

DUPLICATE KITTIES

By Dana Ailer

Our neighborhood is lousy with pets. We have somehow accumulated 3 cats and 2 dogs, and each of our next-door neighbors has a cat and dog each. The second house down the street has 2 cats and 2 dogs; the second house up the street has a dog and an undetermined number of cats.

With all those cats, you're bound to get duplicates. Our short-haired, solid white cat, Miles, was always admired by other cat owners and, I assumed, somewhat rare. Then Muffy moved in next-door. Muffy is a short-haired solid white cat of exactly the same build as Miles. As a matter of fact, it's impossible to tell them apart unless you can see their faces. Muffy is of Persian decent while Miles is of Humane Society heritage.

Soon after Muffy's family moved in, Miles started routinely choosing to go to her house instead of his own at the end of a long day lazing in the sun. I think the appeal is that they only have one dog to deal with, and there is a rumor of canned cat food. Miles lounges strategically on our neighbor's front porch, face turned discretely away, until Mr. or Mrs. Thompson begs him to come inside. (If he just ran in when the door opened, it would be a red flag because Muffy always puts up a fuss about going in.) All is well if Miles and Muffy can both make their way into the house. The problem comes though when Miles manages to finagle his way into the Thompson's house, but Muffy gets left outside. You've never heard such yowling! From Muffy's point of view, I'm sure it's bad enough to get left outside, but when you know it's happened because there's an imposter laying in your spot at the foot of the bed, well that's just too much to take.

Once – only once – Muffy decided, 'Fine. You're in my house? I'm going to *your* house.' Our two rambunctious fifty pound dogs greeted her enthusiastically at the door and she never even made it over the threshold.

Other neighborhood kitties have suffered similar indignities at the hands of us dumb humans. My night owl husband, John, stays up for hours after I go to bed. That means it's his job to let the dogs out one last time and make sure all the cats are in. The one cat who is most likely to still be outside at that hour is Stuart. Stuart has the personality of a bratty little boy. He taunts the neighborhood cats (and dogs) until they chase him, then escapes at the last minute back to his house, sometimes literally hiding behind my legs (I picture him back there, sticking out his tongue,) as I shoo the pursuers away. We know it's just a matter of time before that risky lifestyle costs Stuart a good butt-kicking at the hands of his victims. Which is probably what John was thinking when he found the little grey and white kitty cowering under the bushes by the front porch, too terrified to move – even to get inside to safety. John crawled under the bushes and finally caught Stuart by the scruff, hauling him inside where he still cowered, crouched low on the floor. After he observed Stuart's interaction with our dogs (he hid under a chair, growling,) John gathered him up and hurried him upstairs to me. Apparently, Stuart struggled a lot, but John persevered. Upstairs in our room, he thrust the terrified kitty into my face and woke me by calling out in a shaky voice, "Honey, there's something wrong with Stuart! I almost couldn't get him into the house, and now he's acting all weird with the dogs and he's *growling* at me!"

I'm terribly near-sighted, but the snarling kitty was so close to my face that I could see immediately what the problem was. "That's not Stuart," I told my husband. We never saw that poor little kitty again.