

THE CAT IN THE MAD HOUSE

A Cozy Cat Crime Caper (Cozy Cat Thriller
Book 2)

Peter Scottsdale

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ONE

“Let me out! Let me out. Let. Me. Out,” I meowed at Jamie, along with Tanzy and Alley cats.

“Where are you taking us? Not to the vet, I hope. He’s a bad human – always poking and prodding for no good reason,” Tanzy meowed to our human, driving the Camry.

We went down some streets and around several corners until Jamie pulled up to the curb at our final destination.

“We’re here, kitties,” he said, turning off the ignition.

“Where is here?” I meowed between the spokes of the carrier’s gate.

“You can stop all that meowing, you guys. You’re driving me nuts. Meow. Meow. Meow. We are at your new home,” our human said and got out of the Toyota.

He opened the back door and unbelted and grabbed hold of two of three cat carriers – one with Alley in it, the other with me in it. Tanzy sat on the front seat in her cage, still seat-belted to the seat.

“Can’t be too safe,” Jamie had said when he strapped us in the car at the old house.

“Let me out of this prison,” Tanzy meowed.

Our man carried us across a lush lawn. Sunlight beamed down upon us on this hot summer day. Jamie placed the two cat cages on the front step and unlocked the door.

“You guys are going to love it here. Just you wait to see what I have in store for you furry felines,” he said, bringing us inside.

The immediate stink of dog pee assaulted our breathing. He put us on the living room rug. The room housed our furniture from our old, small home. Mixed in with the dog urine smell was the scent of cleaning chemicals.

“Is there a dog in here? Did you get a dog, human?” Alley asked.

“Oh, God, I hope not,” I said.

Jamie’s cellphone rang. He dug it out of his pocket and slid the answer icon.

“Hi, Sweetheart. How’s my girl?” Jamie said to his adult daughter. A special human. “Yeah, we’re all moved in...Just bringing the cats inside...I still can’t be-

lieve I got this place at such a good price. I'm still surprised...Unuh, the living room smells like dog pee...and it's a yellow shag rug...Yep, kinda ugly and stinky...Yes, I am getting new carpet as soon as I can afford it. And, no, I'm not getting a dog to match the smell."

"Whew!" Alley mewed.

Relief waved over me. No dog – so good.

"There's someone here," Tanzy said from the Toyota.

We could hear her with our sensitive cat sense, but we couldn't see what was going on outside. Being stuck in these cages on the floor, we couldn't look out the window.

"She's opening the door." Her voice was panicky.

"What's happening out there?" I meowed.

Jamie shuffled into the kitchen and kept yammering to Paula.

"Jamie, something's happening outside," I meowed, loud.

"Yes, Sweetheart, I'm looking at it right now. I'm going to make the back sunroom into a cat room. The kitties will love it."

He peered out the rear window. Meanwhile, Tanzy was in trouble out front. Alley and I meowed with sounds, volume and fury.

"Tanzy needs help. Something's happening to her," I meowed.

"Help Tanzy," Alley added.

“She’s taking me out of the car. Help me! I can’t get away,” Tanzy yowled.

The car door clicked shut with little noise.

“Jamie! She smells bad,” Tanzy said.

“Jamie, let us out. We need to get to Tanzy. I think she’s being catnapped,” I meowed, but he didn’t understand me or take notice.

“She’s wearing a stained, ugly, blue and white dress. And she has dark and grey and greasy hair. She stinks so bad. Help! She’s taking me away,” Tanzy said with quick meows. Her voice getting quieter as the woman took her away.

“You’re coming to your new home. Where you belong,” the abductor said to our mostly Calico, part Tabby feisty feline.

“I’ve got big plans for the cat room,” Jamie said into his iPhone.

“Jamie!” Alley shrieked.

He turned and said, “What’s up with these cats? I guess they hate being locked up for so long.”

Tanzy’s pleading meows for help diminished and soon faded from our sensitive ears. Being stuck in these carriers, we weren’t able to see what happened or rescue her. Jamie could if he’d only looked out the front picture window.

“She’s gone.”

Two

“Tanzzy’s gone. Some woman took her,” I meowed to Jamie. “Let us out.”

“Well, I better go, Sweetheart. I’ve got to bring Tanzzy in. I almost forget her in the hot car...Yeah, the windows are open...Alright, I love you, my girl. Bye.”

He hung up his cellphone and came into the living room. We meowed. He didn’t understand. But we continued – loud and with urgency. Our human looked outside.

“Better get out there and get Tanzzy. Can’t leave her in a hot car even though I rolled down the windows,” he said.

Leaving us locked up, he opened the screen door and went outside, letting it slam shut behind him.

“Tanzzy? Time to come inside,” he said.

“She’s gone. You have to find her. She may be a feisty, crotchety Calico, but she’s ours. And we want her back,” I meowed.

Opening the car door, Jamie stayed silent, then said, “Where is she? She’s not here. Did I bring her in already?”

He returned to the house and searched the living room and kitchen.

“Where is she? She’s gone,” he said.

“Some woman took her,” Alley meowed and turned around in her cage.

“Oh, God. Where is she? Did someone take her? Where can she be?” he said, looking side-to-side out the picture window.

“Yes, she was taken,” I said. I wished he could understand.

Our frantic human rushed outside, slamming the screen door.

“Tanzy! Tanzy!” he called out.

His footfalls took him out to the street and down the road, yelling her name. No cat meowed. Jamie knocked on the neighbor’s door. His breathing was fast and deep. A woman answered.

“Yes?” she said.

“I just moved in next door and lost one of my cats. She was in the car and now she’s gone. Did you see

anything in the last five or ten minutes?” he asked the neighbor. His voice was almost shrill.

“No. I have seen nothing,” the woman said.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” came her stern reply.

“I’m sorry. I’m in a panic mode right now,” Jamie said, catching his breath.

“Okay, calm down. Take a few deep breaths,” the neighbor lady said.

“I need to find her. She was in a carrier in my car. And now she’s gone with the carrier. Someone took her.”

“I hate to tell you this, but she may be gone for good. Outdoor cats around here disappear and are never seen again. No one knows why. You should keep your cat inside – if she comes back,” she said.

“Oh no.”

“I will keep an eye out for her.”

“If you see anything, please let me know. I live in the next house. I’m Jamie, and she’s a Calico with some Tabby. Her name is Tanzy,” Jamie said.

“I’m Andrea. And I will. If you think she’s been stolen, you should call the police. Also, check with the people across the street and up the road. They may have seen something,” Andrea said.

“I will. Thank you,” Jamie said, leaving her house.

He crossed the street and knocked on several doors, asking if anyone had seen Tanzy. He was out of luck.

No one saw anything. He came home and paced the floor.

“Let us out. We can help,” Alley meowed.

“Be quiet, cats. I need to think,” he said.

