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CATAclysm

By Patricia Denehy

The cat showed up on my doorstep one day. I'd just spent a long, hot day in the classroom, trying to keep the students busy until last bell. The last day of school before summer was always a doozy. The cat was all scraggly fur and big eyes. I couldn't resist; I let it live with me. Did you ever do something you will always regret? Really regret – to the point where you want to die?

The damn thing fooled me, at first. It was all, 'Love me and I will love you back'. Ha - if I had only seen the truth.

Do you believe I named the cat Siegfried? Not after the ancient Norse dragon-slaying hero but after the famous Las Vegas magician – Roy's significant other. I loved that cat so much in the early days, I thought it was some kind of white magic that had brought it to my door. Loneliness was destroying me since my boyfriend, Joel, dumped me. That cat was supposed to be my savior.

That's a joke! I'd give anything to be alone, now. Anything.

Cats are ungrateful creatures, selfish and sly. It doesn't matter to Siegfried that I gave him a roof over his head, lots of creamy milk to drink, and the best gourmet cat food. I pulled thick ticks from his fur and petted him for hours on end, when I should have been working on my novel. You remember – that book I've been working on every summer since we were in college.

That's another thing that cat took from me. I'll never be able to put another thought on paper. That damn animal can even steal thoughts from my head.

Anyway, the little things that happened in the beginning seemed like coincidences. Like one day, when my shopping list was altered. You see, I have this Brookstone gadget that you speak into when you notice you're running out of milk or eggs; the device records your voice. When you're ready to shop, you push a button and print out your list. It's amazing, really.

I usually do my grocery shopping on Fridays. One Thursday evening, about a week after Siegfried became my roommate, I printed out the list that I'd recorded during the previous week. I left the list on the kitchen table so I wouldn't forget it in the morning, then I poured myself a glass of wine and settled on the couch to watch TV.

The next day, before I pushed my cart down the first aisle, I pulled the list from my purse to refresh my memory. Wait, I think I have it with me. Let me show you.

Groceries
Milk CREEM
Eggs
Bread
Fancy Feast Cat Food TOONA
Oranges

Yogurt
Frosted Flakes
Bananas
Ground Beef
Rolls
Sponges
Laundry Detergent
Wine
Veggies
SARDEENS
LIVER
CATNIP

I blinked my eyes a couple of times when I saw it. Wow, I thought, that wine must have really gone to my head last night. What was I thinking? Siegfried is a good cat but no way can I afford fresh tuna and cream. I took a few more steps down the aisle and halted once again. I've really got to lay off the sauce. I actually took the time to type the changes onto this list? How anal! And my spelling was atrocious!

I shopped using my original list and went home vowing to cut down on my alcohol consumption.

What else happened?

Well, there's the toilet thing. This is embarrassing, I shouldn't even tell you – but I desperately need to tell someone.

After I adopted Siegfried as my pet, I knew I would have to deal with litter box training. I can't have a cat messing up my carpets, right? I bought a couple of books at Barnes and Noble and set up a litter box in the bathroom. I did all the right things, followed all the expert advice.

Siegfried would have no part of that litter box. In fact, every time I had to go to the toilet, Siegfried followed me into the bathroom. Cute, right?

That's what I initially thought until the attacks began. What do I mean? Well, um... I guess I can tell you. Each time I sat on the toilet, the cat attacked my legs. It leapt toward me and dug its claws deep into my skin. I still have the scars. At first, I thought I might have stepped on Siegfried's tail on my way to the toilet but by the second attack, I knew I'd done nothing of the kind. Siegfried did not want me to use the toilet. He wanted me to use the litter box.

Don't look so horrified. I know it's shocking, but what was I to do? After three days of doing everything short of killing the cat to get to the toilet, I finally squatted over the litter box and did my business. That damn cat stood there and watched me with a glint in his eyes.

I've grown used to it, now. That monster still shits on the carpet.

That's another thing - the soiled carpet that Siegfried makes me crawl across on my hands and knees for hours on end. He wants to humiliate me, you see. The damn cat bats the ball of yarn across the floor with his paw and I have to chase after it.

The first time I ignored his antics. That was a mistake. When I sat on the sofa, not chasing after the yarn, Siegfried went wild. He picked up one end of the loose yarn in his teeth and jumped from the sofa to my shoulder. My nose itched and his fur tickled me as he circled my neck. My skin crawled. The cat dragged the yarn around and around until he'd formed a tight noose.

When the devil-cat went back to the unraveled ball to snag the other end in his teeth, I knew he meant to choke me. He snarled when I put my hands to my throat. I cried out, “Please, I’ll do whatever you want.”

Siegfried paused. I flinched as he bounded back to me and into my lap. He pawed my hand and then lifted his paw toward my neck. I slowly raised my hands and struggled to untangle the yarn. When I’d finally freed myself, I blinked back tears as I re-rolled the yarn into a ball.

I’ve grown used to the smell of cat-piss and the soreness of rug-burned knees.

Why didn’t I just release the cat into the woods? Hard to understand, isn’t it? He wouldn’t let me near him and when I went for the doors, Siegfried hissed and snarled like a miniature tiger. When I picked up the phone to call Animal Control, the cat pulled the telephone cord from the wall before I heard, “hello”.

