



Hitherto, Joe the cat has never been anything better than a happy warrior. Behold him now—a cat of shining virtue

# Monkey's Uncle

BY RICHARD STERN



**E**ILEEN SAMPSON'S phone call began the afternoon's events. Eileen said sweetly, "Darling, I was in town today shopping and I saw something in a store that I thought you simply had to have."

"Sweet of you," Lucas said uncertainly.

"It's really for Joe. A playmate, sort of."

"Lovely," Lucas murmured, frowning. It was just possible, she thought, that this was an overture designed to re-establish peace and amity, to wipe away memories of recriminations made upon a certain night. "So thoughtful," she added.

"Darling," Eileen went on, "I simply couldn't resist, so I bought it and asked them to send it along. I hope you won't think I'm too silly."

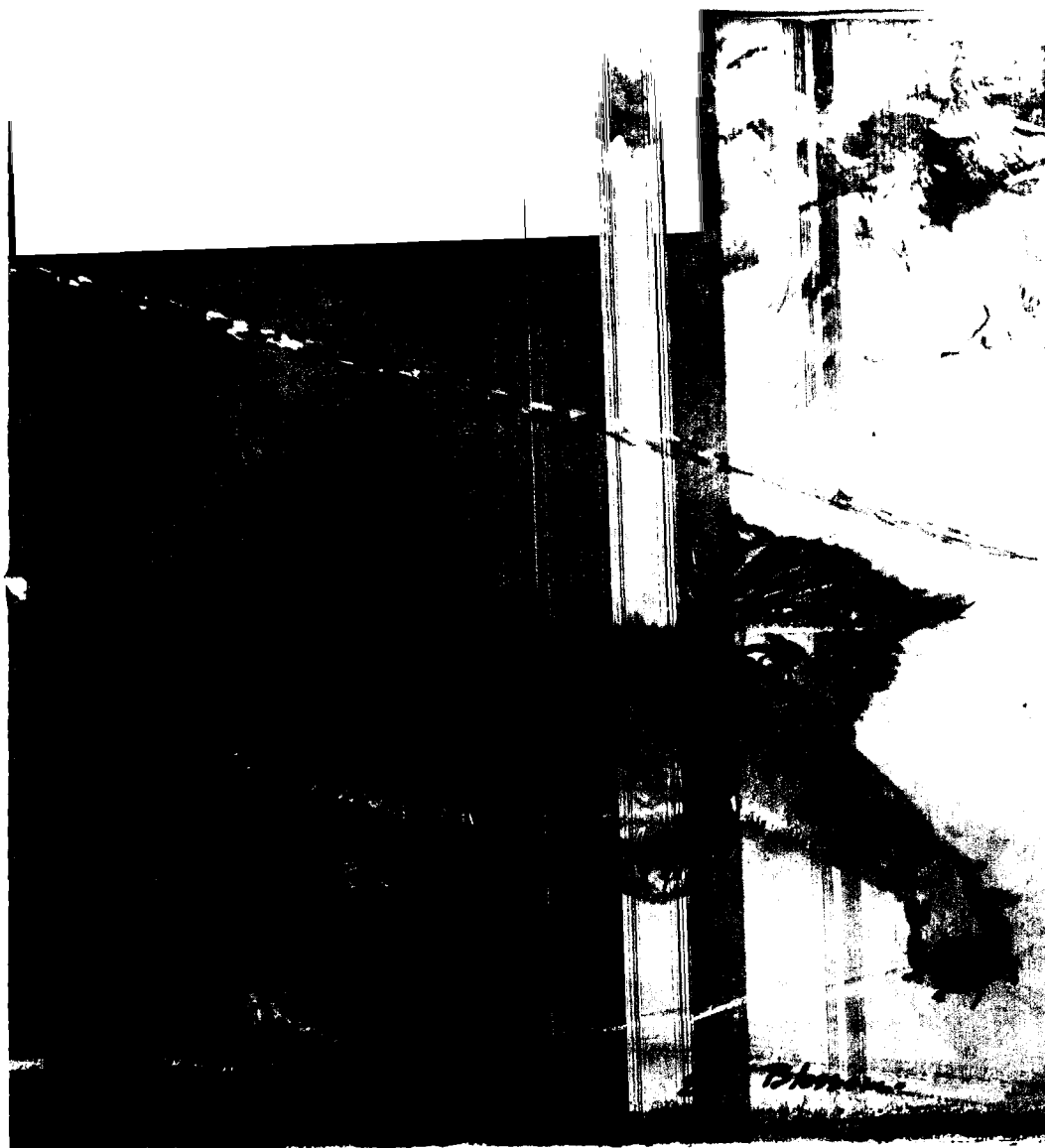
"Not at all. I think it was sweet of you to think of us." Lucas hung up and leaned back in her chair and stared at the ceiling. Those recriminations had been vicious.