“Yes, let us out,” I said.

Our human retrieved his iPhone and dialed 9-1-1. He put the call on speaker.

“Come on, answer.”

Jamie marched to the window. His head darted back-and-forth, searching.

“Hello, 9-1-1. What’s your emergency?” a woman said.

“Yes, my cat just got stolen. I don’t know who took her. I’m so worried. Please send the police. We have to find her,” Jamie said.

The operator asked for Jamie’s name and address, which Jamie gave.

“Sir, did you see your cat get stolen?”

“No, but she’s missing. She was in a cat cage and they’re both gone,” Jamie said.

“Jamie, I know you’re upset, but a missing cat is not an emergency. I will contact the police, and they’ll send someone out when they can. It shouldn’t take too long.”

“Okay. The sooner the better,” our human said.

“Maybe you should call Langston Falls Animal Control. They may end up finding her,” the operator said.

“Okay, sure, bye,” Jamie said and hung up. He put his iPhone on the end table.

“What am I going to do?” he said.

“Let us out,” we meowed.

Jamie searched outside the picture window again for any sign of her. Nothing. After more minutes of us hollering to get out, he opened up our carriers, setting us free. I stepped out with caution. This was a strange new house, and I didn’t know what to expect. Especially with Tanzy being gone. Alley bounded out of her cage, meowing.

I knew one thing: I needed to get outside. It was a strange new neighborhood, already proving to be dangerous for cats. But I needed to find Tanzy and get her home. No matter what it took.

THREE

Jamie stood up, paced back-and-forth, ran his fingers through his brown medium-length hair and sat down again. He wrung his hands and slapped his leg.

“Where are they? Where’s Tanzy? It’s been almost two hours since I called. Come on,” Jamie said.

After checking for danger in our new home, I moved to the front door and meowed. Our human ignored me. I meowed a second time.

“Let me out. I need to find Tanzy,” I said.

Alley came up to me. “What should I do? Do you need me to get outside with you?” she asked.

“No. One of us needs to be with Jamie. I don’t think he can handle losing all three of us. He’s getting panicky. Besides, you’ve never been outside before. I used

to live outdoors. I'm used to it – including the danger out there.”

“What danger?” Alley, the Tuxie, asked.

“Dogs for one. Here, help me meow at the door. Jamie needs to let me out. Start making noise,” I said.

We meowed in unison – loud and shrieking.

“Let me out,” I said.

“Let Scottie out,” Alley said.

Jamie came to the door and looked down at us, shaking his head.

“No, you're not getting out. I don't need to lose another cat. So, be quiet,” our human said, but we continued with our racket. Someone knocked on the door.

“The police,” Jamie said. “Scottie, back up.”

Alley made her way to the living room and jumped onto the table by the picture window. I stayed by the front door.

“Back up, Scottie,” the human said again. I got behind him. He opened the door and let a policeman in.

“Come in. My cat got stolen. Can you help find her?” Jamie said, and I slipped out the yawning doors. My human didn't seem to notice my escape. He kept talking to the man in blue.

“Her name is Tanzy. She's a Calico / Tabby mix – mostly Calico. Who would do that? Who would steal my cat?”

I looked about the front yard of green grass. Bushes grew along the edges of the property. I took off across the lawn and onto the sidewalk. The next house was where I ended up. I stopped and listened with my ears up and turning this way, then the other. A dog barked.

“Shut up, mutt,” I meowed.

A breeze blew by my fur, and the sun beat heat down on me. Like most cats, I loved the heat of the day. But I couldn't sit and enjoy the sunshine at that moment. I perked my ears. A car engine turned over, several cats meowed – looking for food, they were. None were Tanzy.

They must be starving to death from that noise, I thought.

Some other meows reached my ear drums. They sounded low and depressed. But none of the voices were our missing Calico.

She could be far away from here by now. I've got to find her.

I searched the neighborhood with my eyes. No other cats seemed to roam these roads. Walking west, I looked for our feisty feline. Two yappy miniature mutts – whatever they were – let me know they were there.

“We're dangerous! We're dangerous dogs,” they yipped at me. I approached them. “We're Schnauzers, and we'll tear you apart.”

They barked through a chain-link fence beside their house, bounding up-and-down. I got to the gate, sat, and waited. They yipped and yapped.

“Hey! Hey. Quiet down,” I said after a few moments.

They kept it up.

“I need to talk to you,” I meowed. “Stop yapping. You’re not impressing me. And I’m not scared either.”

They continued with a barrage of barks. My patience ran out.

“If you don’t shut up, I will jump this fence and claw your eyes out. All four,” I said, revealing the nails of my left front foot. I meant it – kinda.

They stopped their yapping and leaping.

“What do you want?” the twin curs said together.

“That’s better. Have you seen a woman wearing a blue and white dress, carrying a Calico in a cat carrier this afternoon?” I asked.

“We see everything here,” one of them said.

“Oh, good!” My heart leapt into my throat. “So, you’ve seen her?”

“Nope,” the other one said.

My heart dropped back down into my ribcage. “But you just said?” I said.

“We could have missed her,” the first one said.

“How is that possible? We miss nothing,” the second Schnauzer said.

“Did. You. See. A woman carrying a cat cage today?” I said through my front teeth.

“No. We. Did. Not...At least, not that we’d tell you.”

“Please. It’s important. Did you see her or not?” I meowed.

“Maybe,” the first dog said.

“But we won’t tell you,” the second mutt said.

“Why not?”

“Because we hate cats – especially like you. So, no. We did not see her.”

“Nope, we didn’t,” they said together with a yip to it.

I sprang at the fence and yowled. They skittered back with their tails between their legs when my claws came through the chain links. I missed the mongrels. They backed away far enough that I couldn’t reach their hides.

“If anything happens to Tanzy, I’m coming back for you two,” I meowed.

The two poor excuses for mammals raised their voices again – yipping and yapping from halfway down the walkway. Safe, out of my reach.

I should jump the fence and take it to them. But I have to find Tanzy, I thought.

“Damn dogs,” I said and walked away.

They kept up the noise until I turned into the next property, out of their sight. I moved to the second next yard and stopped. I listened again.

This new neighborhood produced some strange sounds – a screeching and scratching and howling from far away. But no sound from Tanzy. Lifting my nose into the atmosphere, I sniffed the air with a tremendous breath in. I caught her scent.

It was a slight smell, but it was definitely her. I detected which direction I had to go. I followed her aroma down the street, smelling the headlong wind as I went. Tanzy's scent grew slightly stronger, but so did the smells of the crescent.

Her essence diluted into the neighborhood odors. I smelled other cats – many of them – but didn't see any around. I halted in my tracks, inhaling, searching, trying to tell the difference between Tanzy's scent and the others – mostly felines.

What is going on here?

