

FELINE CATASTROPHES

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Victor S E Moubarak

FOREWORD

Feline Catastrophes is a compilation of light-hearted short stories describing life with a capricious and devious cat who knows his mind and is able to manipulate his owner to the best of his abilities.

This cat knows his place and he's forever plotting and conniving to get his own way in a household where he is definitely the Master and King of his domain.

Also by the same author:

VISIONS (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2) by Victor S E Moubarak.

“**VISIONS**” is a fiction story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe, others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“**VISIONS**” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A must-read book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe. “**VISIONS**” is available from all good bookshops.

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“GOLDEN DROPS” is a compilation of stories about Father Ignatius, a character from the book **“VISIONS”**. The stories chosen in **“GOLDEN DROPS”** follow the life of Father Ignatius and none of them are taken from the book **“VISIONS”** – they are stand-alone vignettes in their own right. **“GOLDEN DROPS”** is available FREE in E Format and can be downloaded from the author’s website and Blog – see below.

Thank you for purchasing **Feline Catastrophes** and I hope that you also read and enjoy **“GOLDEN DROPS”** and **“VISIONS”**. I pray that God blesses each one of you and may He be with you and your families always.

Victor S E Moubarak

Website www.holyvisions.co.uk

Blog **“Time for Reflections”** – <http://timeforreflections.blogspot.com/>

FELINE CATASTROPHES

KNOW YOUR PLACE

Let me tell you about our household. There's the family and me, the dog and the cat. Ah ... and the goldfish. Mustn't forget the goldfish! There are two of them happily swimming in the tank in the living room. Normally they would come at the end of our list of priorities in the hierarchy that is our household. But not here ... in our home the lowest position is reserved for me. And right there at the top is ... our cat!

Our dog and our cat are completely different in temperament and character as a dog and cat can be.

The dog is lazy most of the time and totally apathetic the rest of the time. He likes to eat as often as possible and has never been known to turn a good meal down. He's always there at mealtimes making it very obvious that he's hungry and once he's eaten ... well, he's ready for some more.

When he's not eating he is very busy indeed ... sitting on the mat watching TV. Any program would do ... he's not fussy as long as it's the Dog Channel. When the TV is on he'd sit there for hours guarding the house. Or more precisely, guarding the TV in case anyone changes the channel.

A guard dog he definitely is not. I reckon if we were unfortunate enough to have burglars he'd quickly show them where I hide my stash of chocolates. And if they came by night, he'd hold the flashlight for them and lead the way.

The cat on the other hand is totally different. He is mischievous, devious, scheming and conniving. And cunning too!

He certainly knows that he owns the house and we're all living-in domestics devoted to catering to his every whim and needs.

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He decides when he wants to be in, and when he wants to be out. And he certainly makes his wishes known by jumping at the back door and scratching it until it is opened. And that's how our problems started really.

We just couldn't have a cat jumping at the kitchen door whenever it wished and expecting us ... well me mostly ... to get up and open the door to let it out and in. Besides, it was scratching the door badly and this had to stop.

That's when I decided to fit a cat flap to the back door. You know the kind of thing I mean ... It's a small aperture the size of a cat with a swinging little door hinged from the top which opens and shuts both ways depending on whether his Majesty is entering or leaving his palace.

But fitting a cat flap is one thing. Teaching a stupid cat to use it is another. He continued his old habit of jumping at the door expecting us to open it for him. So I had to teach him how to use the new contraption fitted especially for his convenience and our peace of mind.

Have you ever taught a cat to do anything? I mean a totally stubborn and stupid cat?

I sat him there by the cat flap; I went down on my hands and knees and pushed my hand in and out of the small opening. He rolled on his back playfully pawing the air.

I sat him up again and tried once more. He ignored me and tried to grasp my hand as it appeared through the cat flap.

I shut the kitchen door and went out in the garden, still on my hands and knees. I opened the cat flap and called him through the aperture. He totally ignored me and walked away. The neighbour saw me on my hands

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and knees and she must have wondered if I was trying to enter the house through the cat flap.

Eventually the cat wanted out again. So I picked him up and stood him by the cat flap and slowly pushed him forward towards it. He stiffened his legs gripping into the carpeted floor as if his life depended on it. The more I pushed, gently of course, the more he fought back eventually turning on his back like an acrobat and scratching my arms.

Finally I managed to get him through the cat flap and out in the garden. But minutes later he wanted in again. He started jumping at the door.

I went down on my hands and knees inside the kitchen and called him in. No response. He was still there jumping forwards and backwards towards the door thinking it was a new game to play. I put my hand through the cat flap to encourage him to come towards me. No use.

I put my head through the cat flap to show him it was me calling him ... and that's when matters got worse. My head got stuck in the cat flap. I could not move it forwards or backwards as I lay there flat on the kitchen floor seeing from the corner of my eye the cat walk away in disdain whilst the dog could be heard snoring in front of the TV. No point in shouting for help ... there was no one at home at the time.

I lay there on the ground, inches from the cat litter tray with my head tightly stuck in the tiny aperture at the bottom of the kitchen door. What a way to die ... I thought. I could read the obituary in my local paper. Cat-fetish man dies alone at home.

It was hours before I was rescued and released from that infernal cat flap.

The good news is that after a week or so the cat learnt by itself to use the cat flap. He now wanders in and out at will. And that's when my problems took another turn for the worst.

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The crazy creature has now decided to bring in dead mice and birds into the house. Even a dead small frog the other day! I told him to stop it, but stupid cats don't understand when you talk to them do they? Or perhaps clever cats understand and just ignore you anyway.

I discussed the matter with an animal psychologist. He said this was only natural feline behaviour. The cat is a hunting animal and he is bringing in his trophies to share with me at mealtimes. As if I need a dead mouse or bird to complement my steak and French fries, or whatever I happen to be eating at the time.

All in all, the animal psychologist proved to be a waste of time and money. I paid him a great sum to re-define the problem rather than find a solution.

The cat flap is still there. The cat uses it when it wants. It still brings in all sorts of dead trophies into the house. Whilst the dog snores happily in front of the TV only to growl fiercely at any attempts to change away from the Dog Channel!

As for me ... I live there I suppose ... by kind permission of a self-willed conniving cat and his canine accomplice.

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SCHEMING CAT

I often work from home mostly using my computer, the telephone and the Internet.

It's quite productive really in that you don't have to get up early to get ready for work and drive miles to the office by car, train or bus.

I often sit there in my corner office in jeans and T shirt and type away like mad. The recipients of my many e-mails don't know or care what I'm wearing or whether I shaved this morning or not. As long as I produce what I have to produce effectively on time every one is happy.

Including the dog sitting there on the mat snoring in front of the TV!

But of course not the cat. Never restful, he has to make his presence felt. Either by rubbing himself against my legs whilst I'm typing, or jumping on my lap, or on the table disturbing all my papers carefully laid out in order of priority.

His priorities come first ... and me working hard to earn a meagre crust is never number one in his list of things to do.

No matter how often I move him away, he still returns to play and interrupt my chain of thoughts.

