

ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG AGO...

A.N.D

"Here kitty, kitty, kitty..." Catherine coaxed.

The neighbor's orange tomcat considered her request, then rolled invitingly over in the sun, just inside the six-year old's reach. Catherine patted his tummy and was rewarded with a rough purr that sounded like a prop plane badly in need of a tune up. Encouraged, she gathered the limp feline into her arms and hugged him tightly.

"I like you," she told it frankly. "I like you lots better than I like dogs. Mr. Fergeson's dog barked at me and scared me. You're all soft and cuddly."

The cat purred all the louder and rasped her hear with a tongue. Suddenly, Catherine's mother rapped on the window, startling the cat into scrambling over her shoulder into his own territory.

"Catherine, lunchtime!" the older woman called.

Catherine rand gladly into the house and crawled up into her chair. "Did you have fun with the kitty?" her mother asked as she poured her daughter milk.

"I like the kitty," Catherine announced with great decision. "I like the kitty more than anybody - 'cept you and Daddy, or course. I want to marry a kitty."

Catherine's mother laughed outright. "Do you? What about boys?"

"Boys're dumb. I want a kitty. They purr."

Mother couldn't keep a smile off her face as she gave Catherine her plate. "I think you'll change your mind."

The little girl poked her lip out with childish stubbornness. "Won't. When I grow up, I'm gonna marry a kitty just like that one!"

END