A dog stink invaded my nostrils. Garbage, flowers, cut grass and vehicle exhaust, as well. I turned my head one way and then another. Pausing, I waited. Nothing.

“Tanzy, where are you?” I meowed.

I lost her.

FOUR

The wind changed direction. I put my nose up, drew in a breath and smelled the breeze. I walked up one side of the street, then down the other, searching with my eyes, ears and nostrils. Seeing nothing, hearing nothing and not smelling anything that could lead me to Tanzy, I stopped. Some meowing from far away reached my senses, but none of it sounded like our missing Calico. I was lost.

Probably indoor cats. The meows sounded muffled and a ways away.

Maybe I can find some friendly felines to help me find our girl, I thought.

With my travels around the neighborhood, no cats seemed to roam the streets, yards, and alleyways. Except me, of course. I explored my surrounding, looking for felines in my unfamiliar territory.

Strange. No cats challenged me in this territory that I claimed. This must be some feline's territory I'm taking over. Where are they?

I scanned the area between houses, under cars, beneath porches and over fences. No outdoor cats. Are they all inside? Maybe there's a bylaw about roaming cats. I wandered the streets and roads and alleys, kicking up dust and small rocks in frustration.

"Who are you?" a cat meowed.

I gasped. Searching about, I found a Tabby with white peering out the screen door of a nearby house. I approached with caution – one step at a time. I reached the doorway, listened, and looked for danger. Finding nothing but still on edge, I went over and placed my front paws on the mesh. I looked in.

"I'm Scottie. Who are you?" I said.

"I'm Cleo Kitty," she said with a chirp in her voice.

"Can you help me? I'm searching for a feline friend called Tanzy. She is half Tabby and half Calico – well, mostly Calico. Have you seen her?" I meowed to her.

"No. What happened to her?" she asked me.

"Some human lady took her. Do you know any female person who might steal a cat?" I said.

She hesitated, looked away from me and down the street over my shoulder. Then she said, "Noooo! I do not."

She lied. I could tell. I know cats.

“Is she in here? Tanzy?” I said, peeking past Cleo into her home. My eyes adjusted from a sunny street to a darkened living room. It was a typical middle-class home. But no Tanzy.

“No, she’s not in here,” Cleo said, and hissed at me. “I haven’t seen her. Now, get out of here before you bring her here.”

“Who? What’s going on? Is ‘she’ the one who took Tanzy?” I said, with my nose pressed against the screen.

Cleo hissed again and spat at me. Fear disguised as aggression. I startled back.

“Go away.”

She dropped to the carpet and spun around. Taking off deep into her home, she disappeared.

“What the hell?” I meowed.

I shook my head and got down. After turning away, I stepped down to the walkway. I glanced back. Cleo peeked over the frame of their front window. I crossed her lush lawn and stopped at the sidewalk.

“What’s with her?” I meowed.

“She’s frightened. We all are,” some cat said.

In the house across the street, a Siamese cat sat inside the glass door of his home.

“I’m Scottie,” I said, getting across the road.

“Hamlet.”

My four legs got me up to his door in a hurry. I stopped and sat before their door. A television sounded in the background.

“What’s with her? What’s going on?” I asked him.

“We don’t know, for sure. It’s a mystery. I tell you. A conundrum wrapped in a quandary sprinkled with some catnip. Something’s happening. We see it every day – well, not each day. But we know,” Hamlet said.

“I thought you said you didn’t know?” I said.

“We don’t.”

“Hunh?”

“We know we don’t know. Get it?” the Siamese said. My eyes slanted, and I shook my head.

“Well, you better. Otherwise, how will you know?” the maddening Meser meowed.

“That I don’t know?” I questioned him.

“Exactly. Once you know this, you’ll reach enlightenment. Then everything will be clear and obvious.”

“Wait a minute! I’m not here for whatever you’re...selling. I’m trying to find my friend. She’s been abducted. Do you know anything? Besides, what you don’t know?” I said.

He sighed and leaned in close to the glass door.

“Cats are going missing,” Hamlet said.

“Yes, I know. I’m after a missing cat,” I meowed.

“Scottie, all the outdoor cats are going missing. Gone. Never to be seen again. What happens to them?”

We don't know. Just disappeared. Vanished. But there are rumors," he meowed.

"What rumors?" I asked him.

"I hear that there's some woman stealing outdoor cats, and some say she even goes into houses to take indoor cats. Better get yourself some place safe before it happens to you," Hamlet said, his eyes wide in telling.

"I have to find Tanzy. If that means being outdoors and risking it – so be it," I meowed.

"Get thee to a nunnery," Hamlet said.

"What are you talking about? You're the strangest feline I've ever encountered," I said.

"Never mind. She's gone. Get some place safe – if you can. Go before it happens to you. Get back inside and have your human lock the doors. I'm pleading with you. Stay behind locked doors."

"But I need to find her. I'm not stopping until I find her," I said.

He shook his head.

"She's gone for good. Face it. Give up on her. Save yourself. Before it's too late. Don't wait. Putting things off is dangerous. Believe me, I know. To be, or not to be. Right?" Hamlet said.

"Yes. This is a shot in the dark, but will you help me?" I asked the Siamese.

“I don’t know. I’d like to. But I can’t. I’m staying on this side of outside, unless there is a good reason,” he replied.

“Something needs to be done if cats are disappearing and every feline is living in fear. Can you get outside? I need your help,” I meowed.

Hamlet turned and meowed, “Human, can I get out?”

“Hamlet, be quiet. You talk too much. I’m trying to watch my soap operas,” a woman from inside the house said.

“Sorry. My human can’t handle it right now. But it would be a hell of an adventure. Bye!” Hamlet said and turned tail into his home.

“Damn that Siamese! But at least I know something now. Some woman’s catnapping neighborhood kitties, but where is she? Where are the kidnapped victims? I don’t know – but I better find out. Tanzy’s life depends on it, I’m sure.”

FIVE

I lifted my nose into the warm air and drew in a deep breath through my nostrils – no smell of Tanzy registered. I walked off Hamlet’s yard onto the street. A dog barked in the distance.

He might help. I have no other options at this point, I thought.

I wasn’t crazy about dogs or asking one for help. Noisy and smelly and they like to chase me – until I face them. Most stop in their tracks when they realize they are dealing with quick paws with sharp, blood-letting claws. I directed my ears to the barking, took an educated guess where he was and moved toward the mutt.

Stupid dog.

I slipped by some fences, ducked beneath some gates and pushed through some bushes. The hound

barked some more. A tone-deaf dog, for sure. I came to a yard with the noisy dog. A black Labrador with curly hair paced behind a tall, brown picket fence. I leapt onto the fence rail.

“Hey, dog,” I meowed, looking down at it.

