

# Misprint

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Fluffy was crying.

Like a baby.

My new cat's name is FluffIII, the third in the Fluffy line, but I call him Fluffy. I'm not sure what I'll call FluffIV, if there is one.

The new cat is supposed to be a normal ordinary catprint, a match to Fluffy, the best cat ever, who I raised from a kitten. With a catprint, you get a grown cat. That skips the kitten part, which is too bad, but you also skip housetraining. And neutering.

A couple of selection boxes: Neural path: Use the litterbox. A deletion: Testicles.

Correct?

Print.

I never bother with the rest of the form. The non-allergenic Hairless option. Hairless cats are the next ugliest thing to naked mole rats anyway.

And who would tick off "Round Pupils"? Cats should have cat's eyes, slit-pupiled, glow-in-the-dark.

Opushun advertises available Polydactyly. A cat with opposable thumbs? Forget it. Thumbs are fine for

helper animals like dogs or ponies, but with a cat you'd have to add Anxious to Please, a high-performance package (translation: extra cost). They claim it works, but I doubt it. Millennia of domestication didn't produce Anxious to Please in cats.

And if it did, you wouldn't exactly have a cat, would you?

So I chose the standards, ignored the rest, and snapped the order.

A week later – it takes that long to grow enough cells for the printer cartridges – Opushun snapped me back to pick up FluffIII.

The clerk opened the carrier. The Fluffys have long soft grey fur and gold eyes. Their paws look silver in some light. You can change all that, but if I did, I wouldn't exactly have Fluffy, would I?

"He looks perfect! Thank you." I reached into the cat carrier and let him sniff my fingers and rub against my hand. I skritchd his ears. I got a little teary. One reason Fluffys are such great cats is they're friendly. They're not anxious to please, but they are, naturally, friendly.

I thumbed for FluffIII and took him home.

But now he was crying.

I jumped up, startled. My work connection broke. I go to another place when I work so I like it to be quiet where I really am.

"Fluffy, nice kitty, what's the matter?"

He looked up from his kitty bed.

"You never talk to me."

He had a perfect Oxbridge accent, that plummy high-class British way of talking.

"I was just talking to you. I talked to you all the way home."

He licked his silver paw and rubbed the tears from his eyelashes. "You call that a conversation? 'Nice kitty, kitty'?"

"I didn't expect you to understand. I didn't expect you to *talk back*."

"I am not talking back. I am trying to hold a civilized conversation."

"I didn't think cats had civilized conversations," I said.

"Hah," he said. "Or, to be more precise, LOL."

He jumped into my lap, I cradled him, and he managed to look dignified with his paws splayed all which-way. I petted his belly. The Fluffys have very soft fur.

"We'll have to converse later," I said. "Work calls." I put him back in the kitty bed. Being upset, I expended time and effort to reform the connection.

Fluffy strolled into the room, his furry tail high.

"When's dinner?"

The work connection collapsed.

Before Fluffy could protest, I shoved him into the cat carrier.

"There's been a mistake," I said to the clerk at the Opushun kiosk. I hauled Fluffy out. He glared at me without a word.

"I'm so sorry!" the clerk said. "At Opushun we're anxious to please."

"Can you fix him?"

She frowned, puzzled. "Surely it's already fixed?"

"No, yes, I mean, he came already fixed, that isn't the problem. The problem is..." I glanced down at Fluffy. "Tell her the problem."

"That *is* the problem," Fluffy said. "I'm fixed. Can you fix *that*?"

The clerk pretended he wasn't talking.

"Sir, you may exchange any model that's defective."

"Defective!" Fluffy said.

The clerk blinked. For a second I thought she had eyes like Fluffy's but then I blinked and she looked normal again. People's parents don't alterate them outside human traits, usually. Maybe she was wearing mood contacts.

"You see?" I said.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir, I don't."

"He's *talking*."

"Our new development," she said. "It's so popular that we made it standard. At Opushun, we're—"

"—Anxious to please," I said. I hadn't even noticed Conversation so I hadn't opted-out, which would have been an extra charge because they'd have to upgrade the standard by downgrading the upgrade.

"You see?" said Fluffy.

"Can you change him so he doesn't talk?"

Fluffy said something unprintable, which was startling in that accent. The clerk wasn't pretending he couldn't talk – she was ignoring him. That seemed rude. If you're going to create something that talks, you should listen to it.

"I'm so sorry, sir. Alterating a printout is un-cost-effective. But you may certainly make an exchange."

She tried to return Fluffy to the carrier. His claws scabbled at the flaps. Probably he wished I'd gone for available Polydactyly.

"Wait!" he said, dignity abandoned. "What happens to me?"

"They'll find you a good home," I said. "With somebody who appreciates your finer qualities."

“Prove it!”

“I’m sorry, sir,” the clerk said. “It’s imprintouted on you. Another client would not be... pleased.”

Fluffy leaped, flung himself against my chest, and nuzzled my neck, his nose damp and cool. He didn’t say anything.

I sighed. “Will you promise not to talk to me when I’m trying to work?”

“I’ll... try.” He sounded more doubtful than anxious.

I took him home.

He isn’t exactly Fluffy.

But he’s close enough.

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