

## Lucky to Be Alive

Maria, a gentle, soft-spoken woman of seventy, had always managed to view the world with a child's sense of wonderment. She greeted the dawn of each new day with the brightness of the sun itself and found joy in the smallest of things: a dove perched on her birdfeeder, the fresh morning dew, the sweet scent of jasmine in her garden.

A widow<sup>1)</sup>, Maria lived alone in a run-down<sup>2)</sup> neighborhood in Deerfield Beach, Florida. One day while out tending the small garden in front of her modest home, Maria had been injured in a drive-by shooting. The bullet had pierced through her skin with a ferocious<sup>3)</sup> bite and lodged itself in the old woman's right thigh. Crying out in agony, she had dropped to the sidewalk. When the mailman found her unconscious nearly an hour later, her injured leg had been bleeding profusely<sup>4)</sup>. She'd made it to the hospital just in time and later, the doctor had told Maria she was lucky to be alive.

Returning home, Maria didn't feel so lucky. Before the shooting, the elderly woman had always been grateful that she was healthy for her age. Now just getting the daily mail required a Herculean<sup>5)</sup> effort. In addition, her medical bills were mounting alarmingly, straining her meager income. And although she had watched the neighborhood deteriorate<sup>6)</sup>, somehow things had seemed safe in the daylight—but not anymore. For the first time in her life, Maria felt frightened, alone and vulnerable.

"I feel defeated," she had told her friend Vera. "I'm just an old woman with nothing to do and nowhere to go."

"When Vera came to pick up Maria for her checkup at the medical center, she hardly recognized her old friend. Maria's soft brown eyes held a haunting sadness and her face was gaunt and haggard. All the curtains were drawn and her hands shook with fear as she hobbled out onto the front porch, a cane stabilizing her injured leg.

They were a little early for Maria's appointment, so to try to cheer up Maria, Vera took a longer, more scenic route. They were stopped at a red light when Maria suddenly shrieked. "Look at that cat. It's trying to run across the street." Vera looked up to see a small black-and-white cat bounding out in to the middle of traffic. Both women screamed as they saw one car, then another, and finally a third, hit the cat. The cat lay motionless, its small body flung onto the grass. Cars slowed, but no one stopped to help.

"We must save that poor creature," said Maria. Vera pulled over, got out of the car and went to the hurt animal. Miraculously<sup>7)</sup>, it was still alive, but badly injured.

"Take my jacket and wrap the kitty in it," said Maria. Vera carefully put the cat on the seat between them. It looked up at Maria and gave her a plaintive, barely audible meow.

"Everything will be all right, my little friend," Maria said tearfully.

Finding an animal clinic, they went inside and told the receptionist what had happened.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but we cannot accept stray animals."

It was the same at the next clinic. Finally, at the third clinic, a kind veterinarian<sup>8)</sup>, Dr. Susan Shanahan, agreed to help and quickly started working on the cat.

"This little guy is lucky to be alive," she told Maria and Vera. "If you hadn't been there for him, he never would have made it."

The vet took Maria aside. "The cat's injuries are very serious," she said. "He has severe head trauma, crushed paws and a cracked collarbone. He'll need a lot of expensive medical attention. Today's bill alone will cost at least \$ 4 0 0 . "

Maria gasped. But taking her worn cloth wallet out of her handbag, she gave the doctor all the money she had after paying her bills— \$ 5 0 .

"It's all I have right now, but I promise I will pay you the rest over time. Please don't put that kitty to sleep," she pleaded. "I'll take him home. We need each other. "

Sensing how important this was, Dr. Shanahan kneeled and took Maria's hands in hers. "I could get into trouble with my boss for doing this," she said gently. "You see, I really shouldn't have helped the cat in the first place, but, don't worry. . . I will personally pay for this. "

While the cat was at the clinic, Maria went to check on him every day. She spoke softly to him and gently stroked his chin with her little finger. As the days passed, the cat began to purr<sup>9)</sup> and the sparkle returned to Maria's eyes.

The day arrived for the cat to come home. As excited as a little girl on Christmas morning, Maria smiled brightly as she walked into the clinic to pick him up. "What have you decided to name the cat?" asked Dr. Shanahan.

