***The Adventures of Max***

**By Veronica Heley**

She calls me Max, which is short for Maximus, meaning the big one. Humans have a very strange sense of humour. I have the heart of a lion but I was the runt of the litter, black from head to toe, with large, ultra-sensitive ears and piercing green eyes.

In short, I am a cat. And a cat who has many adventures.

For instance, the other day I was tracking the scent of a mouse around the garden when the Enemy jumped down from the wall into my territory. He’s ENORMOUS! He’s a great big fluffy ball of ginger and white fur who likes to sit on the lid over the water barrel and imagine he’s King of all he surveys.

The cheek of him! I considered my options. I crouched and growled. He didn’t turn a hair, looked up at the sky.

I hurled myself at him, screaming with rage.

He batted me out of the air and I landed in a flowerbed.

He strolls around the garden – MY garden! – until he reaches the flowerbed and then he pounces, trying to pin me to the ground. I wriggled out from under him and streaked for the cat door into the house. It clattered shut behind me and I knew I was safe. I saw him peering at me through the glass. I was very shaken, but I approached the glass from my side and leered at him. Sucks! So there!

I made it up the stairs and nestled down into the duvet, sobbing a bit.

Life is very hard for the vertically challenged. I gave myself a good wash and brush-up, and told myself it was a tactical retreat, not a rout.

Next day I decided to go visiting. I wasn’t avoiding the Ginger Giant, you understand, but following up some unfinished business. The last time I visited the man who lives next door but one, I smelled a mouse. As I dropped over the fence into his garden, I sensed that I’m right. Definitely mouse. Possibly more than one? Mm. Nose to ground, eyes and ears on red alert, I spotted that the kitchen door was open, and the man was inside, banging a broom around. He’d spotted the mouse, which is skittering around the floor, evading the broom with ease.

Mouse one. Man nil.

I amused myself watching the contest for a few seconds and then, rising into the air with infinite grace, I pounced. Gottcha!

The man shouted, ‘Bravo!’

The mouse didn’t say anything. It’s was probably dead already, but I made sure by tossing it around a couple of times before allowing the man to remove it.

He gave me a reasonable brand of tuna as a reward me for my services.

Next day the weather was fine, and the Missus stayed at home to do some gardening and I indulged her in a little game we like to play. She dipped her can into the water butt and tried to spray me so I raced away and then crept back to ambush her from a nearby bush! She likes that game. I dash away to chase a butterfly and then we do it again.

But uh-oh! The Ginger Giant dropped into the garden as bold as brass, and I froze. He knew where I was, but ignored me to stalk across the lawn and jump up on the water butt. Only . . . the Missus had removed the lid to water the plants and the Enemy dropped straight down into the water, Splash!

The missus didn’t notice, but I jumped up on the trellis to see what would happen next. It appeared the Enemy could swim after a fashion but he was in trouble because he couldn’t climb out!

I waited for the Missus to realise what’s happened, but she was trimming a rose-bush and didn’t notice. I considered letting the enemy drown, but in the end I wound round the Missus’ legs till she noticed me and then I ran to the water butt. Finally the Missus understood. She scooped the Enemy out and dumped him on the lawn.

But what had happened to the Ginger Giant? This was a scrawny, filthy, ragged scarecrow of a cat, coughing and wheezing. He was no bigger than I am once his fur was wet.

The Missus fetched a towel and rubbed Ginger down. He didn’t seem to be any the worse for his experience.

I went right up to him and he opened his eyes and knew me. I said, ‘I

saved your worthless life. Come into my territory again and you’ll regret it. Is that clear?’

He closed his eyes in submission. After a while he cleaned himself up and slunk off home.

I sunned myself on the lawn. It’s a good feeling to be King of your own Castle.

I am Maximilian the Magnificent, Monarch of all I survey . . . and I’m pretty sure there’ll be my favourite brand of tuna fish for tea.