

What He Didn't Tell the New Kitty

by Daniel Curzon

(a beastly fable)

I was surprised when I saw the new cat being let out of its carrier onto the sofa. It was another male, a Maine Coon, or something as big, with lots of fluffy gray and brown hair, and it must have been close to twenty pounds. What a fatass, I thought. Too bad he's not a slim Siamese like me with chocolate points and the sharpest whiskers this side of Wichita. But whatever. He's no Alpha, that's for sure.

The Woman Who Owned the Food said some soothing words to the new cat and tried to hold him on her lap, but New Guy wasn't having it and got behind the sofa. "I think he's afraid of PrettyBoy Tom," she said to the Man She Owned, looking at me lounging sloe-eyed on my favorite (formerly yellow) pillow on the easy chair.

"Give them time. They'll become the best of buddies, you watch," the Man She Owned said. He was sort of an ugly, skinny twerp, but he bought me fresh salmon. I love fresh salmon.

"I don't think we should leave them alone in the same room," the Food Woman said.

"Maybe in two rooms with the door closed," the Sometimes Food man said.

They went back and forth on that crap for what seemed like forever. Finally they left New Guy by himself in the next room and went out wherever those creatures go. I heard him run under the daybed like a wuss.

I hopped down and went to the door and hissed a few times to let him know whose house it was. I was gonna spray to mark the area, the way you gotta do if you're gonna get any respect, but then I thought better of it because those Food Owners get all pissy about it, and they know how to operate a can opener and I don't. (I'm working on it.) I don't spray as well as I used to, either. Age seven is not for sissies!

"What's your name, Newboy?" I asked him through the door.

He didn't answer.

"What the *FUCK* is your name?!" I said.

After a few feeble little gurgles and meows he finally said, "Angel."

"What the hell kind of name is Angel? Who were you with before, some little girl?"

"Yes," Angel said. "Her name was Patty Sue. She was eight."

"Yeah, did she kick you out?"

"She was killed in a car crash on Thanksgiving. Her whole family was killed, brother, mother, father. I was thrown from the car, the only one to survive."

"Yeah, shit happens," I commiserated.

"How long have you been here?" Angel asked me.

"Seven and half years."

"What's it like?"

I hesitated for a moment before I answered. "The food's good if you refuse to eat the crap they'll try to give you first. Hold out for salmon."

"I like dry food."

"You would. They have that too. I hate it. If I wanted gravel, I'd get some."

"Do they feed once or twice a day here?"

"They leave food out."

"You mean you can eat any time you want?"

"Pretty much. You couldn't?"

"That sounds wonderful. We had one feeding a day at the my old place."

"You can go in and out here through the cat door."

"I used to have to stay inside all the time. It was an apartment."

"You can bring in a rat if you don't chomp on it where they can hear. They like to think they're 'sensitive.'"

"I've never eaten rat."

"It tastes like chicken, only better. But you gotta watch for germs. Yeah. it's come and go as you please around here. I just don't go out as much as I used to."

"Any children here?"

"Not most of the time. They want to think *you're* their child. But don't give in. Once they have your number, they start putting you in little snowsuits and shit."

"I like children."

"Yeah, yeah, but they're basically annoying. And they always want to kiss on the lips. Yuck! But if you scratch them, the Food People can get ugly. So watch the claws."

"I wouldn't dream of scratching a child."

"Well, aren't you precious!"

"A child is a little bit of Heaven on earth."

"What the hell are you talking about? They step on your tail; they pull it when others aren't looking, and they have absolutely no idea of feline anatomy and twist us this way and that way as though we're made of dishrags. You can have all the kids. When the Food Owners' grandkids come over here, I head up to the attic. They're not allowed up there, thank god."

"Were you sleeping on an easy chair earlier?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"I was never allowed on the furniture at the other place."

"Rats, sofas, chairs, fresh salmon, you name it. Actually this ain't a bad gig. Believe me, I've been in worse places. Like that shelter with the cement floor! 'Never again,' I said!"

"So you've been around, huh?"

"You don't want to know. How old are you?"

"Almost six months."

"Whatever you do, don't chase after a string. They try to fool you into thinking it's something good. And don't answer until they come up with a name you can live with. And throw a fit if they try to take you in the car."

"Do they ever give you milk?"

"All the time. But you have to rub against their legs to get it. You can keep saying "milk, milk, milk" as clear as day, but they're so dumb they don't get it. For some reason, they just won't learn cat. But they're decent-enough ear scratchers, and they'll take out your turds if you have an emergency and need the box."

"My new owners sound like really nice people."

"They don't like the term 'owner.'" She calls herself your "mom."

"My 'mom'?"

"I know it's sort of creepy, but the roof don't leak and the heating bill is paid every month. Sometimes they even have catnip. Just don't get hooked on it. It makes you act like an idiot."

"I think I'm going to enjoy it here."

"Just stay out of my spots."

"Okay. Is there anything else I should know?"

"You know, you could still live outside if you really wanted to. Birds are pretty foolish. The water that pools from sprinklers ain't too bad, if you're careful. It's still not too late to escape if you dart out as soon as they come back. There's still time to go feral."

"Why would I want to dart out and live outside? It sounds great here!"

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"What's that?"

"When you lick yourself down there, do you see a couple of round things?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Just curious."

"You have two of them as well, don't you?"

"Ah . . . sure."

"Doesn't everybody?"

“Maybe I should mention that there will be one requirement if you move in here.”

“Just one? That doesn't sound too awful.”

“Yeah, they're most likely gonna make you visit this Guy in a White Coat.”

“Really? Is that going to be a problem?”

I thought about it for a second, then shut my mouth. “Naw, it'll be nothin'. You're gonna love it here. And you're especially gonna *love* that Guy in the White Coat.”

He didn't seem like a bad kid. But fuck him. Nobody told *me*.

