

The Kit and the Colors,

by Pflarrian Collifox

For a time, the house had been silent. Early morning rose, the heat of the fall day slowly building throughout the morning as the sun rose high overhead. Then, shortly after noon, like a hammer striking a sheet of glass, the silence was shattered.

“Uncle Fuzzy!”

The voice belonged to a young kit, perhaps eight years old. The young feline shot from her mother’s arms to wrap her own about the legs of the seemingly ancient canine standing in the doorway. The bright yellow of her t-shirt blended well with the orange of her fur, the tiny stripes of darker fur the only thing that made it easy to determine where her fur stopped and the shirt started.

The canine cast the kit’s mother an amused look. “Uncle Fuzzy?”

The mother stifled a laugh. “Sorry about that...”

He cut her off with a bark of laughter. “Pfft, don’t be. Rather amusing, that, and I am kind of on the fuzzy side, aren’t I?” He reached a paw down to tousle the kit’s hair as the mother passed him a sheet of paper.

“Here are the contact numbers if something comes up, but you’ve probably got three or four copies of this around here somewhere already,” she said softly.

“Most likely,” Uncle Fuzzy replied as he took the note, “but it never hurts to be careful. Don’t worry, Vikky, I’ll not let anything happen to Rillian while the two of you celebrate.” He glanced down at the backpack the kit had dropped on the front porch. “I’ll do what I can to make sure she does her homework, too,” he added with a wink.

The mother smiled at him before turning to leave. Rillian ignored it all, her arms blissfully locked about the knees of her godfather. “Uncle Fuzzy, Uncle Fuzzy!”

“What is it, Rilli?”

Only now did Rillian let go of his knees and take a step back. She waited until Uncle Fuzzy took a seat, tailor-fashion, on the floor in front of her, before continuing. “We went to the zoo today, Uncle Fuzzy!”

“Did you now?”

“Yah, for school! They had a new, um, wing?” at his nod, she continued. “Wing opened up today, so the teacher took us to see it! All sorts of bugs and stuff!”

He smiled at her, happily listening to her chatter as it washed away the lonely feelings that usually surrounded him. “That’s nice. Did you see anything interesting?”

“Butterflies!”

He blinked. “Butterflies?”

“Yus! All sorts of them, and in lots and lots of pretty colors!”

“Really now?”

“Yus, and mommy bought me a coloring book with them!” The kit grabbed her backpack and tried to open it, but the zipper seemed disinclined to let her inside.

“Here, Rilli, let me open it.” He reached over and gently took the backpack from her, carefully unzipping it before handing it back to her. Once it was open, she reached inside and pulled out a thin book and a box of colored pencils and showed them to him. “Very nice, Rilli. Do you want to go color then?”

“Yes, please,” she replied.

“Let’s go out back to the porch then, Rilli. The light’s better there, and I left my book sitting on the table,” he said with a smile, picking up her discarded backpack for her before leading the way.

Rillian took a seat in one of the worn chairs and set her coloring book and pencils up on the table and began to color. As she did this, Uncle Fuzzy set her backpack down on another one of the chairs and stepped back through the door into the kitchen just long enough to grab a pitcher of lemonade from the fridge and a couple of plastic cups. He poured one for each of them, setting hers on the table in front of her. She hardly seemed to notice, she was so intent on her coloring.

With a happy sigh, Uncle Fuzzy walked slowly over to the battered old armchair he liked to use as a reading chair, picked up his book, and was soon lost to the world, the only sign that he was paying any attention to the kit was the motion of his ears, which tracked every sound she made.

It was due to this that he was able to pick up a frustrated sigh from her about half an hour later. Lowering his book to his lap, he shifted his gaze to the kit, who was resting her head on her crossed arms, a frustrated look on her muzzle. “Anything wrong, Rilli?”

“I can’t make the colors work right,” she replied sadly. “All the butterflies at the zoo were so pretty, but every time I try and color them like that in the book, it all comes out wrong,” she whimpered, her tail lashing the air behind her.

He got up from his chair and walked over to the table to inspect her work. To his surprise, she had actually gotten the colors in the book to come very close to what the real thing looked like. Close, but not totally right. “These look very good, Rilli.”

“I know, but they don’t look right,” she muttered. I can’t make the colors... um...”

“Make them what?”

“I dunno the word,” she said with another sigh. “When you have one color and it kind of fades into another?”

“Ah, that would be blending.” He leaned over to re-inspect the picture, and nodded once. “I can see where that would be a problem, but you’ve done a marvelous job with what you have here. Oh, I agree that the colors don’t blend as well as they do in real butterflies, but they still look very pretty to me.”

She cast him a sad look. “My art teacher tells me I have a, um... ‘nek’ for colors?” She cast him a confused look.

“I think she meant ‘knack,’ but yes, I would definitely agree with her.”

“Yah. Anyway, she says I’m good with colors, but I can’t make them do what I see in my head,” she muttered. “Pencils are better than crayons, because you can kinda smudge the colors a little, but it still doesn’t look right.” With one last sigh, she pushed the coloring book away from her and began to cry, softly.