What about my cell phone? I found it submerged in water inside the washing machine – not that I’d done any laundry that day.

Yes, I knew you’d say that – lock the cat in a room, leave and get some help. Have you heard the expression, “quick as a cat?” I swear, Siegfried anticipates my every move and leaves a room before I can ever lock him in. On the other hand, if he leaves a room and I bolt for the door to shut it against him, he is at my ankles in seconds. Those damn green eyes never leave my face. It’s uncanny.

Poison? Oh, didn’t I tell you? Since the day I ignored those items on my grocery list, Siegfried refuses to eat his cat food. He turns his nose up at milk. I told you he won’t let me

leave the house. One day I tried to make a run for the door. He reached the door before I did, leapt, spun around in the air and hurled himself at my face with claws extended. The cuts on my cheeks were deep. I bled a lot.

At first I thought we would both die, having no food to eat. That might have been better. Two days after the attack at the door, Siegfried jumped onto the table and hit the printer button on the Brookstone gadget. I took tentative steps toward the table and picked up the printout with shaking hands.

I still have that list, too. Proof that I'm not crazy - at least if you believe me about the printout.

Groceries
CREEM
TOONA
SAMON
LIVER
CATNIP

DOG FOOD

I read the list and looked at Siegfried. The cat stared at me unblinking, and then leapt onto the desk. He batted the telephone receiver from its cradle, and then he walked across the numbered keyboard. I counted ten small beeps. He hissed at me and pushed the receiver toward me with his head.

What did I do? I picked it up, of course, while those cold, piercing eyes sent chills down my spine.

“All Foods,” a man’s voice said. “How can I help you?”

I thought about screaming into the phone or kicking at the cat but my feet seemed nailed to the floor and that black ball of fur watched me with those unblinking eyes. My fear was overwhelming. I recited the list in a monotone.

“Is that all, ma’am?”

“Yes,” I said in a voice not my own.

“Your address?”

“11 Canopy Drive.”

“We’ll be there this afternoon. Thanks for your order.”

The items were delivered that afternoon. The delivery person left them on the porch when I didn’t answer the door. I sat on the couch crying as I listened to heavy footsteps walking away down the porch steps.

When the roar of the truck’s motor died away, Siegfried jumped up on my shoulder and waved a paw toward the front door. I rose slowly and walked to the door, taking baby-steps. As the summer heat slapped me and a startled bird took to the air, I felt the cat’s claws on my throat and his teeth clamped onto my ear. Blood dripped onto my shirt as I brought the bags in. The physical pain was less than the pain in my soul.

Dog food isn’t that bad when you’re starving.

Oh, yes, the poison – see how my thoughts drift away? I’d never get the chance. Siegfried eats nothing from my hand. When the food arrives, the cat simply claws away the paper that covers the fish. He bites through the cartons that hold the cream, lapping it up with

his pink tongue. And where would I get this poison? I'm a prisoner here, under constant guard.

I am reduced to an abused pet.

I'm so glad you had time to come over for coffee. I really needed to talk.

It was the curiosity that almost killed the cat. When the mouse ran across the kitchen this morning, Siegfried's instincts kicked in and he bounded after it, taking his eyes off me for the first time in days. It was the chance I needed. Like a dog, I chased the cat; but like a human huntress, I was prepared.

For weeks I'd been taking inventory, scanning each room for possible weapons. The dining room held heavy candle sticks, the living room, a Buddhist statue on the mantel. There was not much of use in the bedrooms or the bath and I dared not move objects around; that would attract Siegfried's attention. The kitchen had a number of potentially useful items.

In the seconds I had, I chose the paper shredder on the counter.

I dove for Siegfried's tail, clamping both hands firmly around it. He swung his head toward my hands as I flung the cat's body onto the counter top.

His teeth gouged my arm. I screamed but didn't let go.

I plunged the demon's tail into the shredder, let go with one hand and hit the "On" button. The machine began to grind the tail, spraying blood. The cat released its bite and yowled. Siegfried's tail jammed in the machine, but God bless the Novitech Company, the machine ground on.

I grabbed the mallet that I use to pound meat, and bashed the cat's head. The yowling ceased.

What? Oh, no – the cat isn't dead. How could it be dead? Cats have nine lives, you know. And anyway, don't you think I've learned my lesson? I'm done abusing animals, my friend.

I took it to the vet – told the man that the poor cat was attacked in the woods. He's such a nice man. He said he would bandage what's left of the tail and keep him overnight to watch for signs of concussion. If all is well, he'll drop him by on his way home from work tomorrow.

He said it's no trouble; he drives this way anyway.

Why you, you ask? Your voice is getting soft, I can barely hear you. Those sleep aids I put in your coffee must be kicking in.

Why you? It's simply that I need someone to take my place. You're kind of like a sacrifice to appease the cat god. When that cat comes back, I intend to be far away from here.

Oh, stop blubbering. As a child, you were as bad as I. We caught dragonflies in jars and pulled their wings off, loved to rip the legs from spiders – remember when we got your dad's cat so drunk it was sick all afternoon? We laughed and laughed. Wait until you meet Siegfried – you won't be laughing anymore.

I've taken my punishment – your turn.

Sorry about tying you to the chair, but admit it, you'd run away if you could.

Speaking of running away, I've got to go. Really, I'm sorry, Sarah.