The other day however I believe he went too far. I just could not work on the computer ... why? Because I had lost my computer mouse.

I looked everywhere. First, under my desk ... pretty obvious place to start but it was not there. Amongst my papers ... no. Inside my brief case ... not there either.

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I widened the search and started looking in other rooms ... behind the settee, under the armchair, behind the TV, under ... over ... beside and behind every other piece of furniture in the house. It was no use. The computer mouse had totally vanished.

I eventually found it in the cat's tray in the kitchen. Apparently the cat took it there and used it as a toilet accessory in retaliation of me trying to stop him bringing dead mice and birds into the house.

It was a question of no mouse for me and no mouse for you ... It's really getting to be quite a battle between the cat and me right now. I'm sure he has developed a superior intelligence and ability far beyond his feline capabilities.

The other day I caught him exchanging labels between tins of best salmon and tins of cat food. Obviously he wanted me to feed him salmon by mistake and for me to serve my guests cat food on canapés!!!

(Thinks) They're so refined they would have eaten it anyway and marvelled at my culinary skills!!!

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OF MICE AND MEN AND SMILING CATS

The cat is now fully competent at using the cat flap. He goes in and out of the kitchen when it wants and is master of his domain once again.

Not so the dog. He still has to make it obvious that he wants out and we open the door for him. Once he's finished his business outside he comes back in and watches TV all day long.

The attempted truce with the cat regarding the matter of bringing into the house dead mice and birds has not held. In fact the truce did not even get a chance to see the life of day. The cat insists on his feline rights according to some International Convention or other and decided to totally ignore me and bring in whatever dead creatures he chooses. He even brought in the remains of an old bird's nest the other day. Just to make his point, you understand.

I have been demoted to collector of these dead creatures and cleaner-upper once the carcasses have been removed.

I took a dead mouse out of the house the other day and to the back garden to throw it in the bin. I was followed by the cat jumping at my legs hoping I'd give it the mouse to play with. The dog, clever one he, sat on the mat undisturbed watching TV.

The cat kept jumping at my feet while I was in the garden and in his stupid acrobatic jumping he landed on the door slamming it shut.

I have a back door that opens from inside, but it requires a key if you are out trying to get in. You guessed it ... I did not have a key.

The cat ran into the house through the cat flap, leaving me stranded, locked out of my own house.

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I saw him through the window sitting next to the dog enjoying TV. Then he jumped on the table and enjoyed my milk-shake - chocolate milk-shake.

I had to climb up a tree and squeeze myself into the house through a narrow window ... (Thinks) ... I need to lose weight.

No sooner was I in the house than the front door bell rang. It was the police trying to arrest me for breaking into my own house. Someone must have seen me getting in through the window and phoned them.

I hate cats ... and stupid dogs who can't open doors when asked nicely or even when shouted at.

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A CAT'S VENDETTA

You may well find this amusing, dear friends; but it's getting really very serious.

I honestly believe my cat has a vendetta against me. Ever since I tried to stop him bringing dead mice and birds into the house he has taken it upon himself to fight back, and fight really hard, to undermine me in my own house.

Yesterday I could hear him meowing distressfully from a distance. I looked for him everywhere and could not find him. He was not locked in the toilet ... not in the bathroom either ... or in any of the bedrooms upstairs. He was not in any of the cupboards having entered there mischievously while I was getting something. He was not trapped behind the settee or any other furniture. He was not in the fridge either!

Of course, the lazy dog did not help with the search for his companion. He just sat there on the mat watching TV. Must have been the Dog Channel or something just as inane!

Anyway, I could still hear the cat calling for help in distress. I looked in the garage and there he was ... up a big tree in my back garden.

This huge tree is on my side of the fence between me and my neighbour and pretty close to both our houses.

I called for the cat to come down. He meowed even louder and stayed up there frozen stiff. I brought him some milk in a saucer to tempt him down. No movement whatsoever. I tried to get him something to eat ... opened a tin of best quality salmon for him. Still no movement!

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Whilst I was getting the salmon, the dog came out in the garden, drank the milk in the saucer and went back in to watch TV just as the adverts had finished and his program had started.

I even waved a dead mouse high above my head to entice the stupid cat down but to no avail. He just would not move.

I brought out a tall ladder, placed it against the tree trunk, and up I went; having of course said a short prayer in case this was my last ever act on this beautiful world.

Up and up I climbed until I found a branch strong enough and thick enough to carry my weight (generous as it is) and I gingerly left the ladder and stepped onto the said branch itself. Unfortunately, as I did so, I felt the ladder slip from under me and down it went crashing to the ground. Miraculously it did not break the fence or the lovely pots of flowers nearby, but it left me stranded half-way up a tree as it lay peacefully on the ground far below me.

The noise the ladder made as it fell startled the stupid cat who suddenly discovered long hidden courage and jumped from one branch to another in athletic leaps and bounds until he got down to the ground and into the house through the cat flap.

So there I was up the tree unable to get down whilst the cat was watching TV with the dog.

At this point I must tell you that my neighbour is a young lady living alone. Oh ... I might as well mention that the tree, from that height, overlooks her bedroom window.

Anyway ... what could I tell the police? They would hardly believe the truth would they? Not after the episode when the cat locked me out of my house.

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I could not even tell them that I was picking apples from a huge oak tree!!!

I don't think they believed my story that I was pruning the tree. The absence of a saw or any other gardening implements was a dead giveaway.

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MRS FELIX

The next door neighbour on my right is a lovely old lady living alone in a large house ever since she was widowed a few years ago. She spends her time tending to her lovely gardens both at the front and at the back of the house.

The front garden in particular is a joy to see. It is always full of flowers of every kind and colour especially roses. Red ones, pink ones, cream coloured ones all smelling heavenly as you walk past her house.

To be honest, she does employ a gardener, who visits every other day, but why be uncharitable and take away any credit which she deserves. Her garden is perfect and that's a fact.

I was off to buy a newspaper the other day and I saw her pruning the rose bushes. I greeted her as per usual and she just mumbled something incoherent under her breath.

“Are you all right Mrs Felix?” I asked politely, “you seem awfully quiet today!”

“Oh I'm sorry ...” she apologised, “I'm very upset just now ... Churchill is dead!”

Well, I know she is a little elderly, but not so much so that she's losing her marbles poor soul. We all know that the famous politician has passed away years ago, but this is taking bereavement a bit too far. It's not his anniversary or something? I thought to myself.

She noticed the puzzlement on my face and added, “Churchill is a pet of mine ... or rather he was!”

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I nodded silently and thought, we all have our favourite celebrities or film stars I suppose, but I've never heard of a favourite politician. Then the light bulb switched on in my head ... she has, or had a pet named Churchill.

Now I've never seen nor heard a dog barking in her back garden, nor have I seen a cat there either. So what possibly could Churchill be? A rabbit? No ... she doesn't look like a rabbit person. A tortoise maybe ... a bit too slow I suppose, even for her.

"I found him dead in his cage ..." she said.

