

‘Cats Can Make It On Their Own’
by Molly Martin

Shelby's four tiny kittens were born under the old store house out near the big hay barn. The people who lived in the rock people house did not know anything about the kittens. The kitten's mother cat had always lived in the wild. She had never lived with people. Mama Cat had been born out in the pasture down near the pond. She was a feral cat. Her mother cat was a feral cat. That means her mother was not domesticated, she was not mean or ferocious, she was not tame. Mama Cat's father was not feral, he had once been a pet. Mama Cat did not know or like or trust people. The people living in the rock house had never seen Mama Cat. All day she remained hidden. She came out to hunt only at night.

Her mate was a big, grey tabby cat. The people who lived in the rock people house called him Shelby. The people in the rock house did not own Shelby. Shelby was not a pet. And, he was not feral. Shelby had once lived with people. That was long ago.

Shelby and his brothers and sisters were born in town. Their mother and father cats were pets. Shelby, his mother and his littermates lived in the yard behind a pretty brick house. The kittens were safe in the fenced yard with their mother. Each day people came from the house to put food and water into dishes for the cat and her kittens. The people petted and played with the kittens.

One day the people caught the kittens and put them into a big box. The people put the box full of kittens into their car. Shelby and his brothers and sisters were afraid. They did not like the box. They did not like the noisy car. They cried for their mother.

The car stopped. The man opened the door, he took the box out of the car. Then he carried the box to a fence. The man pushed the box under the fence. The kittens heard the car drive away. The kittens could not see anything. The top of the box covered them. They were too afraid to move. For a long time they sat huddled together in the box. The kittens could hear something moving near the box.

The kittens crowded into the corner when the top of the box moved open. They had never seen cows before. The kittens were terrified. Big cows walked all around the kittens. They chomped grass near the box. The kittens hissed and yowled. One by one the kittens climbed out of the box. Shelby and his brothers and sisters looked around. They did not know what to do. Nothing was familiar. They ran to sit by some tall grass.

They kittens called for their mother. They looked for the bush where they slept at night. They could not find the brick house, the fence or their mother. High over head a big hawk saw the kittens. He glided in a big lazy circle. Down the hawk swooped. The hawk flew away with one kitten dangling from his talons. The kitten did not cry, he hung limp, he was already dead.

Shelby and his remaining brothers and sisters were terrified. They ran to hide in the bramble of a wild rose

bush. The apprehensive kittens sat huddled and fearful. Darkness came. The kittens were hungry and cold and afraid. They heard the sound of coyotes. The kittens had never heard a coyote before. They did not know what the animal was. The sound came nearer. The kittens crowded together. They heard the coyotes nearby.

The coyotes took away two of Shelby's sisters. Shelby and his last brother and sister pushed further under the scratchy bramble. More coyotes came. They made a lot of noise. The kittens heard the sound of feet scratching at the dirt under the bramble. They smelled the scent of the coyotes. At last the coyotes went away.

When morning came the three miserable kittens crept out from under the bramble. They saw the box near the fence. The desolate kittens were hungry and tired and they wanted their mother. They ran to look in the box. It was empty. They sat by the box and howled for their mother.

A car passed by on the road beyond the fence. The kittens saw a house in the field beyond the roadway. The three kittens ran to the road. The pickup truck did not slow and it did not stop. Shelby and his sister ran to the other side of the street. Their brother lay dead on the road. Overhead a crow saw the dead kitten. The crow circled down to investigate. Two more hungry crows soon followed.

A big dog ran barking when Shelby and his sister came into the yard near the house. The two frightened kittens ran up a big tree. They sat in the tree a long time. Finally the dog went away. The kittens came down and hurried to hide in the grass out in the pasture. They were very hungry.

For many days Shelby and his sister knew only fear and hunger. Shelby and his sister slowly began to learn to live on their own. At first they ate bugs or pieces of dead rodents the coyotes left behind in the grassy pasture field. The pair wandered here and there. They were no longer the pretty, fat, playful kittens they had been. Now they were thin, their coats were dull, their eyes were frightened.

People yelled, they threw sticks and dogs barked when the kittens wandered into a yard near a house. Cats who lived in those houses hissed and challenged the kittens. The kittens learned to sit out in the tall grass in the grassy pasture where people could not see them. At night they tried to find a place where the coyotes could not find them. Coyotes came every night. They ran all over the pasture yowling and hunting and looking for something to eat.