“Rilli, please don’t cry, it isn’t the end of the world,” Uncle Fuzzy said softly, putting a gentle paw on her shoulder. “I can show you how to make the colors work.”

The kit raised her head, her ears perking up. The fur under her eyes was matted a little from her tears. “Y-you can?”

He cast her a stern gaze, but a deep hint of warmth lay behind it. “Yes, I can, but I’ll only show you if you promise to pay attention to what I teach you.”

“O-okay.” She gave another snuffle and looked at him.

He motioned for her to get up and follow him. She did as he bade, getting down off the chair and padding quietly along behind him as he climbed the stairs to the second floor of the house, stopping before a door that the kit usually ignored during her visits. “Isn’t that just an empty room?”

“It is, and it isn’t, Rilli. I keep things in here that I don’t use very often.” He opened the door and they went inside. It was a smallish room, an old bed against one wall next to a dusty chest of drawers. “Now, just wait here for a second,” he said, and to her surprise, he lay down

on the floor and began to rummage under the bed.

“Um, Uncle Fuzzy?”

His voice was muffled by the bed, but she could hear it clearly. “Yes, Rillian?”

She gave another snuffle. “Won’t mommy be mad that you shoved stuff under the bed? When I clean my room, if I put the stuff under the bed, she always gets ‘noyed.”

Under the bed, Uncle Fuzzy was doing his best not to break out in howls of laughter, his bushy canine tail wagging about with his amusement. “Ah, but sometimes under the bed is a good place to put things,” he told her as he emerged with a long, wide, flat box made of clear plastic. “This box, for example, was meant to be kept under the bed.”

“Um...”

“You want to know how this box will help you, don’t you?”

“Yus.”

He picked up the odd box and motioned for her to exit the room. “We’ll go back downstairs, and I’ll show you.”

“Okay.”

Once back in the kitchen, Uncle Fuzzy set the box on the kitchen table and opened it. It held dozens upon dozens of little white tubes, a thick stack of very odd-looking paper, and... “Paintbrushes?”

He nodded. “Paintbrushes.”

She cast him a sad look that threatened to burst into tears once more. “Uncle Fuzzy? I tried using watercolors to paint the butterflies, ‘an it didn’t work.”

“Ah,” he said as he began pulling things from the box, “but this isn’t watercolors, kitten.”

“It... isn’t?”

“No, Rillian,” he said, then leaned down to whisper in her ear. “These are *acrylics*, and if your mother knew I was letting you use these, she wouldn’t be happy.”

Rillian blinked and winced. “Will I get into trouble?”

“No, but I might,” he said with a wink. “Now, let me show you how to use these, and then, once you’ve learned all of that, then I will teach you how to make the colors you see in

your head,” he added, gently tapping her forehead with one finger.

What followed were several long hours as he taught her how to squeeze out the colors she needed onto a paper plate, followed by how to paint with the thick, sticky, but above all *bright* colors. That was followed by lessons on color mixing, blending, layering, and so on, until the little kit’s head was spinning. But she was learning, and as she learned, her mind began to see how she could use these to get what she wanted.

At six-thirty, Uncle Fuzzy insisted that they take a break for dinner, so they cleaned up the paints and put everything back into the box and set it on the floor, out of the way. As they ate, Uncle Fuzzy continued to tell her things about the paints, what could and could not be done with them, taking care to make sure that she’d understood what he had said before going on to the next lesson.

Once they were done with dinner, he led her to the bathroom for what he called the most important lesson. She couldn’t understand what it could possibly be, until she saw the spots of colors that graced Uncle Fuzzy’s fur. He tousled her hair and winked at her as he helped her get the paint out of her tail and off of her paws.

That task done, they went back to the porch so she could do her homework, but Rillian couldn’t concentrate on it. Questions about the paints kept rattling about in her mind, until one of them popped up that she simply *had* to ask.

“Uncle Fuzzy?”

Once again, he put his book down and smiled at her. “Yes, Rilli?”

“You said that mommy would get mad if she knew I was using ‘crylics. Why?”

“Lots of reasons, Rilli. Acrylics are ‘adult’ paints, you see, and if you aren’t careful with them they’ll stain your fur, your clothes, and everything else they touch. They require patience, careful use, and careful storage.” His smile faded a little. “They’re also expensive.”

She blinked at that comment, and frowned. “How ‘spensive?”

Uncle Fuzzy smiled sadly. “If you’re thinking of using your allowance to buy some, then you had better count on buying one tube of paint at a time, and that’s *if* your parents will let you.”

“Oh.”

He smiled at her, a warm, friendly smile this time. “But I don’t think that’s going to be a problem, Rillian. Don’t worry about it right now. You can use them some more tomorrow, and afterwards, well, we’ll have to see what happens, won’t we? Now do your homework, please.”

Rillian nodded and went back to her studies, pulling out her math book and opening it up to read. But while outwardly she was doing her homework, in her mind she was painting butterflies.

The End?