**The Visitor**

There is something wrong with my missus. She watches the adverts on TV and believes in them! How daft is that!

Today she has a visitor who says she wants to meet me, the Wonder Cat. Now my official name is Maximillian the Magnificent but that’s just the missus boasting, as I was the runt of the litter, I’m black from head to toe, and answer to the name of Max.

I wonder why the visitor said she wanted to meet me because she never glances my way. Instead, she strokes the little ginger cat she has in a toy stroller. ‘There, there!’ she says. Stroke, stroke.

The missus is polite. ‘She’s very pretty, and she does have a lovely purr.’

So she does. Well, sort of. It sounds off key to me. Anyway, what self-respecting cat allows itself to be put in a toy buggy and walked around?

The visitor puts her head on one side. ‘Your Maximillian is doing quite well, considering he’s somewhat overweight.’

What? Me? Overweight? Does she think I’m F A T? I give her a force five glare, which she ignores. Apparently she’s some kind of influencer promoting a miracle food for cats, and she wants the missus to try it out on me!

‘Vegan food is perfect for cats and helps to save the planet. From now on Max is only to have this special food and nothing else. You’ll see the most remarkable change in him within a week.’

The missus says, ‘Well, he has been a bit off colour recently. Maybe I should try it.’

I bristle. Have I been off colour lately? Yes, I have. She put my blanket and my squeaky toy in the washing machine and destroyed their scent! I couldn’t go near either for two days, until they’d lost their chemical smell.

The visitor’s going. Good. I did not take to her and her silly cat-in-the-basket. What’s more, it’s time for my tea.

The missus gives me a clean dish with some pasty-looking goo in it. I look up at her. She says, ‘Go on, eat up. It’s good for you!’

Perhaps she thinks I’m fat, too?

To please her, I have a sniff of the stuff, and recoil. It smells of . . stomach contents? Regurgitated milk? I sneeze, to get the stink out of my nostrils.

Where’s my usual tuna? Or my special minced meat? The missus is not a vegan, and neither am I.

‘That’s all you’re getting,’ she says.

No way! I exit via the cat flap. The missus is a kind person with a link or two missing in the brain train. She’s stubborn, too. I know she’ll do her best to get me to eat this stuff, but cats don’t need plant food unless their insides are upset. Cats need meat. Who will win this battle of the butter beans?

I have a good think and a scratch, and slink off to find an alternative source of food. I won’t starve. For a start, five doors down on the other side, their garden shed is infested with mice. Every now and then I catch a few and leave them on their back doorstep, carefully laid head to toe. I enjoy the taste if there’s no tuna on offer but I do find a diet of mice is a little boring.

The first night I found my bowl untouched, just as she’d left it that morning. I ignored it. She said I’d eat it when I got hungry. I was a little hungry, but not enough to eat that Pong! I went up to bed with her and we agreed to sleep on the matter.

The next day she changed the food in the bowl for some more of that stuff. I didn’t bother to go near it. One sniff and that was enough. She got cross with me, so I left to visit the Cinnamon cafe nearby. They like me to visit and to sit in their window. People pass by and take photos of me, all stretched out in the sun, and they do a decent all day breakfast. I managed fine.

That evening the missus was almost in tears when I refused even to look at my bowl. ‘You’ll waste away!’ she cried.

To be truthful, that might have been a good idea, for I could do with losing a little here and there. Not that I’m *fat*, you understand. Perhaps well-padded might be a better description.

She nearly gave in at that point. Her hand hovered over the tin of tuna . . but no, She said she’d give it one more try. I wasn’t sure what she meant by that until after breakfast the next day, she brought in that woman again, the one with the kitty in the basket on wheels, the one who thinks plants are good food for cats. And her cat-in-the-basket was still purring! Drat it!

The visitor said, ‘Your Max is a very naughty boy. He must be taught a lesson. You must lock him up until he’s learned to eat what’s good for him. He has to learn who’s boss around here.’

I know who’s boss and that’s me, Maximillian the Magnificent, Terror of Terriers! I am the boss!

The visitor makes a grab at me, I leap forward to escape and land in the pussy toy walker. The visitor screams, but her kitten doesn’t react at all. Stupid thing! I decide to liberate her from bondage. With her neck in my jaws, I take my prize to the top of the cupboard in the hall.

Something’s wrong. My hackles rise. Then I get it. I growl and gnash with my teeth. I kick and scream, tearing at the horrible ginger fabric which leaves fur in my mouth that I spit out . . . and it goes on purring.

The visitor screams again. The missus calls to me to behave.

But I have uncovered the dreadful truth! This is not a real cat! It’s a pretend cat, a muppet, a mechanical toy with a battery for a heart, incapable of giving love or receiving it. And that woman thinks it’s a *cat*?

She’s no brains at all!

Finally, the thing is dead. The stuffing fills the air and drifts slowly down to the floor.

Then – although it is against my principles normally to touch such a monstrosity – I pick up the body in my jaws, drop down to the floor as lightly as thistledown, lay the carcass at the visitor’s feet and walk away, leaving her in tears.

It takes a while for the missus to get rid of the woman and clean up the mess. Then she ladles a nice portion of tuna onto my newly cleaned bowl, and we settle down to watch the telly together.

I am Maximillian the Magnificent, Punisher of Pretend Pussies, and Terror of Toys, whose figure is perfection and not at all FAT.