Ah ... a budgie. Or a prize winning budgie to be precise! I wondered what he'd won prizes at ... whistling in the dark without any sheet music perhaps. Or holding his breath whilst looking at the little mirror in the cage? My brain cells were suddenly in overdrive and I was rehearsing budgie jokes to myself. I wonder whether a budgie is good at budgie jumping I asked.

"I'm thinking of burying him in the back garden ..." she said, "will you help me do it?"

That's odd I thought. I always thought dead budgies get a naval burial down the toilet ... or is it goldfish?

Anyway ... let's help this kind old lady and notch it up as my good deed for the year.

I entered the house and she showed me a little cardboard box which once contained biscuits. There, lying peacefully on its side on a bed of soft cotton wool was Churchill. All three inches of him.

I took the box from her hands and its cover and followed her in the back garden. She chose a nice shady place by a tree and decided to bury him

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there. I put the box and its lid on the garden table and followed her to the shed to get a spade.

And just then it happened ... catastrophe of all catastrophes.

Out of the bushes came my own stupid cat from next door. He pounced on the table, grabbed Churchill in its mouth and ran away. It all happened so quickly in slow motion ... like it often does in the movies.

I thought ... Noooooh ... in slow motion of course. I can often think in slow motion ... my speciality.

I stood there frozen on the spot while all this happened. Mrs Felix continued totally unaware towards the shed.

As I regained my senses I rushed to the box and put the lid back on.

I started digging furiously where she asked me to ... all the time praying that she did not wish to see Churchill one more time by opening the box. As soon as the hole was large enough I picked up the box from the table and placed it deep down.

“Aren’t you going to say anything nice?” she asked, “You being a religious man and all ...”

“Oh yes ...” I replied, “dear Churchill I have never had the pleasure of knowing you in life... but I’m sure you brought a lot of happiness to Mrs Felix and all those who were fortunate enough to know you ... may you now rest in peace ... wherever you are!”

“Amen ...” said Mrs Felix wiping a tear as I buried the box hurriedly; and as my cat came out of the bushes licking his lips in sheer delight.

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UNCLE HERBERT

Uncle Herbert came to visit us the other day. He's a lovely old gentleman much liked by the whole family for his kindness and extreme generosity.

He always arrives laden with gifts for everyone and I must admit to looking forward to my large bottle of vintage single malt whisky every time he visits.

He certainly is an expert at choosing great gifts that we can all love and appreciate Uncle Herbert is. Anything from something decorative or useful for the house to lovely toys and various presents for the children! All are received gratefully with open arms ... as well as Uncle Herbert himself of course.

If there's any spare space available in our open arms he is received gratefully there too.

Even the lazy dog lying on the mat opposite the TV reacts to Uncle Herbert's arrival. He looks up ... yawns ... and goes back to sleep.

The cat of course hurries in the corner of the room and consults his book of tricks to see how he can embarrass me in my own home in front of my own family and friends.

Oh what a lovely meal we had last Sunday when Uncle Herbert called. The best steak that money can buy, all sorts of roast vegetables, with Yorkshire pudding, gravy and all the trimmings. All washed down with fine wine (and orange juice for the kids) followed by a steamed plum pudding with custard and a glass or two of port – just to celebrate you understand.

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After such a sumptuous meal the rest of the family decided to go out to the park for a walk to help the digestion ... and I was left alone with Uncle Herbert.

He settled in front of the TV in his favourite armchair and pretty soon he felt the effects of the food and drink and followed the lazy dog into the land of nod.

I sat on the settee for a while relaxing and pretty soon the conniving cat was up to his tricks again. He jumped on the back of the armchair just behind Uncle Herbert and gently tried to paw his head whilst he was asleep.

I should mention at this point that Uncle Herbert wears a wig. It's pretty obvious to anyone I think except himself. He's obviously self-conscious about his bald head and prefers to cover it with some falsies instead ... Hey, why not. If it makes him happy why should we interfere?

Sensing a potential disaster with the cat standing just behind Uncle Herbert's head I quickly, but silently, tried to entice him away with a morsel of food from the dinner table.

Eventually, the cat moved away and I cleared the dinner table and went to the kitchen to wash the dishes, leaving Uncle Herbert and the dog fast asleep.

Half an hour later when I'd finished washing up I returned to the living room to find Uncle Herbert still asleep in the armchair minus the wig.

What could have happened ... I panicked. Surely the cat did not take it away without waking Uncle Herbert!

I searched everywhere for the missing wig. First behind the armchair ... pretty obvious place. Then on either side of the sleeping man in case the

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wig fell by his side. Then ... as usually happens in these circumstances ... I widened the search area.

They say when you're looking for something it will always be in the last place you think of looking ... again, pretty obvious ... because once you've looked there and found it, then it will be the last place and you'd stop looking. The thing is ... where is this last place where the wig is supposed to be?

It was one of those quick and frantic searches yet carried out very quietly because I did not want to wake sleeping Uncle Herbert. It had to be done hurriedly before the children came back from the park and discovered that their uncle had detachable hair.

A cold sweat covered my forehead and trickled silently into my eyes. My heart was pounding in my chest like a drum sending my blood pressure to new highs.

Think ... think ... think ... where else could it be? I even looked in the fridge and in the washing machine ... although why it should be there is beyond anyone's imagination. But when I panic ... I really panic ... I'm expert at it.

And panic makes you do stupid things ... like go out in the back garden hoping for inspiration ... or just to escape from being inside where all the panic is.

How could I possibly explain to Uncle Herbert that his wig had disappeared? What if the family came back and the children asked him if he'd shaved his head as a fashion statement? Do you think he'd be angry enough to want his whisky back?

Questions ... questions and more questions ran through my mind as I stepped into the garden for inspiration.

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Just as well I went out because that's exactly where the wig was ... right in the middle of the garden. That wretched cat will be the end of me one day ... I can read it in the Medical Journal already ... heart attack induced by family cat!

I picked up the wig which was by now covered in dirt and cat's saliva. How do you clean a wig? Anyone know? More questions.

I can't put it in the washing machine ... the spin dryer would turn Uncle Herbert into a curly head.

I can't vacuum clean it ... it would get sucked up in the machine and transformed into a mop.

I can't beat it hard against the wall to knock off the dirt ... it would probably moult and lose or shed hair ... and poor bald Uncle Herbert would have a bald wig to cover his bald head.

I rubbed my hand across the wig gently and slowly wiped away the cat's saliva with a clean cloth. I then tiptoed into the living room and tried to replace the hair-piece onto its rightful place ... one problem ... which way is forward and which way is backwards ... it all looked the same to me.

I gently let it drop on Uncle Herbert's head and quickly sat on the settee pretending to be asleep just as he woke up and straightened his wig to its pre-destined position without any care or notice.

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LIQUID TRICKS

In our modestly furnished living room, just by the TV set which is in one corner of the room we have a small glass tank rectangular in shape - capacity about 20 litres - with two goldfish swimming happily. I must admit, these days you get more entertainment from watching the fish tank than the TV.

Oh ... I must tell you this ... I was sitting on the settee the other day half-dozing off with the TV switched off. I was asked by my wife as she came in "What's on TV?" and I replied without thinking "Dust!"

