

Annabeth



This short story takes place after the events of Under the Stars. It is written from Annabeth's point of view. As always – additional chapters are unedited so expect to find typos and errors!

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“Annabeth. I think there is a cat in the back garden,” Willow states, wandering into the living room.

“A cat?” I put my book down on the sofa and then haul myself up. It’s not an easy task at the moment.

Willow slips her hand into mine and pulls me towards the back door. She puts her fingers to her lips in a gesture for me to be quiet and I bite my lip to stop me from smiling. We’re quiet for a second and then I hear what caught her attention – the little mewling from the back garden.

“See,” Willow says smugly.

“It does sound like a cat,” I admit. I unlock the door and look around for the sound of the mewling. I know she’s right, there is a cat out here, but based on the mewl, it feels like it’s going to be a kitten we find, or at least a small cat.

I step into the garden and then the smallest, thinnest looking cat comes out from between the trees. It's pure black aside from the paws which are white. The cat rubs against my legs and I can't resist crouching down so I can pick it up.

"It's so small," Willow exclaims.

"Maybe we should bring it inside to let it get warm, and a drink and some food," I suggest. Willow hops up and down. "We might need to take it to the vet to see if they have a chip, so we can find their home," I warn. Willow has the tendency to get attached to things. Usually it's teddy bears that she is obsessed with, but recently she became attached to the hamsters that a friend got. Last month, she tried to convince Nathaniel to let her keep the frog she found in the back garden.

This cute, adorable, and tiny kitten is likely going to be top of Willow's attachment list.

"It doesn't have a collar," Willow points out as I carry them indoors.

I kick the back door shut and then shut the kitchen door so the cat can't rush upstairs and hide under the beds. Nathaniel will have a lot to say if he knows I've been on my hands and knees, trying to coax a potentially stray cat from under the beds. The last thing he reminded me this morning was that I was supposed to be resting. Then he'd told me how much he loved me before heading to work. I *have* been taking it easy. Willow is on an inset day from school, and we've been doing some crafts in the living room, but nothing too strenuous. We ate the lunch Nathaniel made for us and left in the fridge, and the day has been nice and relaxed. We planned to watch a Disney film this afternoon, and Nathaniel has insisted he'll make tea when he gets home, but I'm sure Willow and I can make a start on it.

Doors secure, I put the kitten down. It runs towards Willow, rubbing around her legs and crying for attention.

I smile at how excited she looks, but she doesn't make any attempt to stroke the cat or pick them up. I pull two little dishes out of the cupboard. I fill one with water, putting it on the floor. I grab a tin of tuna from the larder, opening it and draining it before putting it into the other dish. I put the tuna down and it's like catnip – the cat running away from Willow and darting to the bowl.

The cat devours the tuna and then laps up the water, then returns to Willow, rubbing around her legs again.

"Shall we take them to the vets so we can see if they have a home?" I ask.

Willow looks at me with her green eyes wide. "We can't keep it?"

"We ought to see if they already have a home. A responsible pet owner would have had them chipped. It's a little thing under their skin the vets can scan, telling them where they live and who their owners are, just in case they get lost," I explain and she nods her understanding, but her eyes are still wide and full of hope. "We wouldn't want to take a cat that belongs to somebody else, would we?"

"If the vets say they don't have an owner, then can they stay with us?" she asks.

"Why don't we go see now? Let me call Lucy, she can probably come over with her pet carrier."

Willow nods and I pull my phone from my pocket, dialling my best friend, Lucy.

"Oh my goodness, it isn't time yet, is it?" she asks as soon as she answers.

"Time for what, Luce?" I tease.

"The arrival of Mr Hottie and Ms My Bestie's baby," she replies, and I chuckle.

“Weeks left yet, you know that. I’ll remind you how annoyed you got with me every time you phoned in the last two months of your pregnancy, thinking you’d gone into labour.”

“Fair point. What can I do for you?”

“Are you free? Could you pop over with your pet carrier? Willow and I found a kitten in the garden. Poor thing looks abandoned. We want to take it to the vets to be checked out,” I explain.

There is a small pause and then chuckle. “I can’t wait to see how Nathaniel looks when you tell him you’ve adopted a cat.”