Sometimes Shelby and his sister saw other cats out in the tall grass pasture. These cats were feral. The feral cats had been born in the wild and had never lived with people. The feral cats had learned to avoid the coyotes. Over time Shelby and his sister did too. The feral cats rarely hissed or challenged the kittens.

The cats often saw people stop and put more kittens out of their cars near the place where Shelby and his brothers and sisters had been left. Now and then older cats were also left in the field near the fence. A few of those animals lived long enough to learn how to live in the pasture. Most did not. The hawks, owls and coyotes carried away many of the kittens in their curved talons. Some of

those cats and kittens were hit by cars and trucks out on the road where Shelby's brother had died.

One day Shelby could not find his sister. He was very lonely. He looked and looked for her. That night Shelby crept under the thorn bramble out in the pasture to wait for morning. He had never been all alone before. He was very sad and Shelby never saw his sister again.

Shelby slept under the thorn bramble for a few more days before he went to sit near the fence by a rock house. This was a house Shelby and his sister has seen before. The young cats never went near the house. Shelby was so lonely without his sister that he took a chance. Shelby and his sister had seen cats living there in the rock people house. The cats did not hiss or challenge.

Shelby and the rock house cats became friends. They often sat together in the yard at dusk. Shelby was careful to not let the people living in the rock house see him. He always ran into the pasture field when the people came to put the pet cats inside the house for the night.

Out by the barn, away from the rock house was a small storehouse. The people put stuff in the building. Shelby liked to sleep under the supply shed. Coyotes could not get him there. After a time he allowed the people to see him. But, he did not allow them to get too close. Shelby came to realize 'Shelby' is what the people called him.

Every night when it was dark and before the coyotes came howling in the pasture; Shelby checked the bowl he found placed on the front porch of the house. He ate the

food he found in the bowl. It was the kind of food Shelby used to eat from the bowl when he lived with his mother cat. He liked the food. Shelby knew the people were putting the food on the porch. He sat under a big tree in front of the house and watched when the people put the food into the bowl. Sometimes he noticed the people standing inside the house; they were watching him. Shelby was not afraid. He liked the food in the dish. He liked sleeping in the safe place under the storage place. Shelby did not trust people.

People fed him, and petted him then they put Shelby and his brothers and sisters in a box and left them in the big grass field. Shelby would never again allow himself to be put into a box. He would never again people close enough to touch him. He would eat the food people put into the dish. He would sleep under the storehouse, but he would never again trust people.

Now it was spring and Shelby sat near the opening leading into the space under the supply shed. Behind him his mate lay with their four plump newborn kittens. Mama Cat would never have chosen this particular place for herself. It was too near to people. She trusted Shelby and this was the place where he felt the most safe. Food and water were near by, the kittens were safe from coyotes, the people did not come poking around.

Shelby was proud of those fat, mewling kittens. He lay in the warm sunshine watching for danger. Shelby saw one of the rock house cats walking in the yard. Shelby screamed as he rushed across the yard. He yowled and hissed and bit.

The door in the rock house opened. Shelby ran back to the storehouse. People came out to the yard and put the cat in the house. For two days Selby fought the rock house cats each time he saw them in the yard. After two days the people kept the cats in the house.

Mama Cat was worried the first time she heard the people coming to the storage building. The people carried things in their hands. One of them began to put food in a pan near the opening under the storehouse. Mama Cat listened to the sound of the food falling into the pan. She heard the voices of the man and the woman as they talked in quiet voices. She moved her body in front of the kittens. Her ears pointed forward to hear.

Shelby lay near the opening leading under the storage shed and watched the people. The people talked to him. Mama Cat heard the sound of water falling into another pan. The people pushed both pans under the storehouse. Shelby watched carefully, he waited until the people went back to sit on the porch before he called to his mate.

Everyday Shelby and Mama Cat ate the food from the pan the people put under the storage building. Mama also did a lot of hunting. She was a much better hunter than was Shelby. Mama Cat had been born in the wild to a wild mother cat. Mama Cat's mother began to teach her kittens to hunt when they were very young.

Shelby was born in town to a pet cat. His mother found her food and water in a dish and she did not hunt very much. She did not teach Shelby and his brothers and sisters much about hunting. After he was abandoned in the

field to live on his own, it was very hard for Shelby to try to learn to be a wild cat all by himself.

After many days the people began to let the house cats walk out in the yard again. Shelby kept his eyes on the house cats. He did not yowl or run to fight as long as the pet cats did not come close to the storehouse where he guarded his kittens.

When the kittens were old enough Mama Cat began to take them out into the tall grass pasture. She began to teach the kittens to hunt for themselves. Shelby went along to the field with Mama and the kittens. He watched for dogs or hawks or other cats.