My joke was not well received. There were a few harsh words said about my lack of movement and I didn't get a cooked meal that evening! I would have been in the doghouse all day but our dog was there already growling whenever I came near him.

But I digress.

Anyway, as I was saying, we have this big open topped tank with two goldfish swimming in it happily watching us living our varied lives. Now usually we've had no problems with the cat. He probably didn't notice the fish tank or the fish, he being more interested in bringing dead mice and birds into the house and making my life miserable.

The tank I should say is on a side board (small cupboard) containing books. On top of the tank is a shelf fixed to the wall. The shelf has a few knick-knacks porcelain figurines on it. A couple of statuettes and a little crystal vase with a crystal rose.

Now someone, (definitely not me), left a large glass of pure orange juice on the shelf above the tank.

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WHY? I hear you ask. Why indeed. In fact I asked that same question myself. Why not just drink it and have it done with? Why not leave it on a table, in the kitchen, in the fridge, anywhere ... in the washing machine even! Why leave a full big glass of pure orange juice on the shelf above the tank?

Why did the cat jump on the shelf at that precise point in time? It has never done so before. What possessed it to wait for that once in a lifetime event when someone placed a large glass of orange juice on that very shelf ... and at that very moment decide to jump on the shelf as well?

Why did the cat do that? I'll tell you.

The glass of orange juice fell right into the tank followed by a couple of porcelain figurines. All the water turned orange of course. The poor goldfish got very confused indeed as they thought they were melting away into oblivion. One moment you could see them and then they were gone! I could hear them swimming around in what was to them total darkness I suppose ... orange goldfish in an orange sea. They kept bumping into the edge of the glass tank not knowing where they were.

I quickly got the figurines out ... because I could see them.

But have you tried to get two orange goldfish out of orange water? It's like looking for the proverbial needle in a dark cave with no lights on.

I hate touching goldfish ... they're slimy. So I put on one of those rubber gloves you use for washing up and cleaning. It was coloured orange!

So when I put my hand in the water I could no longer see my hand or the goldfish. I kept moving my hand but I did not know where it was ... and neither did the goldfish. They kept gasping for breath and got orange juice instead.

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I had to act quickly because goldfish and orange juice don't mix ... no matter how diluted.

I got a straw and drank ... and drank ... and drank ... Never drank so much orange juice ... tasted a little fishy too. Eventually I found the two fishes holding on to dear life. I pulled them out and put them into a large glass ... of pure clean water of course!

I washed the tank thoroughly and filled it again before putting the fish back into their rightful home.

The cat sat in the corner throughout this episode laughing at me. I could have easily sorted him out I tell you ... but I had to rush somewhere because there's a limit to how long I can hold 20 litres of orange juice inside me.

It now occurs to me that our cat is ORANGE ... or Ginger type coloured.

Had he fallen in the tank we would have had quite a situation on our hands ... or hand, because I only put one hand in the tank.

Cats hate water as you know, so he would have struggled madly to get out of the tank. But he being orange he'd have been totally lost in the orange liquid with two orange goldfish fighting for their lives.

Their struggle for survival would have turned the tank into a whirlpool of orange.

And every time I put my hand in the tank (wearing the orange glove) it would also disappear!!! Hey ... that's a neat magic trick ... any magician interested?

I'll patent it and make a lot of money.

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CATCIDENT

Why do bad things happen to nice people like me? I tell you why ... it's a curse because I have a cat.

I'll explain this just as it happened. Please read it carefully and imagine it in your mind as you read, because I shall only write it once. I just can't even recall the incident without a cold frisson running all over me.

I sat in the car whilst parked on our drive and I turned the ignition on. The engine started running ... tat ... ratatat ... tat ... ratatat ... It didn't sound quite right. It wasn't that smooth running sound you normally get from an engine when all is well. The ratatat bit was new and sounded somewhat off key. Like Luciano Pavarotti singing with one shoe off ... you know what I mean. Hobbling with your voice.

"One of the sparkling plugs must be loose!" I said confidently to my wife sitting beside me. I really didn't know what it meant ... I had read it somewhere and I thought it would make me sound intelligent and knowledgeable. It's good to build up your confidence in the eyes of your spouse ... after all, she know you more than most!

"Should we call the Emergency Repair Services?" she said reflecting her confidence in my mechanical abilities.

"Not at all ... it's a simple matter ... I'll soon have it sorted," I replied getting out of the car and leaving the engine running.

I lifted the bonnet (car hood) up like a professional would. Quickly and smoothly!

Now I should explain that this is an old car ... and it has a little metal rod on the side which you have to pull out vertically and hook it under the car hood so that it holds it up. In modern cars the car hood opens up

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smoothly and stays open by some clever pneumatic device. But my car is old ... so old that the Instruction Manual is written in Latin. You have to lift the car hood by hand ... then pull out the metal rod ... hook it under the hood in a special place and it keeps the hood up whilst you work in the engine. If you're a wimp that is ... If you're macho like me you just lift the hood up and hold it firmly with your left hand whilst working with your free hand in the engine.

So there I was holding the hood up in my left hand and looking down at the vibrating engine going tat ... ratatat ... tat ... ratatat ... There were wires everywhere but no labels or signs telling you which bit of the engine does what. I mean ... what does a sparking plug look like? Is it a light that sparkles on and off?

With my right hand I just pushed and prodded all the cables and wires confidently.

And that's when I got the most horrific electric shock you could imagine. It went straight up my right arm through my chest and up my left arm holding the hood. It was like those cartoon videos you see when a character touches a live wire and sparkles on and off.

In my agony I let go of the hood which fell with great weight and a single thud on my head knocking me down into the engine.

I could not decide for a moment which hurt the most ... the electric shock I'd just received or the clunk of heavy metal at the back of my head.

Neither of these pains soon mattered because the little fan that goes round and round inside the car engine compartment caught my tie and dragged me in further choking me all the time.

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The whole scenario looked like a car eating its driver as the hood bounced up and down as I struggled to free myself from the fan's throttling grasp. I was slowly being eaten up by my own car as my legs were flying in all directions.

At that particular moment my cat decided to come walking by beside me and I must have accidentally kicked it.

Instead of running away ... the cat decided to attack my legs by scratching hard at them and shouting "Vengeance is mine!!!"

This attracted our lazy dog who usually lies on the mat in front of the TV watching the Dog Channel.

Not this time ... there was something more entertaining going on outside! So out he came and decided to jump on me biting me several times ...

Luckily my wife switched off the ignition and the engine reluctantly released its grasp on my tie. I was still stuck head down though as I could not loosen the tie enough to slip my head out.

The tie was eventually cut with a sharp knife and I decided to phone the Emergency Repair Services after all.

I told them the tie must have been left in the engine by some careless mechanic at the workshop where I took the car for a maintenance service. That's probably what caused the odd sound in the engine.

They agreed that this was a distinct possibility although they wondered why I had the remains of a similar coloured tie round my neck.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

MISSING

I've been missing for three days. Without a trace. No one knew I was missing ... except me of course. I suspect none of you noticed my absence.

