

Meet Mr. Mittens

by [Neil Latimer](#) (March 2021)



You Cannot Tame a Wild Cat (from *Animal Homes*), Brian Wildsmith, 1980

Emma opened the oven door and took in the aroma of fresh-baked apple pie filling her small, tidy kitchen. “My Henry, may he rest in peace, loved apple pie,” she said to the disinterested gray cat curled up on the living room sofa. “We owned a butcher shop, but I always said he should have been a baker for his love of pies.” The well-fed cat, not seeing or smelling anything of feline interest, returned to the

interrupted nap. The old woman went on, not taking the hint. "I remember one time we—"

A car pulled up, followed by the sound of people getting out. "Who can that be?" Hurrying to the front of the house, she paused before the hall mirror to smooth her apron and fix her silver hair, then opened the door just as the bell rang. Two young police officers nodded greeting.

"I am so sorry you had to come," Emma blurted before they could speak. "I meant to take the book in last week but just didn't feel well—a touch of arthritis—but I'll get it now and I think the fine is thirty-five cents. I'll get that, too." She turned to go fetch the tardy library book and the fee.

"No, ma'am, that's not why we're here." The older officer of the two, a woman in her late thirties with short, blonde hair, smiled the way a person smiles at a grandmother or favorite aunt. "I'm Sgt. Banning and," motioning to the slim, dark-haired man beside her, "this is Officer Perino. We don't want to frighten you, but are going house to house to warn people of a series of armed robberies in this neighborhood."

Emma returned the smile. "Oh, don't you worry about us. Mr. Mittens and I can take care of ourselves."

Sergeant Banning saw the cat on the sofa and shook her head. "Please, don't take any chances, don't let anyone in that you don't know. The man doing this preys on older people, is young, white, with a muscular build. He gains entry through some ruse—stalled car, safety inspector or some such—then pulls a knife and takes what he wants. He's very dangerous."

"Well, we've had robberies in this neighborhood before. Mr. Mittens and I know what to do."

A few days later, Emma recalled the police warning

when the doorbell rang. She peeked through window blinds to see a well-muscled, nice looking young man standing on the porch. "He looks just like Henry when he was a strapper and came courting." She brushed away a forming tear and opened the door.

"Ma'am, I'm out earning some extra money for college and wonder if you have a few handyman jobs around the house." His practiced line was convincing.

"Why, yes, there is something you can do for us. Please, come in."

Once inside, one swift motion had the knife out of his pocket and close to her face, the long, slender blade open with a click. "Your valuables, old woman, and you won't get hurt." His snarl turned to a laugh as the cat bolted from the sofa in a gray blur and shot for the bedroom. "Oops. Not much of a fight in that one."

"I don't have anything that—"

"Of course you do, granny." The snarl in his voice was back. "All of you old people do. Silverware, old jewelry that's really popular these days, coin collections, money stashed away for some precious snotbag grandkid's education. I could find it, all of it, but don't want to have to rip the place apart looking for it. You can make it easy on both of us by just telling me where it is."

Emma said nothing but couldn't hold back the briefest of glances toward a closed door.

A predator is alert to small tells. "Well, well. Let's go see what's behind that door."

The door creaked as she opened it wide. "This is just where I keep Mr. Mittens' food bowl. There's an old, empty cabinet. A food freezer. Nothing, really."

He shoved her in and followed. "Stand over there," he commanded, pointing to the nearest corner, "and don't move."

He strode past her to the large, chest-style freezer. "People stash things in these thinking nobody will look. Are you that stupid?"

She was too frail to be considered a threat. He put the knife on the floor, freeing both hands to push the heavy lid up. Empty, except for a couple of frozen meat packages on the bottom. "That's a point for you." Taking a few steps to the cabinet, he opened the top doors only to find nothing at all on the shelves. "You're starting to make me angry, old woman. You don't want to do that."

He bent down to reach for the lower doors, noticed the large food bowl with 'Mr. Mittens' stenciled on it. "That's an enormous food bowl for that cowardly cat of yours." He stared at the bowl, then frowned at what was in it—a large bone, gnawed with deep furrows. "How could a cat . . ."

"Oh, that's not the cat's bowl," Emma said from behind him still where he told her to stand. "Goodness, no. The cat's name is 'Fifty Shades'. That bowl belongs to Mr. Mittens here."

The small hairs on the back of the man's neck stood on end when he heard the long growl, rumbling like distant thunder. He turned bit by bit to see the old woman with a hand on her mastiff's collar.

Mr. Mittens, trembling with eagerness, had lips drawn back to unsheathe long rows of glistening white teeth perfect for ripping and shredding.

Before the man could reach the knife, she let go of the collar. "Mr. Mittens: Kill."

The man's scream never reached his throat; the mastiff got there first.

As the pool of blood spread across the floor, Emma's smile was tender, almost sorrowful. "I told you there was something you could do for us. You saw that our freezer is almost empty. We've just about finished off the last man who came to rob." The smile gave way to an appraiser's scrutiny. "You have a lot of meat on you. After I package you up, Mr. Mittens, Fifty Shades, and I will have enough for weeks."

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Neil Latimer retired from writing engineering manuals and decided to write fiction for a change of pace. How difficult can it be, right? No equations! He soon learned that good, attention-getting fiction does not come easily and developed a deep admiration of those who can do it.

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