



Missing Erik

The thing about cats is – you don't own them. You might think you do, but you don't. If a cat lives with you, it's because the cat wants to. He might also live with two or three other families at the same time – and you'll never know. It's just the way cats are. They live life on their own terms. Of course, a lot of cat owners know this, but they don't give it any thought. They love their little kitty and feed it and look after it – and the cat, for its part, is happy to go along with this, most of the time...

Erik is one of two cats that live with Square Ness. The other cat is called Ginger - for obvious reasons. Ginger is a slow, easy going cat who spends most of the day snoozing. Erik is the opposite. He is a fidgety, black cat – full of mischief and fun. Always poking his nose, or paw, in where it isn't particularly wanted.

Sometimes he's so full of energy that he'll rush into the living room and shoot up the curtains, pulling himself up with his claws. Other times he'll play pouncing games, crouching on top of the bookcase and leaping down on whoever is passing underneath – giving them an enormous shock. And then there are the times when he'll sit on the desk, while Ness is trying to do her homework, and poke at her pencil every time she tries to write.

“Stop it, Erik!” She’d say.

And he’d look innocently back at her as if to reply: **“Stop what?”**

Then she’d pick up her pencil and the moment its tip touched the paper, he’d poke it again and she’d make a squiggle instead of a letter. **“Stop it Erik!”** she’d laugh.

Yesterday morning, Square Ness was dozily heading down for breakfast, when Erik leapt on her. She nearly JUMPED out of her skin!

“Erik!”

When she sat down in front of a bowl of cornflakes, he climbed onto the table and dipped his paw into the milk.

“Errrrrik!!!”

When she dumped him on the floor, Erik decided to use her leg as a scratching post.

“OWWWW! ERIKKKKK!!!!” Yelled Square Ness, very, very loudly.

For once it was Erik who was startled, very startled. He wasn’t used to being yelled at like that by anyone, especially Ness. He scampered out of the back door, into the garden and over the fence.

“Stay out, pesky cat!” shouted Square Ness.

Later that day, as she was walking past the bookcase, she smiled to herself, waiting for the little figure to pounce on her. This time she was ready for him...

...but there was no Erik.

At tea time, she put out two bowls of food, one for Ginger and one for Erik...

...but there was no Erik.

Later, when she was watching TV, she waited for her crazy cat to climb up the curtains...

...but there was no Erik.

That night, Square Ness couldn’t sleep for worrying about Erik. He’d never disappeared for so long. She knew it was her fault for yelling at him. **“Why is it,”** she asked herself, **“that you don’t realise how special something is until it’s gone?”** This made her feel so sad that she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning Square Ness got up very early to make missing cat posters. Each poster had a picture of Erik and a big headline that said: MISSING ERIK and a request to bring him home.

When she was out putting the posters up, she met Squarehead, who offered to help. They walked up and down street after street, knocking on doors and asking people if they’d seen Erik.

At one square house Ness's heart leapt. The square old lady who lived there smiled at Erik's picture. **"That little rascal stayed here last night. I've often wondered who he belongs to."** But her heart dropped back into her boots when the old lady told her that Erik had already gone. They walked on, without noticing a shadowy little figure watching them from a distance.

They met Hairy Scary. The three of them searched all over Squaretown. A square man who looked at the picture said: **"I know him! He often drops by in the morning for a bite to eat..."**

"Have you seen him today?" Asked Ness hopefully. But the man shook his head.

They tried the park – but Erik wasn't there. They looked by the lake, but Erik wasn't there. They looked in the school, in the flowerbeds near the library, and in the playground – but there was no Erik anywhere. The little shadow continued to follow them – watching them curiously. When they stopped, he stopped. When they peered around, he peered around too. He liked this game – whatever it was.

The sun was hanging low in the sky as evening approached. Ness, Squarehead and the Hairy Scary sat on a little wall underneath a tree. They didn't see the little eyes looking down at them from the branches overhead.

"I'm sure he'll come back." Said Squarehead, not sounding very sure at all.

The three friends parted company and Ness walked sadly home. When she went inside, she couldn't help glancing up at the bookshelf... no Erik. She looked at the desk where she did her homework... no Erik. When it was time for bed, she gave Ginger an extra hug and a kiss and left him sleeping contentedly in his basket...without Erik.

She was so sad, she didn't see the little shadow scooting silently up the stairs behind her.

"Night Ness." Said her mum.

"Night Mum." Sighed Ness as the shadow streaked unseen into her room. And then...

"AAAAAARGH!"

The shadow leapt down from the top of her cupboard, knocking her backwards onto the bed. She lay there, giggling and overjoyed, as a little black cat purred like an engine and gently pawed her tummy as he snuggled up.

"ERIK!"