On Friday the family went down South to visit friends for the weekend leaving me at home alone with the dog, the cat and the goldfish. Oh bliss ... as long as I can keep the three of them separate I'll have a peaceful weekend all to myself.

But this was not to be.

Let me explain that we live in a very old Victorian house which has a cellar spanning the whole floor area of the property. You enter the cellar from a door just under the staircase.

We don't use this basement often, it's mostly a storage area nowadays where we keep a few bottles of wine lying lazily on shelves which I built myself ... slightly leaning to one side mind you ... but still OK if you wedge a book at the end and it stops the bottles from rolling off.

We also keep some foodstuff down there, mostly tins of soup, various tins of vegetables and fruits and other household goods like detergents, washing liquids and so on. You get the idea ... just a storage area for things we use now and then.

The basement used to be a small apartment for a servant or butler in years gone by ... it has a small kitchenette and bathroom still fully plumbed in and in working order, and a tiny living/sleeping area. Most probably their servant or butler back then was small in stature and so he fitted in quite well ... just like a little ornament you put on a shelf I suppose.

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As we have no servant or butler I of course have taken on these responsibilities in our household ... but that's another story ... I digress.

Now where was I? In the basement ... or about to enter the basement to be precise. I needed some soap so off I went downstairs as one would in such circumstances. It would have been pointless going upstairs because we don't have a basement upstairs ... we have an attic or loft there. Also full of bits and pieces!

As I got downstairs there was an almighty crash in the house as the dog started chasing the cat who followed me down in the basement. The dog ... huge as he is ... like a small pony really ... did not quite fit in under the staircase where the basement door is situated, but his immense stature slammed the door shut. That's when I heard a clunk ... clunk ... clunk ... sound all the way down the stairs and at my feet.

Perhaps I should have mentioned that the door handle has always been a little loose. I've always planned to fix it ... Lord knows I've been told often enough ... but with that and the leaning shelves it was all a question of priorities. Which one to fix first ... and neither was done!

I picked up the door handle and tried to open the door ... No use ... it would not work. And that's how I went missing without a trace in my own house.

No one knew I was there ... No use shouting for help. No one would hear me. No point in phoning for help ... I didn't have the cell-phone with me.

Try as I might to open the door but it was all in vain. An hour or so later I heard the phone ring in the house and the loudspeaker on the answering machine said "Hello ... we've arrived safely ... Oh ... you must be out. See you Sunday evening. Bye!"

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Great ... what a prospect. Trapped in my own house for two whole days.

Now it is said that in such circumstances of extreme trauma one should sit down calmly, take deep breaths and concentrate. No need to panic. Calm down and concentrate.

And nothing aids concentration more than a drop or two of wine. Fortunately we have plenty of that here. Or beer if one prefers ... which is also easily to hand.

After an hour or so of concentration I still had no idea on how to get out of my prison.

My mind was getting a little hazy ... perhaps it's the lack of air down here. There's a small window at the far end of the basement leading to the back garden of the house. It's at ground level when you're out in the garden ... if you see what I mean. It's too small to get out of and it is barred anyway ... but ... I did tell you wine aids concentration didn't I? But ... if I could get the cat out of the window he could go for help!

I could tie a message to his collar ... No that won't do ... he doesn't wear a collar. Too dangerous you see ... he could get caught on a tree branch and injure himself ... So we've never put a collar on him.

Perhaps I could tattoo a distress message on his body ... a bit extreme I must say ... It'll stay with him for life ... "HELP ... I'm trapped in the basement!"

The problem is I have no tattooing equipment whatsoever down here ... and I've never tattooed anyone in my life let alone a cat.

What if I cut a message in his fur with scissors ... like some people do with their hairstyle when they cut their hair in different patterns? Would the cat stay still enough until I finish cutting his fur I wonder?

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I think I need another drink ...

Ah ... I got it ... this is certain to work. I could empty all these tins of peas ... well some of them anyway ... no one likes peas. I could tie them to one another with a long string and tie that to the cat's tail.

He'd make such a noise running all over town that someone is sure to find him and read my message which will be written on one of the tins.

I emptied about a dozen tins ... Peas taste awful when eaten cold you know ... even washed down with beer. I tied the tins together. Wrote a message on several tins to make sure it is read. I went to get the cat sleeping happily in the corner when he suddenly got up and shot out through the window.

Typical of that cat ... un-cooperative to the last. He just would not help me in my moment of need.

I was found fast asleep on Sunday evening.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

THE ARMCHAIR

I may have mentioned that Uncle Herbert is very generous and always brings us many gifts when he visits. Well ... this time his generosity knows no bounds. I wish it did really ... There's one thing like being generous and then another when you actually take over someone else's life. I don't mean to be critical ... Yes I do actually; otherwise I wouldn't be telling you this. Let me explain.

The other day a large van drew outside our house and they delivered a large box. We weren't expecting anything apart from a book that is. I'd ordered a book from the Internet called "How to Control your Cat - Or your Money Back!"

Come to think of it, that book never arrived. I bet the cat intercepted it and returned it for a refund. But I digress. This big box arrived and when we opened it, it contained a huge armchair.

Not a normal type of armchair mind you ... no, this was an inflatable armchair. And not the kind you inflate with air ... it would take ages and strong lungs to inflate something this size. No, this armchair had to be filled with water. It's like a water bed but armchair shaped. And it's in the most hideous blue plastic colour.

With the gift was a short note from Uncle Herbert saying "I saw this in the shop and thought of you."

WHY? Why would an oversized fluorescent blue inflatable armchair lead a kind, albeit somewhat demented old man, think of me? Do I look fat and wobbly maybe? I never even wear blue, so what led him to buy it for us?

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Anyway ... one has to be kind I suppose, and as Uncle Herbert is visiting again next week we decided to inflate the armchair with gallons and gallons of water. It must have emptied three local lakes to fill it.

It was placed in front of the TV where our dear Uncle often sits. It wobbles and moves as you sit in it and it makes you sea-sick, especially when the blue plastic reflects the light from the TV set.

So there was I yesterday sitting uncomfortably in this huge blue lagoon moving from side to side when I eventually fell asleep. There was nothing good on TV except the dust accumulated by the static. As I lay there sleeping, dreaming of being on a Pirate's Ship with Captain Blue Beard no doubt, when suddenly my dream turned into Titanic.

The stupid cat got wedged between the armchair and the wall and struggled to get free by scratching widely with his sharp claws on the back of the chair.

There were gallons of water flooding everywhere as I slowly sank down to the ground trapped in the infernal armchair as it folded itself with me in it ... and then I shot up violently like a rocket as the water made contact with an electric appliance in the living room.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

DOG TAILS

It isn't often that I write about my dog ... and it's quite understandable really, he doesn't do much worth writing about.

He just lies there on the mat in front of the TV watching the Dog Channel. I can hear him licking his lips when the adverts for dog biscuits are on. Dogs are very susceptible to adverts you know ... they're like children in this respect. You know how sometimes those TV people put toys and sweets adverts amongst children's programmes? It's deliberate you know ... a plot to get the children to pester you into buying them the toys in questions. Well it's the same with dogs ... as soon as the biscuits adverts are on there he is wagging his tail and looking at me in expectation.