She was still wondering about the call when Cook brought in the afternoon's mail. A few bills, an ad for a new cleaning establishment, one letter. The letter was from Aunt Lucy, she of the unpredictable enthusiasms. Lucas read it, thinking of the small severe woman, thinking, too, of the Pekingese—what was his name?—who had been the old lady's current passion. "I have come to realize," said Aunt Lucy, "and I am willing to admit, that I was mistaken about the nobility of Pekingese. I have disposed of Chang Poo."

Of Aunt Lucy's letters Tim had once said, "I think that she gives you hints, like the time, station and wave length. Then she settles down and starts her mental broadcast and you're supposed to be ready to receive. Unfortunately, I'm not wired for proper reception." Neither was Lucas. She put the letter down and leaned back in her chair once more and pondered on Eileen Sampson's curious behavior, and presently she gave that up, too, and went in to dress for the evening. She was in her dressing room when the gift arrived.

Cook answered the doorbell and glared at the

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Suddenly Joe's stub tail rose like a flag and began its ominous twitching. His sore whiskers laid themselves flat against his cheeks. He let the growl begin deep in his furry chest, and advanced into combat

grinning delivery man and signed the receipt without examining the package. She closed the door and peered through the slats of the little crate. Vincent peered back at her. Cook recoiled a full step. She thought of Joe, the cross she already bore, and it passed through her mind that flight is not always ignoble and is sometimes downright smart. But then she reconsidered, and in the end picked up the crate. Holding it at arm's length, she delivered it to the bedroom door.

"This just came," Cook announced. Overtones of disapproval crackled in her voice.

"Just put it on the bed," Lucas said and went on with her dressing. Vincent peered through the slats in his crate, studying the room in silence. Then he settled himself philosophically, stretched out one small arm and began to pull tufts from the bedspread.

IT WAS five o'clock when Tim drove in, slammed the garage door and stalked through the kitchen without a word. Joe, crouched beneath the stove at his evening bowl of warm milk and rum, raised his head and braced himself for an affectionate pull upon his stub tail. It did not come, and Joe turned his head in astonishment. Then he heard the clink of a bottle and glasses and ice and he returned to his warm punch. At the close of day, a man deserved his drink.

Carrying two highballs, Tim marched into the bedroom. He handed one glass to Lucas, ignoring the peculiar set of her face, and then plumped himself down upon the bed and drank long and deep. From the corner of the room, Vincent watched through his bars in silence. Lucas said angrily, "I am going to—"

Tim jerked his hand. "I found out today," he said slowly, "why we didn't get that Eastern Steel account." He raised his head and looked at Lucas. "They're new out here, of course, so they didn't know the agencies. They went to their bank, Western Trust, for information. I don't know who they

talked to, but they got the wrong dope on our dependability, and on the basis of it, they turned our presentation down. They know better now; I talked to them this afternoon, but it's too late. They're already signed with Forbes."

There was silence. Then, "I can guess who they talked to," Lucas said.

Tim grinned at her over the rim of his glass.

Lucas said angrily, "All right, smarty, who's president of Western Trust? The new, imported president? The bulwark of respectability? The man who used to own a dog that tangled with Joe one fine night and came out on the wrong end of the engagement?"

Tim said, "John Sampson wouldn't do that."

"Wouldn't he? Wouldn't—"

"Look," Tim said patiently, "the whole thing was a mistake. Nobody, particularly a next-door neighbor, would stoop to a thing like that."

"You think so," Lucas gestured toward the corner. "Meet Vincent. He came this afternoon. From the Sampsons. Eileen phoned and told me that she was sending a playmate for Joe." Tim followed her hand. He and Vincent eyed each other. "And if you'll stand up," Lucas said, "and look where you're sitting, you can see some of Vincent's handiwork." She watched him rise and examine the circle of detufted bedspread. "Clever little fellow," Lucas added. "When I finally saw him he was pulling them out by the roots, playing she-loves-me-she-loves-me-not."