The mongrel snapped his head my way and rushed the fence. I sprung off the plank and fell to the grass in the adjacent yard. I hissed and growled at the mutt. He laid out some more racket.

“Woof! Woof! Woof!”

I sat on the lawn and said, “Shut up, dog.”

“I scared you pretty good,” he said and barked some more.

“Who are you, boy?” I asked.

“I’m a girl. Spayed, but still a female,” she said.

“I thought you were a male,” I said.

“Nope. Female. Who are you?”

“I’m Scottie. What’s your name?”

“Frenchie,” she barked.

“Okay, Frenchie, what kind of dog are you? You look like a mixed breed. A little of this – a little of that. Maybe?” I meowed.

“I’m half Lab / half Poodle,” the dog said.

She peeked through the slates, sniffing. Her nostrils pushed open, then drew shut.

“What do you want, cat?”

“I’m looking for a friend of mine that went missing. She’s part Calico and part Tabby. Some human female stole her. I’ve been searching, but I lost her scent. I need to get her back. Have you seen her or anything that might help?” I asked the crossbreed.

She shook her head and looked me in the eye.

“I haven’t seen a cat outside in a long time. It’s been peaceful. You’re the first feline I’ve seen in weeks or maybe months,” Frenchie said, sitting down. She scratched her neck beneath her red collar.

“Damned. Have you seen a woman in a blue and white dress roaming the area?” I asked her.

“No. But I go for walks.”

“And did you see, smell, or hear anything unusual?” I asked. “Anything?”

“There is this one house a few blocks that way.” She pointed with her nose. “It smells like dirty – very dirty – cat litter. And when we walked by, I heard some cats meowing. It was hard to make out what they were saying. They drowned each other out. They sounded – low and depressed. I mean, that could be where she is. I don’t know, for sure, but it sounded like a lot of cats. Not my bucket of water. I’m sure you know what I mean. Just strange is all,” Frenchie said, and I stood up.

“Where is that, again?” I asked.

“Over that way. It’s a rundown house with long grass,” she replied.

“Tell me more,” I said, quickly. My heart beat faster, and my breathing sped up.

“It’s small and white with black shutters. The windows are covered. It’s hard to see in. And there are bags of garbage littering the porch. The walkway is partially grown over. The lawn is unkempt with tall grass and red flowers by the porch. And it stinks, too,” Frenchie told me.

“Anything else?”

“Nope. Not that I can think of. It’s a creepy place,” she said.

“Did you see any humans there?” I asked.

“No. But I couldn’t see inside the windows. All blocked up,” the dog said.

“Okay. Great! That’s the best lead I’ve had yet. For a dog, you’re not that bad,” I meowed.

“Go away, cat. You bother me. I can’t be seen helping a cat. What would the neighborhood dogs think?” she said and barked.

I rubbed against the fence, then took off across the lawn in the direction she pointed.

“I hope she’s there. Because the longer she’s gone, the more likely she won’t come back.”

Six

The sun waned in the west, and the air took on a cooling chill. The wind picked up. I ducked below some fences and went across some lush lawns. I checked out all the houses in the direction Frenchie told me to go.

“Scottie? Tanzy?” he called. His voice faintly echoed between the houses. Jamie was in the distance and closing in, searching. I wanted to go to him, but he would take me home. And with our language barrier, I wouldn’t be able to tell him where I thought Tanzy was. I ignored his approaching calls.

I have to find Tanzy first – then we can go home together, I thought.

An odor arose in the atmosphere – something I did not want to smell. I hurried down the road and into the breeze. Some forlorn meowing and yowling – des-

perate and depressed – traveled along the airways. I moved in its direction. Then I came upon it.

A small white house with unkempt grass and shaded windows. Red flowers grew near the porch. A cat could hide in the tall grass. I stepped up the cracked and somewhat overgrown pathway up to the front door. The stench of ammonia and rot penetrated my sense of smell. It stung.

“Tanzy? Are you in there?” I meowed.

A chorus of howls, yowls and mews escaped through the scratched and worn door. I sniffed around the doorframe, hoping to catch Tanzy’s scent, but a barrage of scents invaded my nostrils. I pulled back and turned to the right window. Springing my legs, I leapt onto the windowsill. The glass was closed and dark. The black shutters were open, but a brown blanket blocked most of the view inside.

I peered through a crack the blanket didn’t cover.

It was dim inside. My eyes adapted, and my night vision turned on. Something or another moved inside the home. What appeared to be old newspapers and flyers peeked over the windowsill. Mounds of cat fur littered my view. More movement, but no Calico.

“Tanzy! Tanzy, are you there?” I meowed as loud as I could.

Can she hear me over the noise of the other cats mewling and meowing? Maybe she's calling, but I can't hear her over them.

"Tanzy, where are you?"

I sniffed at the crack in the window. The scent of cats – lots of felines – and garbage and rot invaded my nasal passageways. I knew she could be in there. But I didn't know for sure.

Maybe around back, I thought.

I turned to jump down when the blanket shuddered. A head pushed through the opening and popped into view.

"I'm here! I'm here," Tanzy said.

The saliva in my mouth dried up.

"Oh, thank God! Are you okay?" I meowed to her.

"Yes, I think so – physically, anyway. I've never been so happy to see you, Scottie. Get me out of here. I'm gonna lose it soon. I swear. There' are lots of cats – too many – in here. So many, I can't count. Please, help me," our Calico said.

"I've never seen you like this," I said.

"If you could see what it's like in here, you'd act differently, too. It's absolutely filthy in here. No place to be still, no place for a catnap. Damn! I haven't eaten since she brought me here. It's a mad house! This is a cat mad house. I'm telling you. Get me out of here!" Tanzy yowled.

“Have you tried to get out?” I asked.

“Of course, I have. We’re locked in here. You think I’d want to stay in here? It’s like hell. Worse than going to the vet, by far. There are dead cats in here. I don’t want to die in this place. Help me!” Tanzy said, putting her paws on the dirty glass.

“All right.”

I put a paw on the other side of the window where hers were.

“I’ll get you out of there. Hang tight,” I told her.

I searched for an escape route from there. Nothing noticeable. I dropped to the porch. Checking for a front way out, I found no way out. Nothing.

“How am I going to get her out? Can I even get her out? I don’t know what to do.”

SEVEN

I pussyfooted over to the opposite front window. A little bigger than the first one, they covered it with a stained curtain and a bed sheet spotted with black mold. I pushed on the glass with my paw but found the window unmovable. Jumping down, I walked into the tall grass. I moved cautiously, not knowing what I'd find hidden in this brush. To the side of the house, I went.

I came to a broken and deteriorating plank fence. The slightly open gate hung off its rusted hinges. Darkness surrounded me, so my eyes adjusted for night vision. Here, the grass grew high over my tail height. An old, rusted wagon lay beneath a small, boarded-up window. I observed my surroundings.

