

10. Katzen

A pink nose and whiskers appeared around the doorframe. They twitched as the small tabby cat, Tabitha, sniffed the air hesitantly while surveying the lounge. With nine other cats their home was always a crowded cloud of smells and pheromones. The coast seemed clear so she padded across the tiled floor to the large cat tree by the patio door.

None of them went out, but they had great views of the outside world with all the glass. Curled up as cats curl were Jade, a ragdoll, so blue eyes and a generally friendly disposition, on a lower branch, and above her was Jemma, also a ragdoll, but perhaps half the size. Jemma was much quieter, so when she spoke, it was always thoughtful and worth listening to. Tabitha tensed, rehearsing the jump, as cats do, and then leapt up, landing on Jade. The larger ragdoll was outraged and leapt up herself, exclaiming in a few screeches. Jemma's right eye opened partially, peering, then closed.

Jade miaowed, indignant, '*what are you doing?*', her heart slowing, 'We've all got to talk,' Tabitha whispered, licking her left paw and then cleaning her left ear, acting all innocent. 'What about, *moggy?*', as Jade was a purebred, and Tabitha a lowly rescue mix. Tabitha ignored the insult, she got that all the time, and it meant little to her. Before she could reply, a larger black tuxedo cat ambled in between them, purring and trilling. This was Bubbles, very bright, boisterous, and always ensuring his nose was in the centre of things, especially everyone's food bowls.

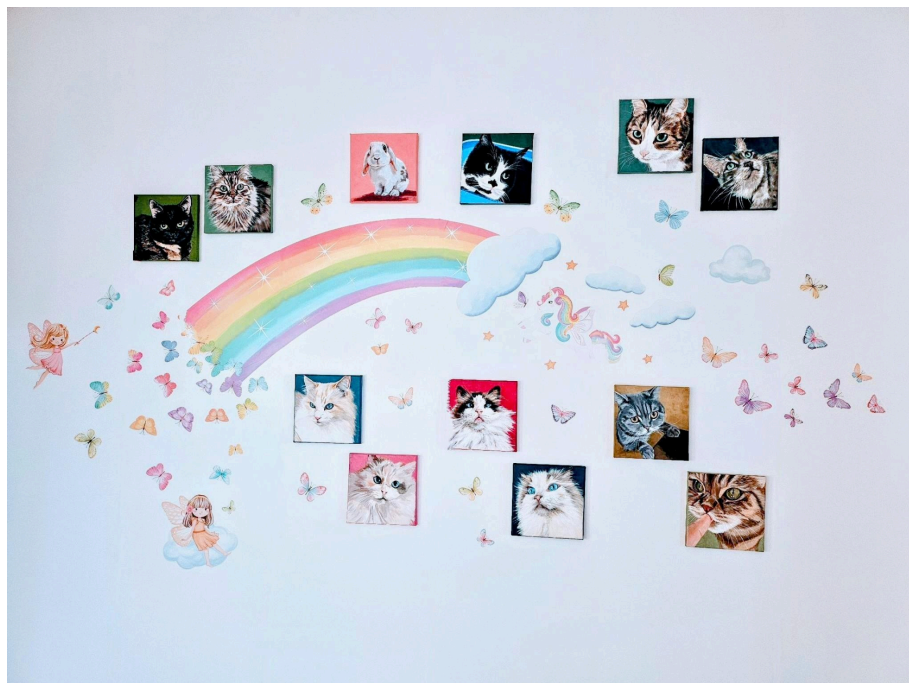
'Afternoon,' he said politely in a fruity miaow, 'what's occurring?', and both Tabitha, Jade, and even a snoozing Jemma arched their eyebrows, as he always asked that! There was no immediate answer as Mr Tickles sidled in, all sleek and blue grey coat, muscles supple like a ballet dancer, and far from Tabitha, his sister, in looks. He just eyed them all. And then before Tabitha could try to speak again, a ragdoll with a brown coat and face and piercing blue eyes bowled in, slipping on the tiles and almost knocking them all down like skittles. 'Hey ho, what's afoot?', he chirped, full of life and mischief.

Tabitha twitched her nose and whiskers resolutely, drew in a breath to make a proclamation. A blue British shorthair, Tom, and his brown furred brother, Jerry, scampered in, involved in a sibling tussle, rolling over and over until they came to rest next to Mr Tickles. He looked less than amused, springing his claws and striking the air twice in quick succession, one for each of them. They had been warned. Tabitha's eyes were wide, exasperated. She looked around her family, left paw scraping the floor.

A large grey and straggly long haired cat, a beautiful chinchilla and persian mix, the oldest of the group, cautiously putting one paw in front of the next, walked very slowly into the group. Padfoot was always quiet, scared of his own shadow, but being old and the first cat of the group, they all showed him deference. 'For crying out loud!!!' Tabitha exploded, losing her patience. Nobody even twitched an ear, they were used to her short fuse. 'I'm trying to tell you something important!', she said via strained miaows. 'What?', was the simple question from an amused voice high above them. Jasper, the last of the four ragdoll contingent, and who looked remarkably like a fox, but one with a snaggle tooth on the right of his mouth, had silently jumped up and was now looking down on them, like a ninja in an ermine fur coat.

Tabitha looked as if she would explode again. Nine tails whipped from side to side in anticipation. 'I think Mummy is upset today, I caught her with tears in her eyes, but she dried them all off with her arm and false fur (that's what cats call human clothes, don't you know?). I rubbed my head on her leg and made a fuss of her foot as it says in the, 'How to take care of the human in your life' manual. 'Oh! Yes, we *all* know *that*, Jemma mentioned it earlier, we each fussed her foot already,' they chorused. 'Dinner soon?', asked Cookie, marching into the kitchen like it was Noah's Ark. Tabitha seethed. Her hair bristling and hackles raised, face screwed up. Her tail whipped rapidly and then stopped suddenly. 'Dinner! Hope it's fish,' she thought as she trotted after her family.

Can you guess who is who?



Our family (courtesy Nessy Hughes)