

BARFI

Hiba Kahn

"Fluffy?" "No, it's too common."

"Mom, what about Coca?" "Like Coca Cola?" "No, like cocaine. Since she is white and so is cocaine." "You need God, Hiba."

"She's white, has the sweetest eyes, and is so tiny. What could be a decent name for something like that?" "Barfi." "Huh? Like the dessert?" "Exactly like the dessert!"

Imagine having a dessert so sweet that it makes your teeth ache, triggers all your sensitivities, and yet you can't stop having more of it. I remember the first time I had barfi. It made me brush my teeth multiple times but had me coming back for more every few hours. I could say the same thing about my cat - my 10-month-old, biting enthusiast, and purr machine of a cat, Barfi. I could talk about Barfi for hours and what she is like now compared to when I got her. But I'm going to talk about what I was like before Barfi and what I am like now.

"Asshole." "Moron." "Hehe, what an idiot!"

I've called every cat I have ever come across these words or worse. I know, it's not my proudest moment. When I was 8, a stray cat jumped at me out of nowhere and scratched my neck badly. I had to be rushed to the hospital due to the wound being deeper than expected. That's where my fear/hate relationship with cats began. So, you can imagine my shock when my mother told me that we were adopting a 4-month-old kitten. It was the 29th of September,

and we were on a flight back home when my mom brought up the fact that her colleague's cat had kittens a few months ago and she told him she would adopt one. I vividly remember being shocked since she knew how much I despised cats. My fear got the best of me, and I decided that I had to stop this from happening.

Over the next few days, I tried to convince her not to bring a feline freak into our house. I showed her videos of cats breaking things and hitting their owners. I made her aware of the fact that they are hard to take care of and that cat litter would stink worse than a blue cheese and rotten fish milkshake.

A week passed and there was no sign of the cat so far. So, I thought my mom had finally listened to my pleas and said no to her colleague and we had moved past this phase together as a family. That day I went out with my friends and came back later than I normally would. I was expecting to get a lecture from my mom about how it's unsafe to be out past midnight, but all I heard as soon as I opened the door was, "Awe come here little one!" "Let me see your adorable little face."

In my head I thought "Oh my god, they missed me?" and walked in excited to be greeted by my family. But to my disappointment, I saw a white, fluffy, minion looking thing in a crate and my family sitting around it. Safe to say, I froze. My worst nightmare had come true. There was a cat in my house.

As the days passed, I felt myself getting closer to the feline freak. Since my mom worked 10 hours a day and my brother was busy with his exams, I somehow got stuck taking care of it. I started researching about how cats need to be taken care of and what types of food they like to eat. I found out everything from the type of shampoo to be used to the differences

in the number of times they sneeze. For example, if cats sneeze once or twice a day, it could be a part of their normal behaviour but if they sneeze a lot for several days in a row it could mean that they have an upper respiratory infection. I became the thing I hated the most: a Karen mom who rushes to the ER the moment their child bumps into a toy. I started testing what type of food she enjoys the most and which treats she liked best. I left my bedroom door open so she could walk in whenever she pleases, at any time of the day. She slowly became the biggest part of my day and the sole owner of 90% of my phone's storage. She became the centre of my universe. Everything I did revolved around this four-legged fur ball. She loved sleeping in her bed through the night, but the moment the clock struck 6 a.m., she would walk into my room, jump on the bed, start smelling my face, and purr loudly to wake me up and get the signal that she wanted to snuggle under the blanket. She became the most important aspect of my life, and she knew it too. Barfi changed my life in ways I had never imagined. She came into my life at a time when nothing was going right, and she took all that negativity and my pain without even knowing it. She gave me something to look forward to every day. She did more for me than I could possibly do for her.

When the time came for me to move to the United States for college, all I wanted was to be able to spend time with her. Yet all that kept happening was just me tirelessly trying to get everything for my big move, which resulted in me hardly staying at home. I kept losing time with Barfi, and yet she continued walking into my room every day at 6 without negligence because that was our routine. I knew that my time to part ways with her was coming soon, but I did not realize just how quickly that time was approaching. It felt like impending doom, like that sinking feeling at the bottom of your stomach when you bid farewell to your closest friends at the end of the night. That feeling that tells you just how

much tougher everything is going to get from this point on. I felt it every time I looked at Barfi. I experienced it in instances where I would randomly start crying while playing with her because I knew that it was one of the last few times I would be doing that.

The day of my flight, I played with Barfi every chance I got. I gave her as many treats as she could have wanted and gave her just as many kisses that she did not want. When the time came for me to leave for the airport, I felt like she knew that she was a part of something bigger than her and her hatred of cuddles. She knew that this would be the last time I was going to torture her with cuddles, which is why she let me do it. I had sworn I would not cry while bidding my farewell to the only thing that was the source of my sanity for 6 months, but I failed. The moment I held her in my arms, I broke down. I sobbed and shuddered, thinking that this was it for my time with my feline freak. I hugged her and cried for five minutes, and it was as if she knew it too, as she let me cry and hug her without moving or even squirming a single inch. I cried more saying goodbye to her than I did when I said goodbye to my family and friends. I feel no shame in admitting that, because when I had no support from my family for the things I wanted to pursue, when I had no help from my friends on the days I needed them the most, Barfi was there for me. She gave me a sense of responsibility that I had never experienced before. I felt a constant sense of companionship when I was around her. I knew that there would be someone waiting to give me a jump scare the moment I entered the house. I knew that lifting her up in my arms and singing to her would make her fall asleep instantly and that she cared about the efforts I made for her. Maybe it is too much to expect from a cat, but when that cat changes you in ways you never thought, you would do the same.

I left a part of me back home. That part roams around the house all day and wakes people up from their sleep because it wants attention or food. It sleeps on my bed through the

night and sleeps on any other surface through the day. It tries to catch flies but is horribly bad at it. It looks at you dramatically when you serve food without the treats mixed in. It purrs when you scratch its neck but bites if you do it longer than it wishes. It only eats seafood-based cat food and will blatantly ignore it if you present mere chicken. It sits next to you on the days you need it the most but will run away the moment you try to get close. It brings a smile to your face whether you like it or not, and it will be sure to let you know just how much it loves you, but in its own way. I left a part of me back home, and its name is Barfi.