No way in here.

On my way to the backyard, I discovered a damaged wheelchair, a haphazard pile of wood and a tube television as old as the mummified cats from Ancient Egypt. I came around the corner.

A soiled mattress, stinking of urine, leaned against the back wall. It covered a window. Beside the smelly bed, piled high, was a mound of used kitty litter. I almost gagged up something – but not a hairball.

They parked an old Ford pickup truck in the overgrown, weed infested, dirt driveway. It had flat tires and its fenders and hood were rusted with sun damaged, faded paint. Piles of old newspapers and flyers filled the rest of the back porch. However, a small space peeked outside the backdoor beside the pile of litter.

The house's eaves had rotted the wood they were screwed to and hung down to the ground. Throughout the white exterior, paint had chipped off. Wood siding rotted where the paint had peeled off.

How can people live like this? Why do the neighbors put up with this unsightly property? I thought.

The dilapidated back porch floor squeaked when I walked over it to get to the backdoor. Some of the wood splintered, and a small hole in the wall hovered over me. Not big enough to squeeze through. I pushed the door by the crack with my nose, then with my front paws. Nothing moved.

Probably locked.

Cats meowed from inside the shack, voices of desperate, downtrodden, depressed, pleading felines. I had to not only free Tanzy – but the other prisoner felines, as well. All of them. I needed to find a way in.

Once I get in there, what am I gonna find?

I shuddered at the thought.

I gave up on the rear of the house and trudged into the overgrown grass to the other side. It had another boarded-up window with damaged siding, hanging off the plywood beneath. An acoustic guitar with several broken strings leaned upright against the rundown fence. An armless doll lay beneath some overgrowing dandelions.

Maybe I can find an opening in the wall. It wouldn't surprise me if I did. Then I could get in and get them out.

I breached the growing grass at the front corner of the house, where a cement slab from an old walkway rested next to the place. A small crack opened into a hole in the wall. I shoved my paw far into the opening and felt around, toes and nails extended, as if it had a delicious mouse in it deep inside. I found nothing.

This is good, I thought.

Taking my foot out, I sniffed the air by the hole, pushing my nose as deep as I could into the space. My whiskers bent back to my furry Tabby face. I dug

my hind feet claws into the concrete slab and shoved my muzzle into the gap. I pushed, pulled, and shoved again and again. It was too tight. I withdrew.

“Dammit!” I meowed.

I sighed.

Two human hands surrounded my midsection and took hold of me. I squirmed and looked about. A woman in her fifties, wearing a blue-and-white dress, picked me up and crushed me to her bosom. She smiled. Her teeth were brown and black.

I wiggled to get away, but she held me closer and tighter. I growled and hissed at her. She grabbed my forelegs with one hand and my hind feet with the other while pushing my midsection into hers. I snapped my jaws at her clutching hands. But I could not reach them. I wasn’t able to break free.

“Oh, none of that now,” the woman said and squeezed me closer and deeper into her flesh. She held me so I could not move. I could not breathe. She stank of unwashed human body odor. Taking me out of the grass, she stood and walked over to the front porch.

“I found another baby, Cliff,” she said to the door.

EIGHT

I squirmed in her arms. But she held me firm. She reached with her free hand and unlatched the door. Taking me inside, she locked the beaten door behind her. The stench burned my sensitive nostrils.

“Cliff? Cliff? It’s your wife, Barbra. Where are you?” she said, stepping further inside the cramped quarters.

Several meows and mews from different cats all over the house. They sounded depressed, lifeless. A small amount of light shone on the floor. Two cats laid in the sliver of sunlight on the soiled rug. The carpet was black with cat feces littering it, wall-to-wall. On one small edge of the rug were light grey strands, the color it used to be before being smeared with cat dung. My breakfast lurched into my throat. I swallowed the upchuck back down.

“Cliff, where are you? We have a new baby in the house. He’ll make it a real pleasant home, Cliff. I really feel he’s the one this time,” she said.

Barbra leaned her face into my fur. I wanted to bite her but thought I better not. At least, not now.

“You’ll have a new, wonderful home here. Best there is. Mommy loves every one of her furry children,” she said to me.

The woman kissed my head and let me go. I shook off the kiss. Landing on the catastrophe of a carpet, something squishy filled the space between my toes and pads. So gross.

“Good God, what is this place?” I meowed, lifting one front paw off the rug.

A black cat with a few strands of off white almost grey fur slinked closer to me. He hung his head low. His eyes met mine momentarily.

“Sheer hell,” he said to me.

She piled bundles of yellowed newspapers and flyers against the walls and in the corners. Intermixed were numerous copies of Cat Fancy and Modern Cat magazines, among other publications. The periodicals appeared to be unread – just piled high.

Roaches skittered up the walls in and out of holes in the plaster. Flies and their maggots swarmed open cans of cat food. A Tabby with some stained white fur plodded by me. Fleas slipped in and out of her coat. I

couldn't count how many besieged her. Her infested tail hung low. A Tortoiseshell favoring the left side of her emaciated frame came closer and sat down.

"What the hell is this place? It's horrid in here," I meowed.

An off-white Persian sniffed about half-empty rotting cans of cat food. Her fur was clumped with mats. The walls that could be seen were scratched up. Door frames and the old furniture had been ripped asunder. Some of it torn by cat claws and others by human mistreatment. It seemed. Clumps of shed kitty fur clung to several beat-up cat kennels, a broken swivel chair, the sofa that also had hills of newspapers on it, and the coffee table legs. On the table were some cracked dishes and shopping bins filled with chewed plastic bags. No place was free from fur. Buckets of dirty water were scattered throughout the living room.

Does she really think I'm going to drink from them? I thought.

Several destroyed feather toys sat not played with. Mounds of garbage piled over the floors and up to the ceiling. A scratched-up piano was barely visible beneath the trash.

I leapt onto one stack of the many newsprint piles and scanned the darkened room. About thirty cats lay on or plodded about the heaps of junk. Some sat on the kitchen counter with the dirty dishes and dried or

decaying food. Among the filth, a carefully organized stack of canned cat food labels stood.

Barbra left and reappeared several minutes later.

“Cliff likes our new baby kitty. He can stay,” she said.

“I’m not staying,” I meowed.

“You’ll never get out. We’re all trapped here,” one feline said.

“Where is Cliff?” I asked.

“He’s not here. He hasn’t been here in this house as long as I’ve been here,” the black cat said.

A Marmalade boy lay on a pile of musty clothes, covered in shed fur.

“Have you seen Cliff?” I asked the Ginger cat.

His eyes averted from mine and stared at the floor. A black, greasy substance peppered his fur, and several large splotches penetrated his coat. From his appearance, he had given up grooming himself. Not good for a cat.

“What happened to you?” I asked the downtrodden orange cat.

