



## Tom's Transition

Tom's tail had been over-active for the past few days. Usually wrapped casually and lazily around him, he liked its tip to rest on his front paws where he could wash and groom it at leisure. Now the tail lashed regularly with each angry, frustrated thought. It twitched aggressively when tractors and trailers roared round the farmyard, and especially when he watched the antics of the digger pecking up huge mouthfuls of soil and stone like some great unwieldy hen.

Watching it this morning reminded him he had not seen the alpha hen this week, but, of course the lady of the house had been taking the hen's feed out into the paddock behind the small barn. Tom decided to investigate. He crossed the yard from the farmhouse back door. The yard was being resurfaced and the kitchen porch and steps re-constructed. Tom was firmly resistant to change and being totally helpless to take any action against it increased his frustration. He was convinced that his whole world was being turned tail-tip up. He needed to talk to someone. That hen - his most annoying critic - would have to do. It was easy to find her, even without hearing her. Standing tall and aloof she was both prominent and dominant among this brood of chickens. Even the cockerel kept his distance - most of the time!

*Found a new home then!* Tom asked while circling the hen three times in hunting pose. He had the instincts of his ancestors but hen was not impressed. *A temporary one,* she clucked back at him. *Home is where our food is!*

*That's all right for you!* Tom spat back with such a sword-swipe of his tail as to actually cause the hen to retreat a few steps. *You peck in the dirt.* He made it sound dirty! *It's disgusting. My dish of food is put out early - not in its usual place but just near where the steps used to be. Now, if I don't get there and eat it fast before the workmen arrive it gets covered with dust. Then worse still, sometimes it's put too near the dog's kennel where he can reach it.* It had seemed for ever that Tom's dish was placed safely on an old milk-stand close to the farmhouse door. Now it was so undignified to have it put out there on the ground where all and sundry - dogs and birds and hens and the like could help themselves. Tom tried to explain this to the hen. She was not sympathetic. *If you're hungry why not catch a mouse for supper?* Her words ended in a derisive clucking laugh which Tom ignored with obvious disdain.

*Mousing is for common feral cats.*

*Not for lazy cats then?* She had Tom at a disadvantage and was enjoying it. *I don't need a mouse. If I get really hungry I'll walk up the lane to the cottage. Jamie will let me share his dish.*

*Share it?* This time hen dissolved into a paroxysm of chuckles. *Jamie doesn't share! You steal!*

*Well, I've seen you pecking grains from in front of other hens!*

*That's how we feed. **WE** share!*

*So?* was the only response Tom could muster. There was a finality about the hen's last statement which made

Tom realise he was not to be the winner of this round.

The noise of an exploding cement mixer gave Tom his parting shot. *I saw your footprints in the new yard. Pity you didn't get stuck in the wet stone!* Tail erect he walked casually towards the small barn. Hen followed at a safe distance. She could be so irritating. However she could not climb bales. With a few unusually energetic leaps Tom reached the top of the barn. Sleep would provide oblivion even if hen stayed to listen. She missed nothing.

Tom was surprised to see owl, dozing on the beam above him and watching him with one half-open eye. Owl would often spend the afternoon in his favourite oak tree from where he could trace the movements of rodents in the fields. At least, Tom considered, here was someone with whom he could hold a proper conversation even if sometimes owl's words and ideas were a little more erudite than he could understand. Tom hoped the hen was still listening.

*Have you been watching the transition?* asked owl.

Tom's limited vocabulary did not yet include the word *transition*. His was a simple life which only needed simple words. If Tom had been asked to explain he would probably have stated his case as - *When most other creatures know what each other is thinking, why complicate life with more words?*

*Can't see it,* said Tom thinking a transition was some hapless creature the owl had in mind for supper.