And he's very choosy you know ... he won't have just any dog biscuits ... it has to be those shaped like little doggy faces. Same ingredients like any other biscuits really ... same ingredients as human biscuits I shouldn't wonder ... just a different shape to entice vulnerable dogs like mine.

I tried one of those biscuits the other day ... tastes like any other biscuit really; but I've developed a shiny coat on top of my head and a cold nose!

They had an unusual advert on the Dog Channel recently ... it's all I'm allowed to watch when the dog is in the house.

You know how they say that dogs can hear sounds that we cannot detect with our human ears? Apparently the frequency or the wavelength or whatever is such that we hear absolutely nothing yet the dogs can hear sounds that we don't ... Men have a similar ability by the way, but in reverse ... they can hear everything around them ... every minute new little sound emanating from the car engine or chassis when driven at

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speed through busy city traffic ... yet they can't hear their wives speaking next to them.

Must be irritating for wives I suppose ... your husband beside you doesn't listen to a word you're saying yet the dog at the back of the car can hear every thing!

Anyway ... back to the doggy advert. It was an advert for a new kind of music record ... or CDs as they're called these days. These CDs are recorded in the same frequency or wavelength that only dogs can hear ... You put them on your CD player and you hear absolutely nothing ... zero sound whatsoever will come out of your speakers no matter how loud you turn them on. But your dog will enjoy the latest Country and Western song to hit the charts. And they cater for various musical tastes too ... big band music ... jazz ... classical and so on.

They have a marvellous selection of songs especially for dogs ... How much is that doggie in the window ... The theme tune from the Lassie films ... You're nothing but a hound dog ... Who let the dogs out? Woof ... woof , woof. Our dog particularly liked this last one ... barking happily albeit somewhat out of tune with the song.

All were recorded on a special frequency so that only dogs can hear them. You should have seen him whining in delight whilst the adverts were on ... yet the TV was totally silent for the rest of us.

The advert showed birthday parties for dogs ... all of them dancing around to the music and not a complaint from the neighbours about loud noise disturbing the peace.

Anyway ... time for some exercise I thought. Enough of this sitting in front of the TV. I put the chain on the dog and tried to get him up and out in the fresh air.

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And what a struggle that was ... He would not move. He just sat solidly there refusing to move no matter how much I pulled on the lead. And to help him in this stubborn protest the cat sat on its back to add weight to the proceedings.

Not to be beaten in my endeavours for fresh air and exercise I had a brilliant idea. I found one of the children's skateboards ... You know the ones ... a narrow wooden or plastic board with a set of wheels underneath used by children to move quickly and perform jumps and stunts; and used by adults to have numerous accidents and break bones.

So I got this skateboard and slowly manoeuvred it underneath the dog ... he quickly stood upright on all fours. Standing there on the skateboard with the cat still sitting comfortably on the dog's back.

And that's how I took both of them for a walk. I pulled on the lead and they glided happily behind me. Every so often the dog would bark by a tree ... I would stop ... and there still on the skateboard he'd lift his back leg and do his business.

I met an old friend whilst out walking the dog. He was taking his goldfish for a walk. Put the bowl into the baby's pram and off he went.

We stopped and talked for a while and then suddenly he put his hand on his chest and collapsed to the ground.

I quickly used my cell phone to call an ambulance.

The operator asked me where I was and I said Laburnum Avenue. She asked me to spell it ... and I couldn't.

I mean ... who can spell laburnum these days ... There were no street signs anywhere for me to read the name and spell it out to the operator.

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I had to do something quick. My friend was lying there on the ground gasping for breath. I feared the worst ... The dog, cat and goldfish were totally unperturbed by the whole event.

So I dragged my friend all the way round to Oak Street and phoned again.

Now I always carry a dictionary with me. You never know when someone might ask you to spell laburnum.

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SLOWLY DOES IT

I am writing this story very slowly today.

And I'm not implying that you out there are slow readers ... so don't be insulted. You just read at your own pace, as is your want. Some of you might read fast, others may read slowly ... some may skip the odd words and just skim through my writings, and quite a few I should imagine may well nod off.

Do so if you wish ... I won't mind. After all, I often fall asleep whilst I'm writing. So why not you? You have your little snooze and I'll wake you up when I get to the end of the story.

So as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted ... I really must stop interrupting myself you know. It totally confuses my train of thought ... anyway, where was I?

Ah ... yes, aren't train fares rather expensive these days? Time was that you could go from here to everywhere for next to nothing ... because the railway men were always on strike. No trains, no tickets, no travel.

It was either strikes or late trains. They never arrived on time. Quite irritating really, until our local station found a good solution to get the trains on time. They withdrew all the timetables (schedules) and replaced them with calendars.

They had a notice the other day apologising for the lack of trains due to shortage of drivers. I ask you ... why can't they recruit taller drivers?

The same problem applies to the ballet you know. All those ballerinas standing on tip toe ... employ taller women and your problem is solved!

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Those railway ticket people do irritate me you know ... I said to the man
“May I have a return ticket please?”

He asked “Where to?” I replied “Back here of course ...”

Anyway ... let’s not derail the discussion any further. I am writing this
very slowly because I am wearing a neck brace.

Why? I hear you asking. Although one or two of you may not care
whatsoever I suspect.

Well my wearing a neck brace has nothing to do with me being a famous
wrestler, because I am not. It has nothing to do with me watching a tennis
tournament on TV and turning my head suddenly from left to right for
long periods of time. In fact it has nothing to do with sports or any
physical activity whatsoever ... nor is it part of my accoutrement to make
me look somewhat more trendy and fashionable.

Let me explain ... I am not a morning person. I find it very difficult to
wake up. I believe that days should be made to start at noon and not at
some unearthly hour when the cock crows for no particular reason at all.

As soon as I return to the land of the living each morning I force myself
to do my morning exercises. Up ... and down ...up ... and down I do
this ten times. Then the other eyelid ... Up ... and down.

So there I was walking out of the bedroom in my pyjamas ... Before you
say anything ... no ... I do not have a bedroom in my pyjamas. I meant I
walked out of the bedroom wearing my pyjamas ... and I was bare feet at
the time I might add. So ... as I came out of the bedroom I heard the
postman delivering the mail downstairs. Early delivery I thought as I
proceeded towards the stairs.

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And as I was about to step down I heard a blood curdling EEEEEK!!!! under my bare foot and it felt somewhat squeegee and fury and wet.

It was a semi-live mouse that the wretched cat had brought in and placed right up at the top of the stairs. My breakfast I suppose.

Well ... I lost my footing didn't I? And down I went all the way to the front door.

As I lay there flat on the ground amongst a pile of letters which had just been delivered ... mostly invoices and final demands I should point out ... I was asked "What happened? Did you miss a step?"

"No ..." I replied in agony, "I hit every one of them ..."

At the hospital the ambulance men rushed me to a room where I was met by a very short doctor ... he was a knee specialist.

He soon left and was replaced by a very tall doctor who fitted me with the neck brace. OK ... you can wake up now you two! I've finished my story.

