

LORI PECKHAM, editor



Guide's Greatest Survivor STORIES



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The Gardener's Fortunate Mistake

by W. L. Barclay

Jean Marie," Mother called, "come quickly. Here is a surprise for you."

Jean Marie stopped what she was doing in the backyard and hurried around to the front of the house.

"What is it, Mother?" she exclaimed excitedly. Jean Marie always loved surprises.

"Hurry in the house and see what Aunt Evangeline and Uncle Howard brought for you," Mother urged.

Quickly, Jean Marie opened the door and hurried into the living room. Aunt Evangeline and Uncle Howard sat on the sofa, smiling happily as they saw the eager girl come into the room.

"Hello, Auntie; hello, Uncle," greeted Jean Marie. "I'm so glad you came over." She looked at them to see what it was they had brought, but there was nothing in sight.

Uncle and Auntie smiled at the look of expectancy on Jean Marie's face, which she tried unsuccessfully to hide.

"Come over here and sit by me," said Aunt Evangeline,

making room between herself and Uncle Howard.

Jean Marie snuggled down between them while Mother and Dad seated themselves in chairs. Aunt Evangeline reached down beside the sofa and picked up a small basket. Opening it, she reached in and took out a furry ball and placed it in Jean Marie's hands. "Just a little gift for you from Uncle and me," she said with a smile.

Her eyes large with surprise and pleasure, Jean Marie looked at the little ball of fur in her hands. It was a beautiful Siamese kitten. It looked up at her with the brightest blue eyes and meowed.

"Oh, Aunt Evangeline, how sweet of you!" cried Jean Marie. "It's just what I've always wanted. I love kitties."

She hugged the kitten to her face and thrilled at the soft touch of its fur. Because her new pet had black front paws like a pair of mittens, she named it Mittens.

The months rolled swiftly by, and every day Jean Marie would hurry home from school to play with Mittens. She was a beautiful kitten and more playful than most. She could climb like a monkey and delighted in scrambling up the curtains in the living room and bedrooms. Sometimes she would climb up the screens on the windows and hang on them and cry until someone came and helped her down to safety.

Mittens always seemed to recognize when it was time for Jean Marie to go to bed. Jean Marie liked to give her kitten a goodnight hug, but they made a game of it. When Jean Marie reached down to pick her up, Mittens would roll over out of reach, then bounce up and run under a chair or table. She would wait until Jean Marie was reaching under for her, and when her hand was almost on her, she would run under another chair or table. This would keep

up for some time until the kitten finally allowed herself to be caught and hugged. Jean Marie would then feed her and go to bed. Mittens would lie down on the rug beside her bed like a faithful watchdog.

A year passed quickly, and Mittens became a full-grown cat. But she remained as cute and playful as ever.

One day Jean Marie's family moved to another house on the mission compound. Another family, the McHenrys, moved into the house that Jean Marie and her parents had vacated.

The hot summer months came, and it was time for Jean Marie's family to go to the hills for vacation. What should be done with Mittens while they were gone? Arrangements were made to leave her with one of the other mission families. Orders were given to the gardener to take Mittens to this family after Jean Marie and her parents had left for the hills.

Somehow the gardener misunderstood what he was told. So instead of taking Mittens to the family who had agreed to care for her, he took her to the house where Jean Marie had originally lived. The McHenrys had been promised a cat by someone and concluded that this was the cat. Mittens felt quite at home, for this was where she had been brought up. The family had three small children, and they enjoyed playing with her until bedtime.

The next morning they had a frightening surprise. When the mother got up, she went through the living room on the way to the kitchen and noticed something lying on the floor—something that had not been there when the family retired the night before. Wondering what it was, she stepped over to take a closer look.

She jumped back in horror. It was a cobra, a very

poisonous snake, and it was nearly three feet long!

She called for her husband, and he rushed into the room. Strangely, the cobra did not rise to spread its hood or attack them, so they ventured closer. Then they saw why the snake had not attacked them. The cobra was dead. Its head had been chewed from its body, and Mittens was sitting nearby, purring pleasantly!

The family realized what had happened. Sometime the day before, the cobra had crawled in through an open door and had hidden under a bed or in a closet. During the night, it had crawled out of its hiding place, and Mittens had found it and had attacked and killed it.

Cobras are usually afraid of cats and will run from them if possible, but this one could not get out of the house. Mittens had cleverly enticed it to strike, then, without getting bitten, had pounced on its back, grabbed it by the neck, and killed it. How thankful the family was that the snake had not bitten any of the children as they played on the floor.

Someone knocked at the door. It was the gardener. He had learned that he had made a mistake and that Mittens was to go elsewhere. The McHenrys looked at each other as the gardener took Mittens away. Then they kneeled and thanked God for His watchful care and protection in times of danger and for the fortunate mistake the gardener had made. If Mittens had not been there that night, one or more of the family might have been bitten by this poisonous snake.

And when Jean Marie returned from the hills, she was overjoyed to learn that her Mittens was a hero!