

An odd couple

I remember quite clearly the day we brought my baby home from the hospital. She was bundled so quietly in my arms as I sat down on the sofa. Through half-closed eyes I watched my beloved, spoiled cat jump onto the sofa and confidently approach me. I had been anxious about his reaction to the baby while I was still pregnant, but now I was too exhausted for anxiety.

The cat paused just short of my lap because the lump of blankets in his way. He put a tentative paw forward onto the sleeping baby. I pushed his paw away. He wasn't deterred. He stepped onto my legs and paused in thought. He placed a paw on the baby again and again I pushed it off. Looking a little put out, he finally curled up half on my leg and half off, cozying up to the side of the baby. I relaxed, he relaxed, and we both sighed a little as we rested our heads and eyes.

Suddenly, a wail came up out of the little bundle on my lap. It was piercing! I jumped out of my nap to find the cat staring, horrified, at the baby he had been curled up next to. His ears were laid flat back in alarm. In an instant, he was gone! Under the table, in the next room—who knows! My husband and I chuckled at the cat's reaction.

A few hours later, I was still sitting in the same spot when the cat reemerged. It had been quiet for sometime, but he approached with caution. He jumped onto the sofa and carefully sniffed the air. He obviously detected the baby with his nose because he decided to come no closer. He sat down right where he was, facing me and the baby. His eyes closed, but through the slits I could tell he was still watching. His body didn't seem to relax either, as if he was ready to run the next time the alarm sounded.

For the following weeks, the cat seemed rather on edge and kept a few feet of space always between him and the baby. That was just fine with me. Eventually, he realized that she wasn't much of a threat, except to one's eardrums. With time, he was confidently curling up beside her again on my lap and would only open his eyes with a look of annoyance when she cried.

My baby eventually learned how to grab, which sent the cat running again! Then she learned how to move, but the cat just had to move faster. As my baby "chased" the cat with an awkward

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crawl, and later by walking, the cat would merely walk away a few feet to sit until the baby got close before walking away a little farther. Sometimes, if he was desperate for attention, he would let her catch him and he'd endure the clumsiest petting job ever. I believe more fur was accidentally pulled out than smoothed down!

After over a year of acquaintance, I would say that my cat and my daughter have a relationship with as much love and hate mixed together as any siblings. My daughter squeals with delight at the sight of the cat and looks broken-hearted if he walks away. The cat, in turn, will actually approach her now and then for a pet and a hug. Sometimes he even licks her in thanks. I don't really care for the cat food smell that lingers after she's been licked, but I'll take that show of affection over claws and bites!