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AT THE VET

It's that time of year again. I had to take the cat to the vet. Nothing serious of course, how could there be? This cat has nine lives and nine more to spare. He's as agile and fit as can be with a brain as sharp as it could get and all too ready to plot against me and plan my downfall in my own domain.

If this cat was a politician he'd charm everyone so much that even his electoral opponent would vote for him. Fortunately he is a cat and no more than that ... that's what I keep convincing myself of. He is a cat whose only aim in life is to make mine miserable. He brings dead mice and birds in the house ... a matter which I've complained about many times and I've been told that it's only natural ... He's being friendly and wants to share his trophies with me.

Well ... thank you very much but I'm not interested. I'd rather he sticks to cat food like all civilised cats do.

I suppose I understand his instincts to prey on his victims and hunt them down ... after all most politicians do that. But does he have to bring them into the house?

Anyway ... back to my story before I got carried away! Figuratively speaking of course. I'm still sitting here relating my latest adventure. If I'd been literally carried away the story would have ended here and now. But it hasn't. I hear some of you muttering "More's the pity!" but that's very unkind. After all I'm the victim here not the cat.

So I had to take him to the vet for his annual vaccinations. You know the kind ... Immunisation against all sort of feline diseases and allergies appertaining to cats. Except being cunning, conniving, plotting and scheming ... there's no vaccinations for that apparently.

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First you have to put the cat in this small carrier cage especially designed for the purpose. Easier said than done ...

Have you ever seen one of those contraptions? They are small ... cat sized actually ... there's no point in having a cage as big as a house is there? Difficult to carry for a start! It's a small box with a little door on the side. You open the door, put the cat in, and closed the door again. Simple ... if the cat is willing to co-operate that is.

It is dark in there and of course the cat is not interested is he? He's had previous experience of that box. It always leads to the vet where bad things happen ... as far as he's concerned. And as far as I'm concerned too ... have you seen how much the vet charges? His treatment costs more than the cat itself!

So I pick the cat ... He hisses and struggles. He rolls round on his back to escape. He bares his teeth. He scratches for all he's worth. He somehow manages to close the cage door just as I'm putting him in. The cage falls on the floor landing right on my foot. I jump and hobble in pain whilst the cat is permanently attached to my face with all claws drawn out like daggers. In my blind confusion I trip over the cage and land head first into the box of cat litter; whilst the cat escapes up a tree and laughs raucously at my misfortune.

Several attempts and First Aid plasters later the cat's in the cage and we're at the vet.

And the same rigmarole starts again. The cat won't come out of the cage. He wriggles and turns on the vet's table. He runs up the curtains. We hunt him down and try to hold him still for a second or two whilst the vet prepares the injection. The cat hisses and scratches at the sight of the needle. I feel a sharp pain in my arm and all is over.

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Now the vet did say that the injection is not harmful to humans ... and the side effects are only temporary.

How could this be? If it's not harmful then why have any side effects? Temporary or otherwise?

In order to pacify me the vet agreed to waive the usual fee and asked me to come back next year without the cat.

The side effects of the injection are quite disturbing. I've noticed that recently I've started to lick my hands for no particular reason. I have an urge to climb trees and I sit purring happily at people when in public. It's very embarrassing on crowded trains and buses ... especially when I want to cuddle closely to people.

I went to see a psychiatrist. He said, "Get on the couch!"

I told him I'm not allowed on the couch.

He gave me some red tablets to take once a day. I asked him what they do. He said "I don't know. They're samples I've received this morning and I'm trying them out on new patients!"

He asked me whether I get sudden headaches and pain on the knees. I said that I didn't. He said that he'd had these symptoms for a week and couldn't work out what it was.

He then gave me a saucer of milk and a piece of fish from his lunch box. He presented me with an invoice for \$300.

Can you imagine that? \$300 for some milk and a piece of sardine sandwich!

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That cured me instantly I tell you. I said I'd report him to the Veterinary Society. He replied that he was not a vet.

“What business have you to treat a cat then?” I asked him directly.

He had no answer to that and he too agreed to waive his fee.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

Now not many of you know this ... in fact none of you know this, because I've never mentioned it before ... but I am a Shakespearean actor.

And by that I don't meant that I am a contemporary of the great Bard himself ... somehow fossilised and just discovered and brought to life. Although some people have been known to refer to me as an old fossil ... I can't think why ... rather unkind I reckon.

Just because I dress differently doesn't mean one has to be insulted! I just happen to like wearing a toga. It gives me an air of dignity and decorum. See what I've done there? I used two words with the same starting letter ... dignity and decorum. It's called alliteration. No ... not an affliction ... that's a totally different kettle of fish. It's alliteration ... a poetic effect achieved by using several words all starting with the same consonant. Dignity and decorum! Delicious delicacy ... and so on.

Maybe I'm a poet and I don't know it.

Anyway ... as I was saying ... I believe a toga gives me an air of je ne sais quoi! Especially when I add a twig from an olive tree to my hat!

People point at me as I go to the shop in the morning to buy my newspaper and say ... look at that guy wearing a dress and a bowler hat with a tree on top. Must be Nero!

So, as I was saying ... I am a Shakespearean actor and a member of a small troupe who perform publicly at various venues far and wide. The further the better our audience might say ... but they're being unkind. We're very good really. Matilda, Hilary, Gerard and I. It's a small troupe as I said ... an ensemble you might call us. We try our best to be as

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authentic as possible when performing our plays ... even though some of us are getting on a bit.

Poor Matilda for instance ... she made quite a vision as Cleopatra with her false teeth and hairnet.

Age shall not wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety ... as our Bard would say.

And there she was dear Matilda ... totally un-withered and her infinite variety not at all stale.

But I digress ... as I am wont to do.

To get back to the point ... our little troupe rehearses our productions in our living room every Wednesday evening. We put the headphones on the dog so we don't disturb his TV viewing and we gather there to read our lines.

Now being a perfectionist, I like to dress in full costume beforehand and rehearse my lines in front of a full length mirror. You should have seen me as Mark Anthony the other day ... frightened the cat I did!

This evening I was rehearsing my lines from Hamlet.

To be or not to be ... that is the question! I said in my best English accent. To be ... or not ... to be ...

And the cat came into the room meowing and rubbing himself against my legs. I gently pushed him away and continued ... To be ... or not to be ...

But the wretched cat continued to pester me ... and my rehearsal turned more into ... To meow ... or not to meow ... that is the purr ... purr ... question.

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Go away ... I said to the silly creature ... this is a monologue ... not a catalogue!

But it wouldn't go away, so I eventually put him out in the garden just as my guests arrived.

So there we were ... Matilda, Hilary, Gerard and I ... enjoying a nice cup of hot lemon tea.

I like to offer them lemon tea because it loosens the vocal chords you see ... it was also on offer and a little cheaper at the supermarket this week.

So we were enjoying a nice cuppa and chatting away casually when the cat came in and gently placed a dead mouse at Matilda's feet.

Eeeeeek!!! She screamed loudly throwing her hot tea in Gerard's lap. He suddenly awoke feeling the sudden rise in temperature and accidentally kicked the small table sending teapot, sugar and Viennese biscuits flying through the air.

