

Yule Time Truce

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“Been seeing her for a month and no one’s been arrested yet,” said Roy into his cell as he entered the elevator, shaking the early December snow from his jacket. “Well, considering the last two ... no, I can’t go back to that restaurant.” He clicked the button and the elevator started to climb. “This one’s different. She’s beautiful and funny and smart ...” He stepped off the elevator. “Yeah, she’s sick and I’m going to take care of her tonight. Talk to you later.”

Roy straightened his clothes and knocked. Laurel answered in her bathrobe and fuzzy slippers. Her apartment spread out behind her – kitchen, dining area, and living room all one big room with two doors leading to a bathroom and bedroom.

After a sanitary kiss on the cheek, Laurel went to make tea while Roy meandered about the living room where he found an unexpected coffee table book, What Would Buddha Do? “Are you a Buddhist?” he called to Laurel.

“No,” she called back, muffled by mucus, as Roy reached for the book. “Someone got that for me because that’s what I named my cat.”

As Roy was about to lift the book, a furry, black paw pushed the book back down and Roy found himself staring into vicious, yellow eyes.

“Buddha’s great,” continued Laurel as the pure black cat sat itself upon the book and released a subtle growl. “He’s a personality detector and boy did he work on my last two boyfriends – both losers – but Buddha figured it out first. Peed on one guy’s head while he was sleeping ...” she explained as Roy backed away from the now growling cat.

“... rode the other one like a horse, using his ears like reins ... two in the morning, he’s running round the apartment with this little, black fur-ball hanging from his head.”

Laurel returned with the tea, distracting Roy. When he turned back the cat was gone. “Where is that cat?” asked Laurel looking around. A tinkling came from the Yule tree. “Oh no!” barked Laurel hoarsely as she reached for a squirt bottle. “Get out of there!” With a few pumps, the cat came screaming down the trunk and out from under the branches as ornaments came crashing onto the ceramic village on the nearby table. “Stay out of there! He can be so bad,” she explained as Buddha circled her legs, glaring at Roy.

“I won’t be bothering your tree,” said Roy, “I’m allergic to pine ... bad rash.”

“If you’re around next year,” said Laurel slyly, “maybe I’ll go plastic ... as long as you’re not allergic to my ceramic village. That’s been in my family for years.”

With her cold, they didn’t stay up late. Laurel downed a double NQ and they settled into bed. As Roy drifted off, two cold, yellow eyes watched him from the dresser at the foot of the bed. Roy knew he’d have to get along with that little demon if he wanted to stay with Laurel but was getting along even possible?

Roy dreamed of suffocating under a blanket and woke to find his dream was true, only the blanket was a cat. He threw the cat screeching across the room. Roy sat up, spitting out fur. “What the hell ...”

Laurel lay next to him painted in the glow of the digital clock, snoring gently through her cold. Buddha sat on the dresser with a look in his eyes that made Roy think of the “last two”. He shushed the cat and promised, “I’m a good guy, really. Give me a chance, would ya, little guy?”

Buddha narrowed his eyes and swatted a picture frame to the floor in an avalanche of noise. Fortunately, Laurel didn't wake. "Come on, be good now," begged Roy.

Buddha gave him a look that said, "You're next," and fired a jeweled box across the room. Then he stood up and walked along the dresser knocking down one thing after another, each louder than the last. Roy searched the room for something, anything to placate the cat ... a toy, a water bottle, a brick maybe. Desperate, Roy grabbed the cat and tossed him from the room. The cat irrupted in a chorus of loud meows beyond the door. Laurel snored but she couldn't sleep through this forever – he had to shut up this cat! "Treats!" whispered Roy, "Cat owners always have treats!"

Roy opened the door and instantly, the cat sliced his shins. Roy hopped in place, holding back a stream of profanities while Buddha disappeared into the dark apartment.

Not knowing where the light switches were, Roy made his way to the kitchen by nightlight. As he searched the cabinets for cat bribes, Buddha crashed around the apartment, running back and forth, knocking stuff off tables, jarring lamps. With a pop, the nightlight was gone. The apartment fell into abject darkness. Roy groped along the wall, feeling for switches as four faint paws fluttered across the carpet ... circling ... hunting. Roy's heart pounded as the patter passed closer and closer. Another swipe across his shins sent him stumbling into the center of the room. The cat continued circling and swiping, forcing Roy to bang into furniture until he was limping about, his legs covered in blood and bruises.

"Buddha," he called softly, his voice shaking, "I'm your buddy, really ... come on ... here Buddha ..."

Buddha growled his reply.

“Okay, you little bastard,” Roy snarled back, “enough of this. When I find that light switch you’re going to be one wet cat.” He found his way back to a wall and followed it, searching for switches, until it led him into the kitchen. He bumped into the table where Laurel had left the squirt bottle. “Now you’re in for it,” he told the cat lurking somewhere in the dark.

A noise came from someplace above Roy’s head. Roy turned. The cat flew through the air and planted all four claws into Roy’s scalp. Roy screamed like a schoolgirl as the cat launched off. Roy staggered back into a wall. Something small stabbed him in the back. The light switch!

As Roy turned to flick on the light, the cat came again, flying right at Roy’s face, only this time Roy ducked. Ha! The cat landed in a clamor followed by a brilliant flash of light. In that snapshot, Roy saw a puffed ball of black with its paws in a toaster. The cat shrieked and the toaster smoldered, never to toast again. Roy flicked on the light in time to watch Buddha laying a smoke trail as he ran into and up the tree leaving a rain of ornaments in his wake.

Roy almost laughed but the tree started to tilt, leaning toward the ceramic village, Laurel’s family heirloom. Roy held his breath. All that pine ... all that sap ... oh the rash he would have ... just don’t fall! The tree teetered further and the cat panicked, trying to escape but only assuring the tree’s descent onto the fragile buildings. As much as he would love to see that evil fur-ball crash onto a pile of glass, Roy couldn’t let that happen to Laurel ... possibly the last sane single woman on Earth.

Roy dove for the tree, dove to catch it before ...

Laurel woke, surprised to be alone. Walking into the living room, she came upon quite a sight. Roy sat in his robe, pink dollops of calamine all over his skin, bandages on his head and shins with Buddha curled up in his lap, purring.

Roy woke to find a warm smile gracing her face. He looked deep into her eyes and felt something stir within him, something strong, something undeniable, and so he said to her over the loud purring of the cat, “I think I have your cold.”