

HENRY AND MUDGE AND THE Happy Cat

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One night Henry and Henry's father and Henry's big dog Mudge were watching TV. Suddenly Mudge ran to the door and barked. Henry's father opened the door. Sitting on the steps was the shabbiest cat Henry had ever seen. It had a saggy belly, skinny legs, and fur that looked like mashed prunes. Henry and Henry's father and Henry's big dog Mudge stood in the door and looked at the shabby cat. Hey kitty, said Henry. Are you sure it's a kitty? Said Henry's father. It may be a stray, Henry said, petting it. It has to be, said Henry's father. That is the shabbiest cat I have ever seen. He carried the cat into the

house while Henry and Mudge followed. Mudge's tail was wagging hard. This cat looks like mashed prunes, said Henry. But it's nice. Nice for a disaster, said Henry's father. The three of them watched as the cat drank three bowls of milk in a row.

Can it stay? Henry asked. Only until we find a home for it, said his father. He looked hard at the cat. Do you think it's shabby? Henry's father asked. Mudge was licking some milk from the visitor's chin. Mudge doesn't know, Henry said. Mudge likes it. Yes, said Henry's father, but Mudge also likes turkey gizzards. In one week the shabby cat turned into a happy cat. It loved three things about Henry's house. It loved the towel closet. It loved the bathtub. And it loved Mudge. In one week the

shabby cat had become Mudge's mother. It washed Mudge all the time. It washed Mudge's ears. It washed Mudge's eyes. It even washed Mudge's dirty feet. Yuck, said Henry. The cat also made Mudge use good manners. Mudge had to wait his turn at the water dish. Mudge had to share his dog toys. Mudge even had to share his crackers. But Mudge didn't mind, because Mudge loved the cat, too. Henry's mother and Henry's father wondered what they would do with the cat. They liked it. But taking care of Mudge was like taking care of five dogs. They didn't want any more pets. Henry's mother decided to make posters to find a home for the cat. Henry helped her. Don't put the cat's picture on them, said Henry's father, or we'll have that cat forever. Henry and Mudge walked

around town with the posters. They put one in the grocery store and one in the drugstore and one in the record store. They put a lot of them on trees. And Mudge ate on by mistake. The posters didn't say anything about mashed prunes. When Henry and Mudge came home, Henry's father and Henry's mother were sitting on the couch with the cat. Henry's mother said, Cats are nice. Henry's father said, Even shabby ones. Mudge climbed onto the couch to be his new mother. Henry climbed on next. The happy cat purred and purred.

A lot of people saw the posters and came to look at the cat. Some of them were very rude. They made fun of the cat. Mudge watched them, and his fur stood up. A lot of people came to see the cat because they had lost their own. But

they always said, ours is white. Or, Ours is gray. No one ever said, Ours looks like mashed prunes. No one seemed to want the cat. Then one day there was a surprise. A police car parked in front of Henry's house, and policeman rang Henry's bell. Henry and Henry's father and Henry's big dog Mudge went to the door. Can I help you? Henry's father asked the policeman. (Henry's father was wondering if Mudge had eaten somebody's purse.) But the policeman had seen one of the posters. He was looking for his cat. He said it was different from other cats. He said it was unique. He said it looked something like mashed prunes. Henry ran to get the cat. When he came back with it, the policeman cried, Dave! Henry and Henry's father looked at each other. Dave? Said Henry's father. Dave

jumped out of Henry's arms and into the policeman's arms. The policeman kissed Dave on the nose. I'm so happy to have him back, the policeman said. Henry looked at Mudge, who was looking at Dave. Your cat likes our dog, Henry told the policeman. The policeman looked at Mudge. I can see that, he said. Your dog has very clean ears. Suddenly Henry got a lump in his throat. He didn't want Mudge to lose his mother. Even if Mudge's mother was named Dave.

The policeman said good bye, and he took his happy cat home. When Dave the cat was gone, Henry and Mudge felt very sad. The towel closet was shut. The bathtub was empty. The dog toys were still. Henry had to cry a little and take a nap. Mudge had to eat a lot of crackers

and take a nap. Henry's father and Henry's mother had to give them both extra hugs. The next day a big box was on their porch. The note on it said: TO MUDGE FROM DAVE. Inside the box were thirty giant dog bones! And under those was a gold police badge! Mudge kept the dog bones for himself. But he shared the police badge with Henry. Dave the cat had taught him very good manners.