Cradling the cat in her arms, Maria answered happily, "I'm going to call him Lucky, because together we have found a new life. "

□by christine E. Belleris

## 活着真幸运

70岁的玛丽亚性情温和，说话轻声细语。她总是用孩子般的新奇目光观察世界。玛丽亚以欢快的心情迎接每一天的到来，她善于从生活中最细微的事情中寻得欢乐：从栖息在食槽上的鸽子、清新的晨露、到花园里茉莉花的芳香。

寡居的玛丽亚独自一人住在佛罗里达州迪尔菲尔德市一个破败的街区。有一天，她正在那间简朴的屋前侍弄着她的小花园，一颗流弹击中了她。子弹穿过皮肉，射入她的右腿，一阵钻心的疼痛。玛丽亚痛苦地叫喊着，倒在人行道上。被邮递员发现时，她已经失去知觉近一个小时，受伤的腿流血不止。她被及时地送进了医院。事后医生说她能活下来真是幸运。

出院回家后，玛丽亚并不觉得有多么幸运。遭枪击前，这位高龄的妇女一直庆幸她这么大的年纪还很健康。可是现在每天出屋取一趟邮件都要费好大的劲。况且，她那微薄的收入已经不敷支付纷至沓来的医院帐单。虽然从前她眼看着她所在的地区世风日下，但不管怎样白天治安情况还算可以，可现在却不行了。玛丽亚有生以来第一次感到害怕、孤独和脆弱。

"我垮了，"玛丽亚告诉她朋友薇拉说，"我只是个老太太，无事可干，也无处可去。"薇拉来接她去医院检查，她几乎没认出她的老朋友。玛丽亚那浅棕色眼睛显露一丝令人难忘的忧虑，她面容瘦削，憔悴。屋里的窗帘全拉着。她拄着拐棍支撑那条伤腿，一瘸一拐地朝前廊挪动，两手因恐惧而不停地颤抖。

离预约的时间还早了些，为了让玛丽亚心情好点，薇拉绕远经过景致宜人的街区。在等红灯的时候，玛丽亚突然尖叫着说，"瞧那只猫。它想过马路。"薇拉抬头看见一只黑白相间的小猫从路边向车流跳去。先是一辆，然后另一辆，接着第三辆，连着三辆车撞了小猫，薇拉和玛丽亚同时尖声喊叫。小猫给甩在草地上，躺在那儿一动不动。来往汽车都减速了，可是没人停车相助。

“咱们得救救那可怜的小东西。”玛丽亚说道。薇拉把车靠在路边，下车走向那受伤的小猫。它还奇迹般地活着，但伤得很厉害。

“用我的上衣裹上它。”玛丽亚说道。薇拉小心翼翼地把猫放在她们俩之间的座位上。小猫抬头瞧着玛丽亚，痛苦地发出轻到几乎听不见的一声“喵”。

玛丽亚含着泪水说，“小家伙，一切都会过去的。”

她们找到了一家动物诊所，进去告诉接待员所发生的事。

“我很抱歉，”接待员说道，“我们不接待无主的动物。”

在第二家诊所也是同样的遭遇。最后，在第三家，心地善良的兽医苏珊·沙纳汉同意相助，立即动手抢救。

“这小家伙能活着真幸运，”她告诉玛丽亚和薇拉说，“你们要是不救它，它就没命了。”

兽医把玛丽亚领到一边。“小猫伤得很重，”她说，“头部有伤，爪子压断，锁骨骨折。治疗费用会很昂贵。光今天一笔花销就得400块钱。”

玛丽亚听了倒抽一口气，可她还是从手提袋里拿出旧布钱包，给了医生50块钱。这是她付了自己的医疗费后仅剩的钱。

“我的钱全在这儿了，不过我答应你过后还清其余的钱。请你不要让它安乐死，”她哀求道，“我打算带它回家。我需要它，它也需要我。”

沙纳汉医生意识到救活那只猫有多么重要，她弯下身来，握住玛丽亚的双手，温和地说道，“老板要是知道我这么做，我就会有麻烦了。其实，一开始我就不该抢救这只猫，不过，别担心……我自己掏腰包先把钱付了。”

小猫待在诊所的日子里，玛丽亚每天都去看望它。她轻声细气地跟它说话，用小指轻轻抚摸小猫的下巴。日子一天天过去，小猫开始呜呜做声，玛丽亚的眼睛又闪烁着喜悦的光。

小猫回家的日子到来了。激动得如同圣诞节上的小女孩，玛丽亚满面春风地走进诊所接小猫。“你给它想好名字了吗？”沙纳汉医生问道。

玛丽亚怀里抱着小猫，高兴地回答说，“我打算管它叫‘幸运’，因为我们俩一起获得新的生命。”

## NOTE 注释：

widow ['widəu] n. 寡妇

run-down 破败的

ferocious [fə'reuʃəs] adj. <口>十分强烈的，极度的

profusely [prə'fju:slɪ] adv. 丰富地，大量的

Herculean [hə:kju:'ljən] adj. 力大无比的，巨大的

deteriorate [di'tiəriəreit] v. (使)恶化

miraculous [mi'rækjuləs] adj. 奇迹般的，不可思议的

veterinarian [,vetəri'nɛəriən] n. 兽医

purr [pə:] v. 咕噜咕噜叫，发出喉音