He rested his chin on his paws. A flea emerged from the fur on his shoulder and disappeared back into his coat down his back.

“He gave up,” said the black cat. “We all have. There is no escape. We’re all dead. Just like Mikey over there.”

He pointed with his nose toward the kitchen. A mixed breed lay on the blistering linoleum – not moving, not breathing.

“Good Lord! How long has he been there?” I asked him.

“A day, at least.”

“We’ve got to get out of here before we end up that way,” I meowed.

“Impossible,” the dark boy said.

“How are my children today? That’s good,” Barbra said without waiting for an answer. She came to me and picked me up, holding me close to her chest. She took me to the worn couch. Brushing off debris, she sat with me in her arms. Barbra kissed me again.

“Welcome to my cocoon of cats,” she said and giggled. “I love having so many cats – so comforting. Since my Cliffie stays downstairs all the time, I needed Pickles, my favorite furry feline, to comfort me. And when Pickles died, my sweet Calico, I was so lonely. So, I got another cat. But he wasn’t enough. I needed more. Cliff and I had never had any children. So, I have you and my other fur babies.”

She nuzzled her face into my fur.

“Now, I have more comfort. Will you be the one who comforts me for good? It always seems I need another when I can find one. But you found me, Charlie. I am naming you Charlie.”

“My name is Scottie,” I meowed.

“I thought you’d like that name,” she said.

“Stupid human,” I said.

“I give each of my children new names, even if I knew their old name. And they hear my story. Just like you, Charlie,” she said.

“Scottie.”

Someone knocked on the front door. It was a loud, hard rapping. Barbra pushed me off her and raced to the kitchen. She ducked below the counter.

“Shh. Cliff, be quiet, or they’ll take our babies away,” the human female said.

The person knocked another time.

Barbra crept on the floor, avoiding the clutter, reached into a drawer and brought out a long, blade knife. She ducked back down. Another knock.

“Hello?” a man said.

“Jamie!” I meowed.

NINE

“**J**amie! We’re in here,” I meowed. “In here.”

I scrambled off the couch and rushed toward the door. Several newspapers flew as I ran over them. I reached the door. Meowing more, I put my paws on the damaged door. From behind, Barbra grabbed me, held me close to her with her fingers around my muzzle, silencing me.

“Hello?” Jamie said again, with another knock.

I wriggled in the woman’s arms. Trying to free myself, I pushed at her fingers with my one free forward foot. But she held me tight.

He knocked a third time. Jamie cast a blurry shadow onto the frosted window in the door. The shadow then disappeared. His footfalls sounded further and further away until I couldn’t hear them anymore. He was gone. And so was our chance at rescue.

I pulled my face away from Barbra's releasing hand and bit her finger, breaking the skin.

"Oww!" she let out, yanking her hand away.

She looked at the wound as I squirmed to get free. Taking me by my four feet, she took me to a closed door. I wriggled to get away. I even laid my teeth on her knuckle. But she had such a firm grip on me I could not break free.

"You're going in the bad cat room with the other nasty cats," she said.

Opening the door, she tossed me in. I landed on all four feet on another soiled rug. Barbra slammed the door shut.

"Scottie!" a voice meowed.

I turned to find Tanzy. She let out a sudden burst of purr.

"Tanzy! Thank God, I found you. Are you okay?" I asked the Calico/Tabby mix. Her purrs stopped.

"No. I'm not. I can't stay here. I'll die here. It's a mad house here. I'm telling you. We have to get out of here," she said, her meows quick, her breathing fast.

"Take me with you," another cat said. She was another Tabby that looked like me, but she had white paws. She drew closer.

"Me, too."

"And me."

A couple more felines added.

“But how can we get out? There’s no way,” an older Ginger cat said.

“There has to be a way. I’m not living the rest of my life cooped up in here. I’d rather die,” Tanzy said, and scratched her neck. “Damned fleas.”

“I’m ready to get out of here,” the other Tabby said.

“I’m set on leaving this hellhole and never looking back,” Tanzy meowed.

“I think I know of a way to get us out of here. But first we have to get out of this bedroom,” I said.

“I’ve tried. But I cannot find a way out. She opens that door too quick, throws in food and slams it shut,” Tanzy said.

Cans of cat food were scattered about the floor. I sniffed several cans. They licked most clean or almost empty. Flies buzzed about the remaining food.

“When was the last time she fed you?” I asked.

“Yesterday. She tosses two cans of food in here once a day. But it’s not enough for all of us. I am so hungry,” Tanzy said. Although being hungry is not unusual for Tanzy, she was slimmer.

“I hiss at her whenever she opens the door,” the Tabby said.

“So do I,” the Ginger said.

“Me, too,” Tanzy added.

“I see. What if we were nice to her when she brings in some more food?” I asked.

“I’m not rubbing up to her. That’s for sure. No way,” Tanzy said, and the Tabby with white feet nodded.

“Wait. If we are nice to her – like rubbing her leg – she may let us out. And if she lets us out, I’m sure I can get us out of this mad house. I know what to do, but we have to do it together. So she can’t stop us – or Cliff, either. Wait, is there a Cliff? She talks to him, but I haven’t seen him. Am I missing something?” I said.

“There is no Cliff,” the Tabby said.

“Yet, she talks to him?” I meowed.

“He died eight years ago. He was a smoker and lung cancer got him. She still speaks to him like he’s still alive, even though she knows he’s dead. That human female still believes he is living here. Alive and well. To her, he never died,” the white-footed Tabby said.

“To her, he’s alive sometimes and dead at other times,” The Ginger feline said.

“Good Lord. The crazy cat lady has trapped us. I thought they were an urban legend. I never believed they existed – until today,” I said. “We have to escape or we’re dead.”

TEN

That evening, Barbra returned holding a small can of cat food. Going to her, I rubbed her legs – one, then the other, around and in between them. Tanzy joined in, rubbing and purring and loving. The other three cats with us hissed and growled at her.

“Well, you two are being good. I love lovey kitties. Do you want to come out of the bad cat room and into the rest of the house? There’s more food there,” Barbra said, placing the open can on the floor beside the old ones.

“Yes,” I meowed and Tanzy agreed.

The woman picked me up with one arm, then she did the same with Tanzy with the other arm.

“Just relax, Tanzy. Don’t freak out. I know you hate being held. Let her do her thing,” I said.

“That’s how I got put in the ‘bad cat’ room. I bit her when she held me too long,” Tanzy said.

“How long was that?” I asked the Calico.

“About ten seconds,” she meowed and relaxed into the human’s arm without a struggle or a yowl.

“The rest of you naughty kitties have to stay in here,” she said, closing the door behind us.

Barbra bent down and placed us on the floor. She kissed each of us and scratching me behind my right ear. To the right, some of the “good” captive cats surrounded some fresh tins of feline food, eating.