“We haven’t, I just—”

“No way are you saying no to Willow. I bet she’s staring at you with her big, soulful eyes, right? Don’t answer. I don’t need you to. I’ll be ten minutes. The twins are with my mum, so I’m free as a bird. I’ll drive you to the vets.”

“I can drive myself,” I grumble.

“You’re supposed to be taking it easy,” Lucy reminds me. I want to roll my eyes because she sounds so much like Nathaniel, but I know they both only say it because they love me.

“See you in a min, Luce,” I reply. She hangs up and I put my phone away. I look over at Willow who is now sat on the floor, cuddling the kitten to her chest, and he’s purring away like he’s the very definition of happy.

I make a note to tell Lucy she was right, because if this cat doesn’t have an owner, it looks like we have a new addition to the family.

“How was your day?” Nathaniel asks when I greet him by the front door. He steps inside and pulls me into an embrace, holding me closely like he’s come home from war rather than just a day at the office.

“I missed you.”

“I missed you too, Annabeth. I always do,” he murmurs against me. He kisses my forehead before pulling away and looking at me. “What’s up?” he asks.

I grin. “Who says anything is up?”

“Now I know something is definitely up.” He laughs. He kicks off his shoes.

“Well, okay. Well, we’re going to put up posters, just to check, so I’ve told her not to get too excited but...”

I push the door to the living room open. Willow is curled up on the armchair, the kitten curled up in her lap, purring away as she pets their head. Next to her are two teddy bears, and she’s holding a book, reading to them all. She looks up and beams at us.

“Nathaniel. Look what we found,” she exclaims.

“It looks like you found a lost cat, and you’re looking after them before they go home,” Nathaniel says. He sounds pragmatic, but I can see the little tug of a smile on his face.

“No, he didn’t have a family,” Willow proclaims. “The vet said there was nothing under the skin. He didn’t have a home.”

“He didn’t?” Nathaniel echoes. I hide my face from Willow’s line of sight, and I resist the urge to burst out laughing.

“He can stay with us. Annabeth says it’s okay if you say so too,” Willow announces. There is a little pause and she stares at him. “So... he can stay here?”

“Let me just chat with Annabeth,” Nathaniel replies. He pulls me with him into the kitchen.

“In my defence, we didn’t go *looking* for a cat, it just found us,” I explain. “Lucy drove us to the vets, and we got them checked out. I’ve had them treated for fleas and worms, just in case, and as they have no medical records, we started their jabs.”

Before I can say another word, he pulls me close and kisses me. It’s deep and passionate, filled with all the heat and emotions our kisses always are.

“You’re a good person, Annie, and you’re a good mother,” he proclaims when he pulls away.

My eyes well with tears. It has only been two weeks since we signed the paperwork to officially adopt Willow, to become legally her mother and father, not just her guardians, and whenever Nathaniel says anything like this, it makes me emotional. I love Willow desperately, as much as I love the baby still growing inside me. I can’t wait for them to arrive so that we’ll be a family of four. Four, plus the cat.

“You don’t mind having a cat?”

“You told me once that you’d get her a cat, or a rabbit. In this very room, if I remember correctly,” he reminds me.

“I did say that; didn’t I?” I grin.

“I like a woman who can keep her promises,” he teases.

“Obviously, I love a man who keeps his.” I kiss his cheek. Nathaniel treats his promises like they’re a legal document. I can’t wait for our wedding day, when we’ll promise in front of everybody we know and love to be together forever.

“Come on, we can put her out of her misery. Just... I’ll change the cat’s litter tray, okay? I wouldn’t want you to get sick.”

“I’m pretty sure the risk of getting sick from cleaning the cat litter tray is the same as gardening,” I point out, but he silences me with another kiss.

When he pulls away, he takes my hand and we walk back into the living room together. Willow looks up at us and grins before stroking the cat.

“See, Mittens, I told you he’d say yes,” she proclaims. “You’re going to *love* living with us.”

She sounds so sure and true, and it makes me laugh. She’s not wrong. The cat is going to want for nothing and will love living here. How can it not when I’m sure this family is a little piece of perfection, one I’m so grateful to be part of, one that makes my heart swell with pride and love every single day and will do for the rest of my life.