

Jack's Thanksgiving plans have been foiled. He's traveling to be with family in the mountains. What happens when Tree Street Kids face a real threat? Jack braves danger, finds new branches on his family tree, *and* discovers what it means to be rooted in God's great family.

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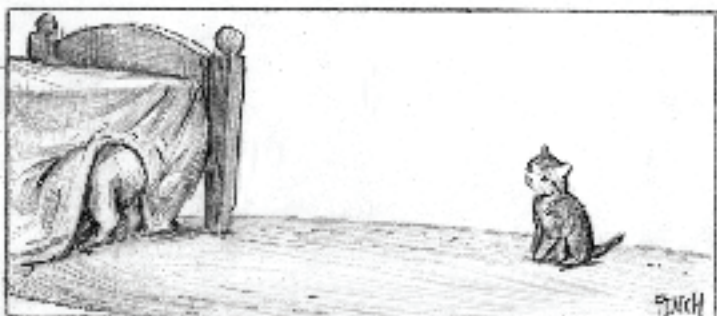
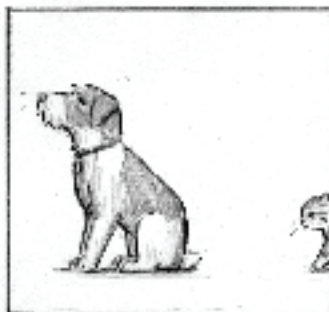
NEW FURRY FAMILY MEMBER

Our new “baby brother” is cute and furry. And telling by the pinhole pricks on my hands, he’s appropriately named Fang (the name we’d also given the neighborhood coyote over the summer). Technically, our Fang is a kitten, although my real little sister, Midge, insists this fuzzy terror is part of the family. Just like my dog, Arrow.

Arrow doesn’t agree. My scraggly and beloved mutt has tried every tactic to deal with this new addition to the family: the cold shoulder, nervous side-eye, whiny-growl-bark threat, and camouflage.

Arrow vs. Fang

by PAUL



But nothing was working to keep the gray floof with pointy daws and needle-sharp teeth *away*. Until . . .

. . . I opened the back door one morning to take Arrow outside. Fang darted past us, and Arrow took off after him.

"Arrow, no!" I yelled.

"Fang, no!" Midge shrieked behind me.

But it was too late.

Arrow had already spooked the kitten. Fang bolted down the back steps, streaked across the patio, and executed a gravity-defying leap that sent him sailing through the air toward the huge maple tree in our backyard.

Fang landed spread-eagle on the trunk and clawed himself halfway up the tree. It was actually pretty impressive.

"Way to put the 'cat' in catapulted," I said.

Midge was *not* impressed. For a girl who loved bugs and frogs, she sure was nuts about that piece of fluff stuck to the tree. "Faaannnggg!" she cried, running past me before I could even get out the door. "You are *not* an orangutan!"

At the base of the tree, Midge stood on her tiptoes. She stretched her arms up toward the scruffy gray kitten. But Fang was still just out of reach. Midge was nearly nine, but small for her age.

Meanwhile, Arrow barked like he'd treed a lion.

"Sure, now you're brave," I said when I got to the tree. I gave him a useless "sit" command.

Arrow jumped up onto the trunk again.

Midge jumped too, stretching to reach Fang.

Arrow jumped.

Midge jumped.

Arrow, *boing*. Midge, *boing*. Up and down like the Whac-A-Mole game at the arcade.

I bent over beside Midge and laced my hands together for her to use as a step. I gave her a boost.

Fang was now within reach of my sister's wiggling fingers.

"Here, kitty, kitty," Midge called softly.

Fang responded by diving off the trunk and landing on top of my head. He slowly slid down my back, trying to get a grip with his death claws.

"Yeow!" I yelled and nearly dropped my sister. I lowered her quickly and spun around.

Fang hung from the back of my favorite Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles T-shirt like a kitten ninja while Arrow jumped and barked around my shins.

Once Fang was safely in Midge's arms, I grabbed hold of Arrow's collar.

"Well," said Midge, "that gave new meaning to the term 'family tree.'"

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON CAT

Jack doesn't want me to have a pet," Midge complained to Mom once we were back inside the house.

So much for helping my sister out.

She struggled to cradle Fang, who was squirming in her arms.

