

Chapter 1

*T*he sunlight streaked haltingly into the room revealing Sandy's long, dishevelled hair sprawling haphazardly over the twin pillows. A few lonely stray strands were stuck in one corner of her softly curved mouth; the smile, long lost in a dream, had closed during the night, trapping them. Part of her face was hidden under the fluffiness of the flowered comforter which she had pulled up greedily during the night.

Save for her lover Jacques' steady breathing disturbing a large mass of split ends which

lay between the two pillows, she was immobile, motionless - deeply immersed in sleep. The steady rhythm of his breathing was broken now and again by the sunlight's randomly playing itself over his face. It was arriving and departing. As it passed through the leaves of the slightly swaying sapling trees that filled 'their' garden, it flickered. Then, filtered again by her snowflake pattered curtains hanging raggedly icicle-like over the dew covered window, it would finally find their faces.

The cat was lying by their feet, more closely to his than to hers. This was always an enigma to her who loved it so much and a bother to him who hated it so much. It seemed to enjoy this unspoken conflict in its own proud way; it seemed to sense that she would always love it if it remained an enigma, aloof and distant. It moved a little now and again; it would twitch uncontrollably from time to time as it relived a cat adventure, and then, just as unexpectedly, it would fall back into its motionless, dead to the world, sleeping state. Its eyes were marginally closed or marginally open? No-one really ever did know. It always seemed to exist in its own dreamy carefree world.

As the sunlight grew stronger, a few solitary rays managed to reach the cat's fuzzy face. It squinted, eyes still mainly closed, stretching one paw, then the other; head pushed down, eyes tightly closed or not? paws outstretched, it hesitated, as if lost for a moment, in the dawn's early light: suspended seemingly in the everlasting moment before awake.

A stronger sunbeam suddenly struck its left eye, reflected off the rusty white dew covered

thermometer that seemed to adorn every house in middle-class America, and, in particular, this very house in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The cat, now forced by circumstances beyond its control, repositioned its head firmly, in a flowing gentle motion, under a fold of the comforter. That done, it re-entered its dream from a new attack angle... claws out... drawing the comforter closer, ever closer....

The sunlight was slowly succeeding in dissolving the dew which lay on the windowpane. As the intensity grew, as the sun rose higher in the October morning sky, the dew began to evaporate even more quickly. A steamy mist began to rise from the window. Soon the sunlight began to splay itself over the whole of the bed.

It was soon smothering Sandy's half buried face. An eye was suddenly, involuntarily open. She writhed a little, like a snake in pain: the reality of the morning piercing her consciousness. She slithered, ever so slightly, towards Jacques to try to escape from the sunlight. She moved her head gently, yet definitely onto his shoulder where there was this nook that was 'soooo nice'. She nestled into him, stealing a little security, a little warmth.

Her warm gentle breathing, or her movement, convinced Jacques' hand to slide half consciously onto her breast for a few moments of lost time; a slight hesitation, a gentle pause as his mind registered the softness, the fullness, the wonderful and unique qualities of