



*Memorial Pet Services*

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## Tabitha Gomez

Tabitha

It was May of 2008 when I moved in with my friend, Karen and her two rescue dogs, Rufus and Gypsy Bell. I had been looking for a place that I could afford on my part-time salary and as luck would have it she had a finished basement that she offered to rent to me. Since childhood I had always cherished having pets and spending time with them, so I decided that I wanted to adopt a cat; a black cat to be specific. Despite the superstitions that society has given to black cats I had an affinity and fascination for them. Now began the arduous task of finding the perfect feline companion.

The first place I thought to look was the local animal shelter. I had been a volunteer there for several years and knew that they always had a plethora of cats just waiting to be adopted. So one sunny Friday afternoon I drove over to the shelter and decided to see if I could find my perfect black cat. When I entered the building I was greeted by a staff member named Sandy, who asked how she could help me. When I told her that I was looking for a black cat she said that I was in luck as they had many up for adoption. Across a crowded, cage filled room there she was. Her name was Tabitha, and it broke my heart to learn that she was picked up on the streets of a neighboring town and had been languishing in a cage there for several months. She had been with a foster family who said that even though she interacted well with humans as well as other cats and dogs, she was extremely shy.

The next step was to meet with her so I could gauge her personality and see if we liked each other. When Sandy brought Tabitha into the tiny adoption room we had an instant connection. She didn't seem shy to me and even sat calmly on my lap and let me pet her. As I scratched her behind her ears and neck she began to purr. I knew immediately that she was the cat for me. I could picture Tabitha sitting on my lap as I watched television and curling up with me every night when I went to bed. With all the affection that she had shown me I found her to be a sweet cat that was just misunderstood. After she was returned to her cage I went to the front desk and put an adoption hold on her. I planned to return to the shelter on Sunday to bring Karen's dogs in to meet and officially adopt her. I couldn't wait.

We arrived at the shelter around noon on Sunday with Karen's dogs in tow. Even though the shelter was extremely busy we managed to find a vacant adoption room in which we took the dogs and sat down. I was so anxious for Tabitha to meet the dogs that I didn't wait for a staff member to get her out of her cage and went to do it

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myself. When I placed her crate on the floor of the adoption room she started to growl. The dogs approached the crate to sniff it and she began to hiss and spit and even lunged at the wire door with her head. When Rufus made the mistake of getting too close she reached up through the wires and scratched him on his snout. As Rufus recoiled in pain, Gypsy Bell cowered in the corner, in terror. I was shocked. She was nothing like this when we met one-on-one. I was concerned that if our pets didn't get along Karen would evict us from her house. Poor Tabitha would not be going home with me.

About a year later I had moved out of Karen's basement and into my own apartment. I was volunteering at a satellite adoption center for the same animal shelter, when one day I noticed a little black kitty that seemed very familiar. It was Tabitha! She must have been moved from the shelter to give her more exposure to prospective adopters. I had an immediate sense of remorse and guilt. My heart felt so heavy that I couldn't stand it. Because of my impatience and ignorance I botched the introduction and that could have cost the life of a sweet and innocent cat. I realized that I mistook her fear for aggression and that she was only trying to protect herself. It was my fault that she got scared, scratched Rufus, and was still at the shelter.

Every shift I volunteered she would be sitting in the same spot. She never socialized with the other cats and didn't budge an inch when someone would come in to interact with the clowder of cats up for adoption. I noticed this, so every time I volunteered I would say to her, "Someday I'm going to take you home with me." One evening I began my shift by cleaning cages when I had the sense that I was being watched. I looked down at my feet and there sat Tabitha. I was stunned. During my time there I never saw her eat or toilet, much less move an inch from that bed to sit on the floor. She didn't make a sound, but just stared up at me with those soulful green eyes. It was as if to say I'm ready for you to take me home now. So I did.

After I got her home I learned just how shy she was. For the first three days she remained in the hall closet and from there she took refuge on a pillow on my bed. Yes, she did move for certain biological functions but I never saw her anywhere else but there. Since all she did was sit on my pillow I didn't get to see her true personality except for when I went to bed. Every night as I was falling asleep I would pet her. As I drifted off to sleep the petting would gradually cease. At first she would lightly start to scratch at my hand to wake me. Then the scratching became more intense until she was digging her claws into my flesh. It was like she was saying to me, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch your hand if you stop scratching my back." Now there's the Tabitha I know and love!

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After about three years of her holing up in my bedroom every day I was sitting on the couch reading when suddenly out pranced Tabitha! I was amazed. It was like she had finally developed enough confidence not to isolate herself anymore. After our first botched attempt at adoption she was put back in my life for a reason. I know that she was meant to be with me. Through all of this I believe that she learned to be more confident and trusting, and I learned that situations are not always what they seem. Where there is love there is patience, and no matter how long it takes love transcends time and space.

