

HOW TO WASH A CAT

INTRODUCTION

I followed a trail of paw prints, clumped up litter, and splattered flecks of soap up the stairs and down the hall to my bedroom. Sticky wet spots covered the floors, the walls, a roll top desk, a wicker laundry basket, and a half dozen scattered books. A miserable wet lump of fur huddled in the middle of my bed.

“This is for your own good,” I said, stealthily creeping towards him as I clutched the corners of a large beach towel. The lump glared back at me incredulously.

“We’re almost done. We can’t turn back now,” I argued, slowly moving closer to the corner of the bed. The lump continued to stare at me suspiciously.

I glanced down at my arms and legs, grimly surveying the map of fresh scratches. Sighing, I gripped the towel and moved into position. The quivering lump dug his claws into the bedspread, anticipating my next move.

I lunged forward, the towel unfolding as my arms spread wide. My target tried to jump out of the way, but the billowing beach towel swallowed him whole. I felt a twinge of guilt as the sheet came down over his disappointed face; then I carried my struggling wet fugitive back downstairs to the kitchen sink.

The day had begun with a sense of foreboding, filled with apprehension of the task that lay ahead of me. Yawning in a reluctant gulp of crisp spring air, I wiggled my toes to rouse the

two slumbering cats entwined at the foot of the bed—a mass of white fur tinged with peachy, buff-colored highlights.

One of them stood up, her back arching in a full body stretch before her slender figure leapt nimbly to the floor. Isabella issued a commanding look in my direction and sauntered out of the bedroom.

I swung my feet down to the hardwood floor, unearthing the second of my feline foot warmers. The more portly of the pair, he hit the ground beside the bed with a squawking grunt and waddled sleepily across the room to his inclined scratching post.

I splashed a basin full of cold water on my face and plodded slowly down the flight of stairs to the kitchen. Isabella greeted me with an impatient chirp and looked pointedly at her empty food bowl. Her imperious gaze followed me through the dark kitchen as I groped for the light switch and stumbled towards the coffee machine. Together, we watched as the first promising drops of brew began to plink into the glass receptacle. Isabella sat down on the floor in front of me, her wand of a tail waving back and forth, while I siphoned off the first precious ounces of the dark, steaming liquid. Coffee in hand, I dribbled a cup of dry cat food into the small white bowls on the floor underneath the kitchen table.

Upstairs, heavy feet padded towards the litter box, creaking the floorboards above my head. Seconds later, the unmistakable sounds of spastic, frenzied digging shook the ceiling, snowing the kitchen table with a light covering of dust. Isabella and I listened as the litter box—a shiny, red contraption complete with a covered hood—began to rock to a lively mambo beat. Thousands of sandy particles pattered against its plastic walls as the commotion above us increased in intensity.

I ran a caffeine-coated tongue over my top lip, waiting for the inevitable culmination of the boisterous goings-on inside

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the bouncing red igloo. Isabella trilled expectantly as a violent eruption launched the energetic digger out of the litter box and propelled him down the stairs. His fluffy, white blur careened around the corner and skidded through the entrance to the kitchen. He was covered from head to toe with a fine dusting of cat litter.

I greeted him casually. “Good morning, Rupert.”

He blinked innocently up at me, grains of litter scattering from his furry eyebrows to the kitchen floor.

As a species, cats are generally known for their cleanliness. For Rupert, however, that objective couldn't quite compete with his love of litter box dancing. Despite his best efforts to remove it, stray pieces of litter clung to his white coat like persistent black fleas.

I had put this off as long as possible. A rank, unpleasant odor had begun to follow him around. It was time to give him a bath.

Biting down on my bottom lip, I strolled over to the sink and pulled out a couple of worn beach towels from a nearby drawer.

“Nothing special going on here,” I said breezily, discreetly reaching my hand up to the shelf that held the cat shampoo.

My fingers flailed about in an unexpected vacuum. I risked an obvious glance to the empty shelf, and then down to the smug, satisfied cat sitting on the kitchen floor, munching on his breakfast. He paused, sensing my stare, and beamed triumphantly up at me.

Twenty minutes later, I finally found the shampoo bottle—shoved into a crevice between the refrigerator and the wall, alongside several toy mice and a bouncing ball. Rupert monitored my search from a series of defensive positions in the hallway, under the table, and behind the kitchen curtains. He crept commando style through the kitchen, sliding across the floor on

his furry, round belly, eyeing me warily as I gripped the bottle around its neck and tapped it on the palm of my hand.

“Clever,” I said, tapping furiously.

Rupert flashed me an impish grin and slowly began to back away. I reached out to grab him, but caught only air as he spun around and raced down the stairs that led to the first floor. That pudgy, white fur ball could be amazingly fast when motivated. The chase was on.

Rupert’s long, feathery tail popped up, bouncing like a pogo stick as he hopped down the steps. He rounded the corner at the bottom of the stairs, spinning out as his claws scrambled on the slick wood floor. I dashed down after him, and, seconds later, stood in the middle of the open room that spanned the commercial, street level of the building. Pivoting slowly, I scanned my dusty surroundings for a hint to his hiding spot.

I was standing in the middle of my Uncle Oscar’s antique shop, the Green Vase. At least, I still thought of it as Uncle Oscar’s. I had recently inherited his antique business along with the three-story building it occupied.

Rupert’s fuzzy, white reflection in the storefront glass revealed his location, hunched behind the edge of the adjacent counter that housed my uncle’s antique cash register. I didn’t want him to know that he had been discovered, so I continued the pretext of looking under cracked display cases and behind dusty bookshelves, gradually making my way over to the front door. I saw him tense up as I drew nearer.

Easing forward, I inched towards the counter and stepped surreptitiously into position. Rupert held his breath, trying to hold every hair perfectly still.

A small bird landed on the pavement outside. Overwhelmed by his feline instincts, Rupert couldn’t help but glance out the window at it. Seizing the opportunity, I swooped around the counter and caught him by the long hairs on the back of his neck.

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Rupert made a peeved, squelching sound as my fingers locked around his wide midsection, and I hoisted him up.

“Let’s get this over with,” I said, lugging my captive back upstairs.

Isabella had watched the chase scene from a perch on the top of a bookcase in the showroom. She trailed a safe distance behind as I trudged up the stairs with my despondent cargo.

Rupert’s furry face looked up at me woefully.

“It’s not that bad,” I said soothingly. He shot me a livid look that conveyed his obvious disagreement.

Back in the kitchen, I scrambled to turn on the water and adjust the temperature without losing my grip on the increasingly agitated Rupert. When I finally managed to lower him into the sink, he splayed his back legs out, catching the rim. After a flurry of skin-gouging scratches, I succeeded in positioning him in front of the running faucet. Vengeful, vicious mutterings emitted from the basin as I dunked him under the stream of running water and began to lather him up.

To wash a large, uncooperative cat is to take on a seemingly impossible and sure to be thankless task. I was just about to start the rinse cycle when his slippery, struggling body broke free. With lightening speed, his soapy, white blur jumped out of the sink, streaked across the kitchen, and sprinted up the stairs. I heard him scamper through the litter box and dart into my bedroom, a shower of damp litter spraying out behind him.

Cursing under my breath, I grabbed a large beach towel and raced after him.