didn't appear, and another week slowly crawled by.

I despaired, slipping into a haze of gloom. I told myself over and over that Mia was not coming back, but I left the garage open a little longer every day...waiting. I stared out the window like a zombie. Had Mia died?

Finally, I spotted a white fur ball cautiously picking its way across the street. My heart nearly jumped out of my chest with joy. Mia was back! She bumped her head against my leg, rubbing herself all around me. I scratched her silky head and ran my fingers along her body. Mia had come back.

Mia still visits me, just not every day. Once a week is good enough for me. Our friendship is still strong, but it's faded to an affectionate bond. Still, my heart leaps like a flame rekindled whenever I see her. Still, Mia is my friend. And who said best friends couldn't be cats?