"Honey, that's not true," Mom said. She petted the kitten's head to calm it down while simultaneously stirring pancake batter.

Moms have the coordination of circus jugglers.

Actually, Midge was kind of right. But, if she was going to have a pet, I was thinking more along the lines of a

clawless frog or toothless hermit crab. Not something that could disrupt the quiet life of a boy and his dog.

Hadn't we Finches had enough change in our lives already?

Summer 1995: We moved from Grandma Jo and Grandpa Ernie's farmhouse to the suburbs of Chicago, and I met the Tree Street Kids.

Still summer: I found Arrow, the stray that would become my loyal companion, and I protected him from the local wildlife. (And I don't just mean Buzz Rublatz, everyone's favorite neighborhood bully.)

Fall 1995: I started a new school and joined the Lions peewee football team.

Still fall: I'm saying goodbye to our elderly next-door neighbor, Mr. Bruno Kowalski, who is moving on to paradise. (At least that's what he calls California.)

Sure, most of the changes have been great. My grandparents bought Mr. Bruno's house and will be moving next door, hopefully for the first official Finch Thanksgiving in the suburbs. But it's all still *change*, and I'll never be a fan.

Especially of the fluffy kind.

Fang twisted out of Midge's arms, climbed onto Mom's arm, then lunged at me. This time his tiny claws pierced the front of my favorite T-shirt.

"Yee-OOOWWW!" I grabbed the kitten dragon around

the middle and pulled it away. Its claws took the front of my shirt with them.

Midge and Mom worked to release the kitten as Arrow—suddenly my not-so-loyal companion—got distracted by the smell of pancakes.

As Fang's claws came free, tiny holes appeared above two of the Ninja Turtles' masked heads.

Midge grabbed Fang and hugged him to herself. "You dog people don't know how to deal with the *Felis catus*," she said.

Midge speaks *science* more fluently than she speaks eight-year-old.

MIDGE'S PHENOMENAL FACTS

Felis catus [fee-luhs cat-uhs] is the scientific name for a cat. Although Fang is named after the local coyote, coyotes—or *Canis latrans* [CANE-uhs luh-TRANZ]—are from the dog family.¹ Now, Arrow and Fang (the kitten, not the coyote!) are both in the Finch family.



My sister is the smallest biologist I know. And she'd been waiting for months for *Felis catus* FANGUS to grow big enough to leave his mom, Captain Beans, who belongs to our friend Ruthie.

Ruthie Galinski is one of the Tree Street Kids. She lives on Maple, which of course is a tree and not just a delicious syrup. Midge and I live on Cherry. Roger Jennings lives on Pine. And my best friend, Ellison Henry, lives on Oak.

I knelt on the kitchen floor beside Arrow and put my arm around his scruffy brown, black, and white body. He trembled and stared up at Fang, who peeked down over Midge's arm.

"Mew." Fang seemed to extend a peace offering.

Or a veiled threat . . . I couldn't tell which.

Arrow seemed to take it as a threat because he started barking loudly again.

Mom, who had gone back to stirring, stopped again and turned toward us. "Okay, it's too early in the morning for family drama. Midge, you and Fang back up several steps." Mom knelt beside me and Arrow. "Jack, because I still do your laundry, I know you have dog treats in every pocket of every pair of pants. Give Arrow one when I tell you."

I kept my arm around Arrow.

A low growl rumbled in his chest.

With the other hand, I retrieved a bone-shaped dog biscuit from my left pocket.

Mom snapped her fingers in front of Arrow's snout to distract him and told me, "Hold the treat in front of him but so he can't see it. Then tell him to be quiet."

I hid the biscuit in my closed fist and held it in front of his nose.

Arrow gave a weak *ruff*.

"Quiet," I commanded.

"Midge," Mom said softly, "move one step closer."

She did, and Arrow didn't bark.

I was catching on and hoped Arrow was too. "Good boy," I said, opening my hand.

Arrow carefully took the biscuit between his teeth and munched happily. Even Fang seemed to be wriggling less.


"There," Mom said, standing up and spooning batter into the frying pan like she hadn't just schooled me in how to train your dog. "Now you four keep practicing that. We're a family, and sometimes we have to work together to get a long and to make each other feel loved."

I wasn't sure there were enough bone-shaped biscuits in the world to convince Arrow to love Fang.

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