“Cliff? Cliff?” The mad woman called out. “I brought out two of the bad cats. They’re good now. I hope that’s okay.”

The human female walked away from us and between the piles of clutter to the kitchen. She opened the basement door.

“Cliff, is that okay?” she hollered into the darkness and waited.

She nodded and said, “Okay with you?...Good. These are such lovey kitties.”

She closed the cellar door and returned to the living room. Going to the dead cat, she bent down and touched it with her fingertips. She pushed against it. The feline corpse rolled away, then back.

“I think we have a sick cat, Cliff. Can she get better with you?...Okay, here she comes.”

Barbra picked up the expired feline by one dead paw. It hung down as she stood and went back to the basement door. Opening it again, she threw the poor puss soul down the cellar stairs. It thumped when it reached the bottom.

“You’ll stay down there with Cliff until you’re better. I don’t want the healthy kitties getting sick, too. You and Cliff can get better together,” she said, closing the door.

“She’s definitely a crazy cat lady,” Tanzy said. “I’m hungry. Are you?”

“Maybe a little,” I said. My stomach growled.

Tanzy crept over to the feline feeding frenzy. She sniffed some morsels and ate.

“That’s awful – disgusting. Must be the cheapest cat food in the store,” Tanzy said.

“She doesn’t seem to have a lot of money,” I meowed.

Tanzy kept eating, though. My gut roared, but I didn’t feel like eating. I knew I needed to eat, so I gulped some food down, trying not to taste it. But I wasn’t successful. It was terrible, indeed. I ate enough, so I wasn’t hungry anymore – barely keeping it down.

We finished eating. The cats lower on the mad house hierarchy pushed past us and the other satisfied felines to eat. Most of the food was gone after they completed their meals. The rest was left to rot. Barbra did not clean up after “her” cats.

I went to the kitchen. The refrigerator door stood open with no light or cold coming from it. No lights at all illuminated this dark house. Only the occasional crack of sunlight came through the window coverings. She had no electrical power. Inside the fridge, food decayed to blackness and green mold. And it stank.

“We’ve got to get out of here. Which of you cats is with me?” I meowed.

Most of the felines barely looked in my direction. Their spark for life was gone. They had given up – no hope left. I needed to change that.

I leapt onto the countertop that opened into the living room, where most of the cats were.

“I have a plan to get us free,” I said, looking for a reaction. I got little.

“Come on, you...you bunch of majestic felines. You need to wake up. We can do this. She doesn’t control us,” I meowed.

I paced back-and-forth across the counter. I looked at every cat I could make eye contact with.

“It’s useless. I’ve tried to get away. But she kept catching me. She put me in the ‘bad cats’ bedroom and hardly fed me until I stopped trying. It’s hopeless,” a Tortie Tabby said.

“Who helped you escape?” I asked her.

“No one. I tried on my own. No puss helped,” she answered.

“We have to work together here. Together, we can take her down and get us all out of here. I’m sure of it,” I meowed.

“How? We’re locked in here,” she said.

“We have to wait for the right opportunity. Right, every puss?” I said.

“Good luck with that,” the Tortie Tabby said.

“Yeah,” some other cats meowed.

Tanzy leapt onto the counter with me. She sat still as I continued pacing.

“Don’t be so sceptical. I know this is pretty bad. But we caught a pair of rotten humans trying to kill our human. We can do this,” Tanzy said.

“You could die trying,” the Tortie Tabby said. “And get thrown into the basement.”

“I’d rather die trying. This is no life,” I meowed.

“You’re right. I just don’t see it happening,” she said.

“We need your help. Who is in it with us?” I asked.

“I am,” Tanzy said. “Let’s get with it. Who else?”

“I’m scared,” a cat said.

“We’re all scared – scared to death in this hellhole. We must do this,” Tanzy said.

“I’m in! I’ve got to get out of here,” a Ginger boy said.

“It’s a mad house. Who else?” I said, but no other cats spoke up.

The Ginger boy named Redcat, Tanzy, and I spent the next sixty-three hours convincing the other fe-

lines to join us. The Tortie Tabby named Bethany and a few other pusses came around, shaking off their despair. Then we waited.

“We’re getting the hell out of this crazy lady’s cat prison,” I yowled.

ELEVEN

“**I**t’s been three days since you said you’d get us out of here. When are we gonna be free?” Tanzy asked.

I scratched at some fleas that infested my stripped coat. I shook my body to free myself from those blood suckers.

“Damned itchy things. How do I get rid of them? I can’t stand them anymore,” I said.

“We’ve all got fleas. So long as we’re stuck in here, we’ll be full of fleas. When are we getting out of this hell? I thought you had a plan, Scottie,” Redcat said.

“We are waiting for the right moment,” I meowed, scratching. “Let me see if I can’t...”

I bounded onto a pile of yellowed newspapers and magazines beside the front window. Like I had done several times a day the past few days, I peered through

a small opening in the blankets that let a little light in. Then I saw him – Hamlet, the Siamese cat who spouts a bit of Shakespeare.

This is it, I thought.

Hamlet sat at the end of the walk, looking here and there.

Our chance to escape.

“Hamlet,” I yowled, startling half the cats in this house. “Over here.”

His left ear twisted in our direction. His blue eyes narrowed. He sniffed the air.

“Who was that?” the Siamese said, peering at the mad house.

“It’s me, Scottie, the Tabby. I met you a few days ago. Over here. Look,” I meowed.

Hamlet turned to us and scanned the building.

“What happened to you? Are you in there?” he asked.

“Yes. We’re in here. We need to get out. Help us,” I said.

“Can’t you walk out?” Hamlet said.

“No, we can’t. We need your help. The crazy cat lady has us.”

“You have that human in there with you?” the Siamese said.

“Yes. We need you to distract her. Please, we need you. We’re trapped,” I meowed.

He advanced up the walk, avoiding the weeds growing in the cracks, to the porch and said, "How are you trapped in there?"

"She grabbed us and locked us in. I need you to meow real loud," I said.

"What for?" he asked me.

"If you make enough noise, she'll come out to get you, and then we can escape."

"But then I'll be caught. Besides, she'll stop you. So, nay, I do not," he meowed.

"Listen. She can't stop all of us. Besides, Tanzy will attack her and get her to drop you, if she gets you," I said.

"Yes, I will. And I'll be happy to give her a swift swipe," Tanzy said behind me.

"Right! And maybe some human will see all of us and call the police or, at least, Animal Control. Now, meow real loud," I said.

"Give every man thy ear but few thy voice," Hamlet said, turning away. I pressed my leather against the glass.

"But we'll die in here. 'To be or not to be.' And we need 'to be.' Help us, Meow! Yowl!" I said.

Hamlet shifted his position toward the front door. He drew in a deep breath. The Siamese opened his mouth and caterwauled, long and loud.