Shelby guarded his kittens.

At night, when it was dark and the moon was in the sky, Shelby, Mama Cat and the four kittens all came from the place under the storehouse to eat food from the bowl there on the porch. Mama Cat realized the people put the food into the bowl. Nevertheless she never stopped being wary of the people. She had never lived with people and she was not at all sure she could trust them. She did not like or dislike the people, she simply did not know whether or not she could trust people.

One day Mama Cat took the kittens far away to hunt. She did not go with Shelby. He was very upset. Shelby searched everywhere for his family all through the day. That night he sat on the porch and yowled. He did not run when the people came to sit with him on the porch. Shelby sat on one end of the porch. The people sat on the other.

At last the people went into the house. Shelby went out to sleep alone in the supply shed. For three lonely days Shelby wandered the pasture. For three lonely nights he slept alone under or inside the storehouse. Each evening he sat with the people on the porch and ate food from the bowl.

At last Shelby's family came home. Shelby licked his kittens. They all came to eat food from the bowl on the porch. Shelby was happy to see Mama Cat and the kittens. He stood on the porch and yowled until the people came to see that his family had come home. Mama Cat never let her kittens go to the people. Whenever people came near to where she and the kittens were; Mama Cat sent the kittens up a tree or under the storage building.

At last the time came when Mama Cat knew the kittens could live all alone. One morning Mama Cat and Shelby walked away from the storehouse and out into the big grass pasture field. The kittens sat and watched them go. That day the kittens hunted mice in the pasture. In the evening the four young cats came to eat food from the bowl on the porch. Now Tuffy sat guarding while his three sisters ate.

Some nights when they came to the porch the kittens found Shelby eating from the bowl. How happy they were to see him. They ran to Shelby. He purred and licked his kittens. Shelby made a deep throaty noise from deep within his chest. Mama Cat never went back to the storehouse. She never came to eat from the bowl when the kittens were near. Some nights when it was very late the people saw Mama Cat sitting on the porch and eating from the bowl. After a time the people never saw her again. Shelby often came to visit the kittens. He ate and played with them.

Now and then Shelby even slept under the storehouse with the kittens.

One night Tuffy got killed. The people buried him in the yard. The three little sisters sat near the supply shed and watched as the people buried Tuffy. Now the three little girls lived together inside the storehouse. They found mice in the pasture during the day, at night they ate food from the bowl on the porch.

One chilly evening in the fall Shelby found a small, starving kitten wandering alone out in the pasture. She and her brothers and sisters had been put out of a car many days before. Her coat was dull and lifeless. She did not know how to hunt. She was the only one of her family left alive. The kitten was cold and hungry and miserable. She wanted her mother. The kitten followed Shelby to the rock house. He stood by the water pan. The kitten drank and drank. Shelby began to yowl.

The people came to the door. The kitten saw the people. She did not run away. Shelby watched the woman come out to sit on the porch. The kitten purred, she rubbed against the woman. The woman carried the thin, starving kitten into the house. For three nights Shelby came to yowl under the window where the kitten sat on the window sill inside the rock house. Grizzly meowed, but she did not want to go back out to the pasture.

All that winter Shelby came to visit. He looked for food on the porch. He looked for his kittens in the storehouse. Now there were only two. He yowled to Grizzly until she came to sit on the window sill. He ate the food the people

put into the bowl. One night the wind blew and the snow fell fast. Shelby and his two kittens eyed the hut the people put behind the rock house. It stood next to the rock chimney. The snow was very wet and it was very cold. The two little sisters shivered.

At last Shelby ventured into the hut. It was warm and cozy. He saw 2 doors. One was in front, the other in the back. The hut was next to the rock house fireplace. Inside the hut was a thick cushion. Shelby slept in the hut that night with his kittens. The two little girls slept in the hut all winter long. Shelby came now and again.

In the spring a young black Tom Cat came to the hut. He had been put out of a car only a day or two before. He was sleek and fat and sassy. The Young Tom had been born in a house in town. The people in the house where he was born played with him. They talked to him and then one day they put him into the car and took him out to the big grassy pasture.

The young Tom Cat liked people. He never ran away when the people came out of the rock house. He ran to the people and he sat on them. Fluffy and Little Clyde watched the people stroke the young Tom. He purred and purred. The two little sisters did not venture close.

One day the young Tom went across the road after a big brown field rat. He did not see the pickup truck. The pickup did not slow or stop. Fluffy and Little Clyde watched as the people brought him from the road. They watched as the people buried the young Tom near to Tuffy.