*Can't see it!! Why, it's all around you! Transition is change. It's what's happening to the yard. I can fly away to escape it, but you have to live with it.*

*Change! You can see it! You can hear it! You can feel it! You can smell it!*

Owl tried to explain transition. *Transition, his voice was deep and slow, transition means moving from one state of being, or place to another. Trans means to cross over - like moving from one perch to another. Like me. I'm off now to find a new perch - a quieter one in the woods. I sometimes wish people were like me and worked at night instead of disturbing the day.* Tom heard the quietest breath of wings as the owl passed over him and out into the sunshine.

He climbed down. Hen was still there, waiting for him.

*That owl thinks he's so clever with his posh words,* She clucked. Tim restrained himself from saying he thought wise words were better than repetitive clucks.

*Transition indeed,* she persisted. *Why can't he say 'change' if that's what he means. I think a change will be good in our yard. It's getting rid of all those rough stones. We shall be able to see our corn much easier.*

*And leave your footprints all over it!* Tom smirked and gave his tail a wave of triumph.

The hen was not prepared for him to have the last word. *I don't mind change. It's been good to be out in the field - a bit like a holiday. That's what you need Tom. Go away for a while till the work's finished.* At last she moved away believing that if Tom took her at her word she would be spared his presence for while.

The sun was high now. Tom found himself a shady place under the field hedge and thought ... and thought long. The idea of a holiday appealed to him. First thing next morning - first thing that is after forcing down the last dry scraps in his bowl before the workmen arrived - Tom set off across the fields. His journey was not unfamiliar. Most cats take a break at some point during their lifetime. They resort to primal instincts to explore - to hunt - to taste new food - to practice forgotten skills. For Tom it was not exactly like that - leisurely strolling alongside field ditches - frightening sparrows in the hedges - watching voles play but with no savage intention towards them - rolling over to bask in a bundle of hay as sunshine warmed parts of him it rarely glimpsed - tasting new foods - from other cats' dishes - and generally catching up on hours of lost sleep which were not really lost but so easily found and repeated.

Three days he was away ... He arrived home, strolling into the farmyard just after sunrise. A smart look round and Tom saw that all the machines had gone - together with the men who operated them. Sunlight already glistened on new rain-washed concrete. He quickly despatch a bevy of sparrows from near to where his dish should be. The dish was not there, nor the stand where the lady of the house always put it. The dog barked.

Tom drew back but dog did not appear. On investigation he discovered that dog now had a new kennel behind a gate into the yard.

*This is my place,* dog growled defensively when Tom' sniffed the gate.

*You can keep it. I won't be calling in. That gate'll keep you out of my dish.*

But where was the dish? It and the old milk-stand had gone. Tom walked up the new steps, pressing down cross paw after cross paw, until at the top his eyes opened wide to see a new platform opposite the back door and his dish with the remains of yesterday's food on set firm and safe in the centre of it.

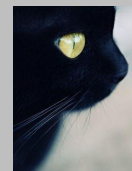
The food was good, though somewhat stale and after a few mouthfuls he experimented with the new seat from where he could see right through the new glass door and into the house. Then, as though at his wish, he saw the lady of the house approaching.

*Hello Tom! Where have you been? On your holidays?  
Do you like your new dining area?*

Tom tucked in to the fresh dish - there was nothing in the fields as tasty as roast chicken and biscuits. Looking round him he observed there was no need to hurry. His food would be safe there all day. Tom's tail reacted differently today. It performed a gentle, rhythmic tap, in time with a most contented purr. He almost emptied the dish and was about to get into the relaxed 'dead to the world' pose - characteristic of all cats - when an all too familiar clucking disturbed him.

*New seat then?* called the hen.

Tom was too relaxed to quarrel. *It's much better than the old one,* he replied. *I've been laying here, thinking.* He did not turn his head, nor did he give hen a chance to cluck. *Owl said what's happened here is a transition. When I asked what that meant, he said it's a change like moving from one perch to another. He was right!* Tom's tail waved in the direction of the old milk-stand. *I've transed my sit on! I used to sit there. Now I sit here! I've had a **trans-sit-on!***



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*Of course, in the human world, people know how good change is...  
how helpful, even inspirational, to change seats and learn to  
appreciate life from another angle or point of view!*