

Göttwigg's Fandango

by Daniel Harris

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Helmut Göttwigg is one of the most knowledgeable people I know. He speaks & reads a dozen languages, plays three or four musical instruments at a professional level, and can make an *haute cuisine* dinner on demand. But, like most people whose minds are on lofty tasks, he is forgetful. He is always misplacing personal items: cigarettes, eyeglasses, pens, tickets, books, music. It is not unusual to see Göttwigg with his shirt on inside out.

Göttwigg visited me recently with his current lady friend. We were sitting on my back porch drinking beer. A heavy fog enshrouded my yard obscuring its lush tropical vegetation. Göttwigg and I were discussing Scriabin's idiosyncratic chord progressions. A gecko entertained us with his calls for a mate.

Suddenly Göttwigg began to frantically check his pockets.

—Shit, I seem to have misplaced my sunglasses, said Gottwigg dropping his e-cigarette on the floor.

—Well, it's nighttime, so you won't need them now, said his lady friend.

—I'm sure they'll turn up in the morning. I probably left them in the car. It just bothers me that maybe I left them in the restaurant where we ate lunch.

—No, I said. I took a picture of you waiting for the green flash at sunset. You were wearing your sunglasses. Remember, I said you couldn't see the green flash with your sunglasses on. They are probably in the car. It was dark when we drove home.

My cat, Stretch, sauntered onto the porch from the house, talking up a storm. He is a big talker. He even replies in his special feline

Available online at *«<http://fictionaut.com/stories/daniel-harris/gottwiggs-fandango>»*

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argot when you talk to him. I have cataloged over forty different vocalizations in Stretch's lexicon. He was using his "I demand attention" voice.

—But Stretch, I said, you have plenty of food in your bowl.

He gave me one of his protracted in-your-face insistent cries where his ears go back and he stares you straight in the eye, mouth fully open.

—Stretch, leave us alone, I said shooing him away.

Stretch went into the house and bounded up the stairs to the second floor where he let out a long loud yowl.

—Streeetch! I said making his name last as long as his yowl.

He unleashed an even louder yowl.

—You better go see what he wants, said my wife. Maybe someone left water running in the upstairs bathroom.

I arose and went upstairs to investigate.

—Okay, Stretch, what's the problem?

I entered the bathroom to find Stretch sitting next to his litter box.

Stretch started rubbing against my leg purring loudly.

—What's wrong, little boy?

—He uttered a short interrogative sound.

I looked at his cat box and didn't see anything unusual. Stretch's cat box is a covered affair called Clevercat Top Entry Litter Box. It is a little over a foot tall and has a cover with a circular opening. It is designed for male cats who tend to lift their hind quarters when urinating. The cat jumps down into the box through the access hole and does his business. Male cats spray urine over the edge of the usual cat box, but it is all contained within the Clevercat box's high walls. Stretch can scratch and dig in his litter all he wants and none of the litter leaves the cat box: a clever solution to a common cat problem.

I had changed the litter that morning and didn't think Stretch's litter was dirty. But when I looked inside, there lying on the litter, were Göttwigg's sunglasses. I reached inside to fetch them and

barely had my hand out of the box when Stretch dived into the box and let loose a fire hose jet of urine.

—Does anyone need another beer? I said opening the fridge. Everyone wanted a refill. I put Göttwigg's sunglasses in my shirt pocket and brought out four beers.

—Guess what I found in Stretch's litter box?

—What? said my wife.

—Göttwigg's sunglasses. How the hell did they end up there, Göttwigg?

—I don't know, said Göttwigg. I was using the bathroom and saw Stretch's unusual cat box. I was trying to figure out if Stretch sat on the top and used it like we use a toilet, or if he went down inside. I was puzzled. I guess my sunglasses fell out of my shirt pocket and into the cat box.

—You, a genius polymath, couldn't figure out how the cat used his cat box? I said. That's pretty rich. Stretch's brain is about the size of an acorn.

—Well, it wasn't obvious to me.

—When I brought the Clevercat Box home and set it up for Stretch, I said, he jumped up and dived into it right away. He had it figured out in a heartbeat.

—I guess Stretch is cleverer than you, Göttwigg, said my wife. Maybe you aren't so smart after all.

Stretch came onto the porch and gave me his “pick me up and praise me” meow.

I put him on my lap. He purred loudly as I scratched his ears.

—Stretch knew enough not to do his business on your glasses, said my wife. How many cats would be so considerate?

—I have to admit, Stretch is pretty clever, said Göttwigg, but if he's so smart why doesn't he just use the toilet?

