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## ISSUES

# I Stole My Landlord's Cat When I Saw He Was Being Neglected and Abused

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NICOLE ORTIZ · NOV 3, 2015

My landlords don't exactly get a pet owner of the year award, and once I saw them taking interest in a local stray, I became concerned.

A few weeks ago, I stole a cat from my landlord, crossing a line into cat-ladydom that I didn't even know existed.

This isn't the first time I've helped out a kitty in need, and it probably won't be the last. Three years ago, I took in a friend of a friend's ten-year-old cat so it wouldn't have to go to a shelter, where older cats are rarely adopted. It was my mission to find it a home, and after months of searching and dealing with its intensity (this was a cat that decided when and how long you pet it), I successfully shifted her into my ex-boyfriend's family home where his mom swiftly fell in love with her.

This year's cat-in-need was a skinny little stray—or what I thought was a stray—that hung around outside my apartment building.

I met this cat like I meet every stray—they run past me, I crouch down and make cooing noises, and I pet them if they let me, all to an audience of cringing strangers. This cat just never left after those first pats.

He was adorably affectionate; whenever I saw him, he would run over to me and weave himself in and out of my legs, purring and meowing his pleas for attention. It was cute until he began doing it as I walked up and down the steps to my apartment where it became terrifying. This cat and his excessive clinginess soon became a staple of my apartment building.

Since I already have a cat that is mildly obsessed with me and not keen on having friends, taking him in wasn't really an option. I also don't have the time or space to acclimate two high-energy kitties, so my goal was ultimately to bring him to a no-kill shelter.

Until I could find an opportunity to bring him, I started intermittently feeding him. This was probably one of my biggest mistakes in the situation, but he refused to leave my apartment building anyway and he was painfully thin.

After a few weeks, I noticed that my landlord's son was leaving food outside for the stray as well. This struck a chord with me and made me hasten my plans for bringing the cat to a shelter.

Although my landlords are nice to me, I dislike them for being serial animal abusers. They leave a dog chained up in the backyard every day despite the rain, snow, or heat (I've anonymously reported this to the police quite a few times, but nothing has changed still). The dog cries incessantly, breaking my heart on an almost daily basis, and there's also a bird *somewhere* that spends its entire life screeching manically probably because it's also being neglected.

If that weren't bad enough, boxes and garbage clutter the first floor and staircase that heads into the basement of our building where they live. They seem to treat their animals like part of their disregarded collection of junk; items that have become more of an inconvenience once their novelty wore off.

Needless to say, when I saw their son feeding the cat, I didn't feel comfortable about it.

One chilly day, I got home from work and saw the cat limping around outside my building, trying to stay dry under an awning. Naturally I made my next classic mistake and let him into the building so he wouldn't die or freeze outside. I fed him and tried to convince myself that he'd stay on the first floor away from my apartment.

For the next two weeks, he sat outside my apartment, meowing whenever he heard someone walk past the door. My cat essentially lost her mind in that period, barely eating and hissing at the door sporadically. I tried to put the cat back outside, but my landlords left the basement gate open and he squeezed himself through to get back in. I began feeding him twice a day because he never left, telling myself he would probably just waste away on my doorstep if I didn't.

In this time, no one else ever interacted with him aside from my roommate accidentally tripping over him as she went downstairs. I eventually texted my landlords to let them know there was a stray cat hanging around outside my door all day and night. I did it with the hopes that they'd close the gate so he would take a hint and leave.

When my landlord texted me back saying it wasn't a stray, it was her son's cat, and she'd take care of it, I had a sinking feeling that I'd made another mistake.

The weekend after I texted them, I left to visit my family. I was pretty sick on my return home and was looking forward to spending the rest of that Sunday afternoon drinking excessive amounts of green tea and watching Disney movies. Instead my plans for bringing this cat to the shelter became rapidly expedited.

At one point, I left my apartment and heard him meowing somewhere in the building. I optimistically hoped that he was inside my landlord's apartment and hating indoor life, but he echoed too much in the stairwell for that to be the case. I feared that he was trapped under a box or some of their other garbage, so I went searching for him.

I peered over the staircase into the basement and noticed a cat carrier tucked among the various boxes that I'd never seen before. As soon as I saw it, I knew he was in there, which was confirmed when I whistled and he meowed in response.

In the three days I'd been gone, he must've just sat in there. He sounded weak, and I could see flies buzzing around the carrier. Once I knew where he was, I couldn't leave him—this cat was essentially a hostage to my landlord's hoarding problem, and I was the only person around who seemed to know.

I spent an hour or two frantically pacing in my apartment, trying to figure out a course of action. I had to take him out of the carrier and bring him to a no-kill shelter, but the idea of stealing this cat seemed so extreme to me. But then again, leaving him felt worse.

Finally, after watching my landlords drive off, I crept down the squeaky basement steps and squeezed myself between boxes to get to him. I heard the television playing from their apartment and tried to think up excuses I could use in case their son came out and saw me there.

The cat carrier was difficult to open, and the smell coming from it was hard to handle. The cat watched me with disinterest, and after tugging on the door for a few minutes I finally pried it open.

I readied myself, expecting him to bolt out toward a chance at freedom, but what actually happened was almost worse. He just stood there in the carrier, exhausted and dejected, his fur crusted in feces and dried urine. I pulled him out and squeezed him to my chest. Normally I avoided holding him in case he had fleas or ticks that I might transfer to my cat, but I felt like I needed to reassure him that he was loved.

Still unsure of my next plan, I bounded upstairs to my apartment where my cat was already hiding, terrified the entire way up that he might make noise and alert someone else to his existence again. I put him in my bathroom with some food and resumed my anxious pacing.

It took me over an hour to find a shelter that even had room to take him. When I went to retrieve him, he was curled into a little ball on my bathroom rug and popped up to rub against me when he saw me return. His trust in humans and desire for affection was unwavering, and yet it was exactly what got him into this situation with my abusive landlords.

I wrapped him in a towel and put him into my cat's cat carrier, which he was understandably hesitant to get into. Then I hopped in a cab and brought him to a no-kill shelter over half an hour from my apartment. I was scared the entire way there that something would go wrong, but the shelter happily accepted the cat and I left with an empty carrier.

The next week was mixed with disbelief that I stole a cat and probably saved its life, and paranoia that my landlords would somehow figure it out and demand their cat back. No one ever mentioned it, though, and I noticed that the cat carrier was shoved back into place among the boxes a few days later.

After a week, I followed up with the shelter. They reassured me that the cat passed their behavioral test and was in their adoption agency awaiting his forever home.

Imagining him frolicking around someone's living room actually brings tears to my eyes; all he wanted was to be someone's pet. I hope he finds a family that can appreciate his aggressive cuteness and restore any of his lost faith in humanity.