It was a hot July day when Fluffy had her five kittens. Almost a week later on another hot day Clyde had seven kittens. The twelve kittens were born inside the storehouse near the place where Fluffy, Clyde and their brother and sister had been born. One of the girls took turns feeding all twelve babies while her sister guarded.

Fluffy and Mama Clyde were proud of those twelve fat babies. Mama Clyde was not worried when the woman came from the rock house to see the kittens. Fluffy did not like it one bit. Fluffy carried those kittens one by one to a hiding place **under** the supply shed. The woman put fresh food and water inside the storage house for the two young mothers. Fluffy ate the food and drank the water. She put the kittens in a secret place inside the storehouse. She did not bring the kittens out of the hiding place.

Clyde was feeding the kittens. It was dark outside the supply shed; Fluffy was hunting in the pasture. Her five plump kittens were now three weeks old. They were a little larger than Mama Clyde's kittens. Their eyes were open and they were beginning to play. Far away Mama Clyde heard the noise of coyotes hunting. The sound came closer. Clyde growled. The kittens hid in a corner. Clyde hurried to watch the opening under the storehouse. Fluffy ran fast. Mama Clyde peeked out. There were many yowling coyotes chasing Fluffy. One coyote ran faster. Clyde saw the coyote attack. She heard the yowls as the coyotes rampaged.

Fluffy managed to break away and crawl through the opening under the building. Mama Clyde ran to touch noses with her. Fluffy was hurt very badly. All night she lay under the storehouse. Morning came. She heard the door to the

rock house open. She saw the woman coming near. She heard the woman talking with a soft voice. Almost Fluffy came out. Almost.

But, she was just too frightened of people. At last the sad woman went back to the rock house.

Fluffy touched noses one last time with Mama Clyde. Then, she dragged herself out into the tall grass pasture. She had to get far from her kittens before the coyotes came back. Fluffy died all alone out in the pasture. Her kittens were safe inside the storehouse with Mama Clyde.

For two days Mama Clyde took care of all twelve kittens. She did not have time to hunt. She was getting very thin. The people came to the supply shed. They found the kittens. Mama Clyde ran to the pasture. She watched as the people took the kittens away in a box. They carried the box full of kittens into the rock house.

The people came back to the storehouse. They made a lot noise. When they were gone Mama Clyde hurried to look for her babies. She could not get in. All the holes leading into the building were covered. She found a pan of food and another with water under the storage house. Clyde ate and ate, she was famished.

The people brought the kittens back to the storehouse. Mama Clyde wanted her babies. She meowed to them. She watched them from the shelf by the window. For two days she slept on the shelf. She brought rats for the kittens. She put the rats under the window. She watched the people go

in and out of the building. She saw them play with the kittens and give them food.

On the third day Mama Cat sat watching from the pasture. The woman found the rats Mama Cat had brought for the kittens earlier that morning. The woman took the rats into the storehouse for the kittens. Mama Clyde saw the woman doing something to the window.

Then, the woman went away. Mama Clyde waited. She could hear her kittens mewling and playing inside the storage shed. She wanted her babies. Mama Clyde had to be sure the woman was not coming back.

After a time Mama Clyde did come back to the building. The kittens saw her standing on the shelf. They ran mewling to stand just under the window. Mama Clyde looked all around. She saw the window was open. In popped Mama Clyde. She was so happy to be with her kittens. She licked and licked and licked their furry little bodies.

She ate some of their food. The kittens pressed against her. For many days Mama Clyde stayed with the kittens. Whenever she heard the people open the door to the rock house Mama Clyde zipped right out through the window. Back she went when she was sure the people had gone back to the rock house. One day two kittens managed to clamor up and make their way out through the window. Before Mama Clyde could hurry to take her babies out to the pasture, the people came from the house.

The people put the kittens back into the storehouse. Mama Clyde was sad to find the window was closed when

she came to check. She could not get in to be with her kittens. Mama Clyde walked all around the supply shed. She noticed a small window high on the back of the building. It was open. The people had stacked firewood under the window. She looked all around to be sure it was not a trap. She did not see the people. Up went Mama Clyde. Into the supply shed she flew.

The kittens were thirteen weeks old before one of them managed to escape through the high window. The people were sad to have to close the window. Now Mama Clyde could not get into the storeroom. The people fixed a nice place just for Mama in the back of the building. There was even a screen door between the front and back so she could see her kittens.