Vincent entered the discussion, chattering briefly in a high, squeaky voice.

"Articulate," said Tim, "isn't he?" He sat down upon the bed once more and sipped his highball thoughtfully. "A monkey—from the Sampsons with love and good wishes." He looked at Lucas. "What's the idea?"

"What do you think? It's Eileen's subtle way of getting even because our cat whipped her dog. Vincent's a gift, just like the Trojan horse or a bomb sent in the mail."

"And you think that the bum information at John's bank is all part of the same thing?"

"Think it?" Lucas said rather loudly. "I know it. Eileen has hated us ever since that night."

There was silence. Vincent shifted uncomfortably in his small crate. He looked at Lucas and he looked at Tim and then he chattered.

Tim studied him thoughtfully. "He's a cute little fellow," he said at last. "And he's probably tired of being shut up and he's probably hungry." Vincent listened carefully and with obvious approval. Tim got up from the bed. "Let's—"

"If you let him out of that cage," Lucas said, "he's your responsibility. I'm in favor of shouting for the Animal League."

Slowly Tim advanced on the crate. He hunkered down beside it and held out a forefinger for Vincent's inspection. "If you're right about Eileen's motives, sending him away would just make her laugh at you." Vincent studied the forefinger gravely and then made up his mind. He reached out one tiny hand, grasped the finger, and held it tight. He looked into Tim's face and chattered volubly and with considerable appeal.

"I hadn't thought of that," Lucas said.

Tim was grinning at Vincent. "He's friendly. We'll get along fine. Eileen's campaign will bounce right back on her."

"And John's little joke?"

Tim undid the crate with one hand, letting Vincent hold the finger for assurance. "About John," he answered with a certain grimness, "we'll see. That's a different thing altogether."

"Joe," said Lucas, watching the opening of the crate, "is going to take a dim view of Vincent."

"Joe," said Tim, "is basically a gentleman. And his family feeling is strong. And Vincent is now part of the family."

Vincent said nothing.

NOW it is one of life's verities that relatives come in varying degrees of compatibility. Amongst in-laws, this is especially true. Joe took an unenthusiastic, although unalarmed, view of the new member of the McCoy family. His approach the next morning and his investigation were cool. He eyed Vincent's small, peculiarly human face, and he listened noncommittally to Vincent's excited chatter. Then he stretched himself out on the warm cement of the side porch and apparently dismissed the entire matter from his mind. Vincent was here, obviously under the auspices of Tim and Lucas, who kept house for Joe, and under the sufferance of Cook, who was necessary, if annoying. There was no more to be said upon the subject. Joe dozed.

Vincent, moored to a new collar and a long piece of line, sat in a hanging flowerpot, well out of Joe's reach. His fur was carefully cleaned and fluffed to the warm sun. His face, beneath the shining black skullcap that is the mark of the capuchin, was bland and guileless, but his thoughts, like his bright eyes, roamed without pause. And his small fingers picked ceaselessly at the irksome collar, endeavoring to discover the combination. His chattering had ceased. It is not on record how long the decollaring operation took, but the open collar was found, some hours later, resting in the flowerpot. By that time many things had happened.

Vincent, freed, sat quiet for a time, rubbing his neck and laying his plans. His eyes were focused upon Joe, watching for any sign of wakefulness. There was none. Vincent swarmed up the wires which supported the pot and across the porch-roof eaves to the nearest upright. There he disappeared into the heavy ivy, and only a rustling sound and the gentle shaking of leaves marked his progress to the ground. He reappeared, thrusting his head out from the foliage, and rested motionless for a time, studying Joe.

And then, quietly, stealthily, he emerged and crept across the cement on all fours. The last three feet he covered in a soundless rush and as he passed Joe's head he reached out one small arm and grabbed a handful of Joe's whiskers. He did his level best to carry them with him to the next upright.

Joe's awakening roar sent shivers up and down the back of every dog in the neighborhood. He came to his feet in a rush, his stub tail twitching and his eyes narrowed and his great head swinging slowly from side to side as he searched for his tormentor. Vincent paused halfway up the ivy vine. His bright eyes were gay and his entire small body began to shake with (Continued on page 48)

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL BLOSSOM



