

ANIMAL BOY

Chapter 5

Josh was making his way back home as quickly as he could. He didn't understand what was happening: the cats, Ellie's hamster and now Miss Chang's goldfish! He reached up to feel the bump. Although it didn't hurt, and was definitely going down, he couldn't help but question its role in all of this madness.

He was nearly home; only a couple more streets to go. On his way down Keats Road, he felt as if someone were watching him again. Josh looked over to his right. There, to his surprise, was a black cat slowly walking beside him. It was looking up at Josh.

"Hi there," came a voice to his left. Josh turned to look and saw another cat, this one ginger, also walking alongside him.

"Arghh! Not again! Not again!" Josh cried.

"Relax, kid," the ginger cat whispered. "We just want to talk to you." It had what appeared to be a smile on its face. "The boss wants a quick word."

Josh stopped walking and tried to calm himself down. His heart was racing and he was sweating again. "The boss?" he asked.

The ginger cat, to Josh's right, strode out in front of him and sat in the middle of the pavement. "Yeah. The boss," it said, wiping and running its paw over its face for a quick clean. "He wants to see if we can come to some sort of arrangement."

"Arrangement?" Josh asked. "What sort of arrangement?"

Everywhere around him he could see more cats appearing over the walls and fences. There were so many different types. Big ones. Small ones. Clean and well-groomed ones and some that looked as though they hadn't seen a bath in their lives.

"Follow us and all will become clear," said the ginger cat that was sitting in front of Josh.

Unsure of what was happening, Josh allowed himself to be led down an alley. He knew this one. It had a few garages at the end and a collection of bins. It smelt bad and Josh was beginning to regret following the ginger feline. He was near the end when he decided to turn and make a run for it. To his horror, he found that even more cats had joined them. He was trapped.

"What do you want?" Josh cried. "Get away from me!"



They were all slowly closing in on him, their eyes fixed on his. Josh looked over to one of the bins next to the wall. If he could jump on top of it, he may be able to get over the wall and make a break for freedom.

Before he could put his new plan into action, a fat cat jumped on top of the bin Josh was going to use. It was now blocking his escape route.

The cat was a giant, mean-looking, knotted fur ball. It was almost twice the size of most of the other cats in the alley. One of its eyes was bleached white and its other was similar to a tiger's. It had a scruffy collar round its neck with a tag dangling from it. Josh couldn't quite make out the name that was etched onto it.

"And where do you think you're going?" it spat.

Josh pointed to himself. "Who? Me?"

“Yeah, you,” said the fat cat. “So it’s true. You really can understand what we are saying.”

Josh squirmed on the spot. “I guess so,” he replied with a nervous smile.

The fat cat flared its whiskers. “Good. Very good,” it said with a wicked smile on its face.

“Then I guess you won’t mind if you swing by the supermarket and buy us the biggest fish they have.”

“Us?” asked Josh.

As soon as the word had left his mouth, the surrounding cats stepped in a little closer. They looked at Josh, all licking their lips. They had him cornered; he didn’t have much choice.

“I see,” Josh said, loosening his school tie from around his neck a little. “Yes. I’m sure I can do that.”

The tag dangling from the fat cat was shining in the sunlight. Josh could now see the word ‘Fluffy’ written on it.

“Fluffy!” he laughed. “Is that your name?”

The cat hissed at Josh and stepped closer. “Watch out, human. We aren’t all domesticated, you know. Some of us can be real mean if we want to be.”