Winter came again. This winter Mama Cat was alone. But, she had a warm bed in the storeroom inside the shed. She sat on a thick cushion under warmth of the light bulb and watched her kittens on the other side of the door. The kittens had a warm bed too. All twelve snuggled under their own light bulb. The kittens mewed to their mama, Mama Cat meowed back. The wind howled. Snow fell. Mama Cat and the kittens were warm and snug.

One night when the snow was falling and the wind howled a huge black and white cat crept to the room where Mama Cat sat on her cushion inside storehouse. He was cold and wet and hungry and miserable. He was not a feral cat. The big black and white cat was a pet. He was a pet cat who had once had a home and people in town. One day those people put him and his brothers and sisters in the car.

Those people put him and the others in the pasture. He was the only one left.

Mama Clyde did not move. She watched as the disconsolate cat crept to the bowl and ate some food. She did not growl. The big black and white cat came to sleep on the cushion with Mama Clyde. Mama Clyde did not like to be alone in the back room of the storage shed.

Today Mama Clyde and Sam hunt together ou in the tall grass pasture. They sleep inside the room in the back of the storage building, or they sleep under it. The twelve kittens live in the big part of the building. Five are white, two are tabby, two are Siamese, two are tortise and one is black. The kittens have a covered play yard. They go in and out to sit in the sun and play. Hawks or owls or coyotes cannot get to them. Mama lays under the store house and watches her kittens, at night she goes into the store room and looks at her kittens through the screen door. Sam never growls at the kittens.

She and Sam eat food from Shelby's dish on the front porch. Sam lays under the storehouse and does not bother the kittens. The people have not seen Shelby for a long long time. They did find a beautiful young, white Tom Cat sitting in the yard one day. Nathan is older than Mama Clyde's kittens, but he is not as old as Mama.

He is another pet cat who was put out of a car out near the road. He is a lucky cat to have found a safe home with people to care for him. Nathan sleeps in the garage at night and eats from his own supper dish. He plays in the yard.

As soon as dusk comes, into the garage and away from the coyotes he goes. Nathan is and was a pet.

Mama Clyde is and was a feral cat. She is not so wary of the people in the rock house, but she is not a pet. She knows the people and she trusts that they will not hurt her. She knows they give her food. She knows she is 'Mama Clyde.' She does not know about being touched by people. Mama Clyde is feral.

The twelve kittens were almost feral. They have been petted and cared for by people from the time they were born. They love their people and like to be held and petted. They are pets.

Sam, and Shelby before him, was a house pet who is becoming feral. His kittens will not be pets. He like Shelby will not let people come close to him. Sam is not afraid. He simply does not trust people because they abandoned him.

The people who live in the rock house hope no more kittens will be brought from town to the pasture. Most of the kittens people bring in their cars and leave by the fence; are eaten by owls and hawks and coyotes. Some are killed by cars on the road. Most of the abandoned cats who do survive live a short worry filled life of not enough food, barking dogs, people who want them to go away, coyotes and owls at night, hawks by day, cars on the road and no shelter. Most no longer trust people.

Mama Clyde, Sam, Nathan and the twelve kittens are lucky cats. They are lucky because they do have a safe home away from the weather. They have good food and

clean water, and they are safe from animals who want to eat them.

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Since the story was written little Mama Clyde has died. She fell from the top of the barn and broke her neck. The people buried her by the storage building near her kittens. Sam has moved to live in the woods across the street. He comes very late at night to eat food from the bowl on the porch.

Two little brothers with beautiful black fur came to live in the store room in the back of the storage shed. One talks a lot and one is quiet. The woman calls them Talky George and Quiet George. The Georges were pets. They were pets who were abandoned in the tall grass pasture. They eat the food on the porch and they like people.

Not long after the Georges came a beautiful fluffy tortise lady cat came. The lady calls her Lulu. Lulu was much more wary of people. She likes to eat the food on the porch. She is an outdoor pet whose mother cat must have been an outdoor pet. Lulu is a good hunter.

She had a litter of babies and the hawks ate them all. She was very wary of the people and would not let them touch her. Today Lulu is living in the storeroom in the back of the shed. Talky George died and is buried in the back yard. Quiet George is under the storage building guarding. Lulu has six fat babies. She cannot get out of the store room. The lady comes many times each day to feed Lulu and pet her and the kittens. Lulu will go to the vet to have a

spay operation to prevent any more kittens. Lulu and her six kittens and George will live here with the people in the rock house. George and Lulu and their kittens are pets.

The people in the rock house hope no more abandoned pets will be left in the big tall grass pasture. They fear there will be more.