I like to offer Viennese biscuits because they're so delicate ... and also on offer ... buy one get one free. So I got two packets.

Anyway ... in the mayhem that ensued the dog suddenly awoke and rushed out of the room still wearing the headphones, dragging the TV to the ground as it broke into millions of pieces.

The whole evening's events were totally disrupted and our rehearsals adjourned to a date in the very distant future.

The cat enjoyed the Viennese biscuits but was not too partial to the lemon tea. I understand both Matilda and Gerard are consulting their respective lawyers.

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SWEET REVENGE

I remember reading years ago an article entitled *The Vicissitudes of Life*. To be honest, I don't remember much about the article or who wrote it. In fact I don't remember anything about it at all.

So why mention it? I hear you say.

Well it's the title you see ... or more precisely the word *vicissitudes* in the title.

Some words have a certain sound to them and have the ability to be imprinted on your memory ... well, not your memory because you haven't read the article in question ... but my memory.

I remember the word *vicissitudes*. Also the word *vestibule*. And *vicarious*. *Vagrancy* and *valedictory*.

You notice that all these words have one thing in common ... they are not much used today in every day language. They also suggest that I only bought one volume of the *World's Biggest Encyclopaedia of Knowledge*. But you'd be wrong ... I bought two volumes because I needed both to be able to reach on top of the wardrobe.

But that's beside the point. What is much nearer to the point though is the word *vicissitudes*. It means sudden changes in fortune.

You know what it's like ... one minute you're happy with your lot in life and the next you've slipped on a banana skin and landed in hospital.

Like being on a roller-coaster ... now there's another word you won't find in the V section of the *Encyclopaedia*. It means being up and down ... up and down ... throughout your life. Must be a very unsettling living

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like this I suppose ... unless you're an elevator assistant and then you get used to it.

So there it is ... the vicissitudes of my life. All this time I have been driven to maddening distraction by my cat plotting against me and then, just out of the blue, something happens to change things completely.

Let me explain.

I may have mentioned in the past that I am a Shakespearean actor. And a good one at that ... I won a Gold Star at school for my performance of Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was the back end of the donkey and my teacher said at the time I performed the ass to perfection.

I am also currently a founder member, chairman, treasurer and secretary of a small troupe of Shakespearean actors who perform throughout the land. Well ... throughout the local area where I live ... in the church hall down the street to be precise.

But be that as it may ... I have now landed a big part in a play that's showing locally in town. I play the part of a mouse.

I know it's not Shakespeare but he could have written it I suppose ... if he was into pantomimes. That's a British comedic theatre style ... for those of you who don't know.

I play one of the mice that turn into horses in the *Cinderella* story.

As I may have also mentioned in the past, I like to rehearse my lines in full costume at home in front of a full length mirror.

I realise that in *Cinderella* I don't have any lines to say per se ... I just stand there dressed as a mouse together with three other actors ... then there's a big bang as the Fairy Godmother waves her wand ... the lights

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go out ... and when they come on again we've left the stage and we're replaced by three other actors dressed like horses.

It's very complicated you see and requires a lot of rehearsals to get it right.

So I took my costume home and put it on ... then I stood there in front of the mirror looking like a giant mouse.

And that's when the vicissitudes came into full effect in my life.

The cat came in and AHHH!!!! He was totally frightened out of his nine lives. He thought one of the many mice he has been chasing in the past had come back for revenge. He climbed madly on top of the wardrobe and would not come down ... shaking to death he was.

What a turn of events. The cat who made my life hell all these years is now cowering away like a quivering jelly on top of the wardrobe. But vicissitudes have a way of changing quickly. Hence the word vicissitudes.

The lazy dog usually half-asleep in front of the TV woke up suddenly upon hearing the cat's commotion.

He looked at me and decided there's no way he'd let a giant mouse usurp his territory.

He started growling ... I tried to calm him down ... but he pounced toppling me onto the ground and biting me in several unmentionable places.

I'm currently recuperating in hospital ... but considering playing the role of the lion in our next production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

TICKET TO PARK

The thing about cats is that they are small and can hide and fit in the smallest of places without you noticing. They seem to slide along and would enter a cupboard whilst you're looking for something and without you realising it you've locked the poor creatures in.

I say poor creatures just to show you my good loving nature. Sadly, this is not reciprocated by my cat.

When he enters a place without my noticing him it is not by sheer accident. No ... not he. It is always part of an elaborate plot on his part to make my life more intolerable and miserable.

I was really in a rush the other day. I packed all my papers in my briefcase and got ready to go out and see a client. The cat kept pursuing me throughout the house and wanted to play. I really had not time for him and the more I ignored him the more he ran round my feet and risked being stepped over by accident.

I got out to the car and was about to leave when I remembered that I needed a certain file with me for the meeting. I went back into the house leaving the car door open. Literally seconds later I was back in the car and off to see my client.

Half a mile down the road I heard a meow from the back seat. It startled me and I nearly lost control of the car. I looked behind me and there he was ... sitting on the back seat licking his paws. The cat must have jumped into the car when I was in the house.

There really was no time to go back home ... I was late enough as it is; so I drove on to my meeting.

FELINE CATASTROPHES

I arrived at the client's house and parked a few yards away; it was the only available space in a restricted parking zone.

I put a few coins into the parking meter nearby and obtained a ticket which I placed on the dashboard – easily visible from outside by anyone looking through the windscreen or side windows.

I rushed to my meeting which lasted no more than twenty minutes. I repeat, just twenty minutes; which in normal circumstances is not a very long time. But my life is nothing approaching normal. Not when you have a cat intent on disrupting every moment of your life.

As I neared the car I found a Traffic Warden standing beside it writing in his notepad.

Let me explain what a Traffic Warden is. They are creatures from outer space devoid of all humanity, care or consideration. They have no compassion whatsoever for the human race and have been cleansed of every ounce of common sense which may at one time inhabited their tiny brains.

These creatures seem to materialise out of nowhere and stand by the roadside looking for vehicles which are wrongly parked or have overstayed their waiting period and ... like the robots which they are ... they issue penalty fines to be paid on the spot by unsuspecting drivers, or at a later date not exceeding 5 days.

It is really not worth reasoning with such creatures as Traffic Wardens since they have not been programmed so to do. Any attempt at conversation is met with the ubiquitous response, "I've started writing the ticket and I cannot cancel it!"

I approached this monster from another planet and said politely, "Hello ... what seems to be the problem?"

FELINE CATASTROPHES

“You have parked without displaying a parking ticket Sir,” he replied in a monotonous robotic voice.

I looked at the dashboard and sure enough, the ticket I had placed there not more than twenty minutes ago had vanished. I saw the cat’s tail wiggling to and fro under the passenger seat and all became clear.

There was obviously no point in explaining what had happened to this man from Planet Brainless. Even if he’d believed me, he would probably have called the Animal Welfare people who would have prosecuted me for leaving an animal alone in a car.

There was no alternative to paying the on-the-spot fine and drive home totally deflated and down-hearted whilst my cat sat on the back seat smiling all the way.