"Open the door," he screeched.

“That’s it. Keep going,” I meowed.

“Let me in,” Hamlet said. He came up the walk and scratched the old wooden door. “Let me in. Let me in!”

Behind us cats, who had huddled by the door frame, came Barbra. She shooed us away from the front and reached for the doorknob. I got down from the stack of yellow journalism and joined my fellow escapee wannabes on the floor by the door. We backed away from the human, but only a bit.

“Let me in,” Hamlet continued.

She unlocked the door and turned the knob. Peeking outside, she grinned. I pushed into Barbra’s hairy leg, trying to get past her. But she blocked me with her foot.

Hamlet backed away from the opening doorway, making the crazed human female to open the door further. Her breathing elevated.

“Cliff, we have another baby,” the woman said.

She opened the door and leaned down, reaching to take hold of Hamlet. The Siamese moved back some more.

“This is it! Let’s get the hell out of here,” I meowed. And we bolted.

With the door open wide enough, we made our escape. In every direction except back, furry felines darted, scrambled and weaved out of Barbra’s house.

Some cats who refused to join us earlier also made a run for it. A few felines refused to flee.

“Oh no! My babies! Come back to Mama,” Barbra said.

Hamlet spun about and sprinted away along with us. Tanzy and I took off for our house. Across the overgrown lawn and down the street, we dashed. We spotted Jamie at someone’s house. He had been going door-to-door still, never giving up on us. We bounded to him, meowing.

“Jamie, we’re here,” I let out.

Coming down the walk, our human broke into a run when he saw us. He slowed down, and we two felines greeted him.

“Scottie! Tanzy!” he said, bending down. We got to him and I jumped into his outstretched arms. I purred and rubbed his face. Tanzy stopped and pushed against his hips.

“My kitties! Where have you been?” he asked us and kissed me.

Tanzy moved back down the street a little, pointing her nose at the mad house.

“She kept us prisoner, along with lots of other cats,” Tanzy meowed.

Jamie glanced up from nuzzling me toward our prison.

“Where did all those cats come from?” he asked.

“They were catnapped. We were taken,” I meowed.

Tanzy came back to us in a hurry. Her legs moved so fast they were a blur. Barbra marched up the street to the three of us. Jamie stood up, still holding me. Tanzy hid behind him.

“Who are you?” Jamie said.

“That’s the crazy cat lady,” Tanzy meowed.

“That’s my baby. Give him to me,” Barbra said, reaching her hands toward me. Jamie extended one hand and pushed her away.

“No. These are my cats. Did you steal my cats?” our man said.

“They are my babies! Mine!” she said with her hands on her hips. She reached out again, trying to grab me.

“Stay away. I’m calling the police,” Jamie said, taking his iPhone out of his jeans pocket.

“No! No police. You can keep my babies. No police,” she said, dropped her reach and slapped her hands on her cheeks.

Jamie dialled and waited. It rang.

“Hello, police? Yeah, I’m looking at a woman who stole my cats. I need the police. She’s trying to steal them again. Yes, I’ll hold.”

Barbra twisted around and took off as fast as she could to her home. She ignored the wandering cats in her lawn and on her porch. Rushing inside, the woman slammed the door. The noise made the remaining nearby felines to sprint in every direction.

Jamie spoke to a policeman on his cellphone and explained the situation best he could. With the cops on their way, Jamie walked us home. We purred all the way to our new home. Our human locked us inside the house and returned to where he found us.

Alley greeted us with her tail up. We were happy to see her, too. But most of all, we were free from that crazy cat lady and her mad house. We had our freedom back.

TWELVE

A knock at the door came a week later. Jamie broke away from the television and answered the door. A uniformed policeman stood waiting.

“May I help you?” Jamie asked.

“Good afternoon. I’m Officer Simpson, and I’m doing a follow up to your catnapping case. I want to fill you in on some things. May I come in?” the cop said.

“Yes, of course. Would you like a cup of coffee?” our human said.

“No, thank you,” Simpson said, stepping inside.

“Okay. How are all those cats doing?” Jamie asked.

“Animal Control worked through the piles...of...stuff she had hoarded and rescued all the surviving cats. Some cats have already been reunited with their owners. We’re hoping they’ll be able to get the remaining cats home. But they will put those left over up

for adoption. With this case making the news, more people than available cats are looking to adopt,” the policeman said.

“What about the woman? How is she?” Jamie asked.

I moved closer to Simpson and rubbed his legs. He bent over and scratched behind my ears.

“We have charged her with several offenses regarding animal cruelty. Currently, she’s in the psychiatric wing at the hospital in Calgary for evaluation. It looks like she may be schizophrenic with an obsessive-compulsive disorder. She is a hoarder of all matters of things – not just cats. It appears she has thrown nothing away in years – probably since her husband died. The doctors believe the death of her husband caused a psychotic break. Where her mental illness may have been a minor disorder before, the stress of his death lead to her hoarding. She felt comfort in having many things, especially the cats. Even though her possessions gave her that comfort, she still believes her husband is still alive and living in her house,” the policeman said.

“I hope she gets treatment. The poor woman,” Jamie said.

“Yes, she is being assessed and will be assigned a regular psychiatrist if she’s released. They’ll take good care of her,” Simpson said.

“Good.”

“It looks like she has a long road ahead of her. Do you have any questions for me?” the cop asked.

Jamie shook his head.

“Poor woman,” I meowed and Alley nodded.

“What happened to your arm?” Simpson asked Jamie.

“That’s from Tanzy. I had to give each of the cats a flea bath, and Tanzy hates getting wet. Not to mention, she’s a feisty kitty. So even wearing welder’s gloves, she still got me with a paw full of claws. A full-on bloody series of scratches,” Jamie told him.

“Otherwise, how are your cats?” Simpson asked.

“Scottie and Tanzy were starving when I got them home. I fed them slowly, not knowing what they’d been through. But they seem okay now,” Jamie replied.

“Tanzy’s not okay. She’s afraid to go outside now,” I meowed.

“I’m not going anywhere near that door,” Tanzy said.

“I’d love to get outside. But Jamie won’t let me out,” Alley meowed.

“Okay, that’s all I need for now. We’ll be in contact if we need anything else. Have a good day,” Officer Simpson said and left.

“Why don’t you want to go outside?” Alley asked Tanzy.

“Shouldn’t it be obvious? I’m not taking the chance of being abducted by some human – again,” Tanzy meowed.

“What about you, Scottie?” the Tuxie asked.

“As soon as Jamie lets me out, I’m going exploring and marking. This is my new territory. I own this neighborhood. I can’t wait to get to it,” I said.

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Cats, cats and more cats is what Peter Scottsdale's awesome books are all about. An Amazon bestselling author, Peter writes his cat books and blog for YOU, the cat and book loving fans of the world.

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