

THERE'S A MOOSE IN THE HOOSE

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(First published in The Bengal Cat Club publication 'The Bengal Times' in 2005)

The formative part of my life was happily spent in a dog food storage warehouse in Scotland. Food was plentiful and the resident mouser was an old, toothless, three-legged and obese black moggie called Eric. He had, needless to say, considering the abundance of available food, long since given up the chase. Preferring instead, a laid back and sedentary lifestyle. Life was therefore very pleasant as we all lived contentedly side-by-side.

This all came to an abrupt halt when, one day whilst foraging in a bag of 'Dippy Doggy Dental Treats', I was suddenly catapulted into the back of a lorry and transported hundreds of miles away, never to return to my Scottish homeland again.

I now live behind a fridge.

Food is plentiful. Toast arrives promptly most mornings as it is propelled out of the toaster and down the side of the refrigerator into my dining area. Dinner is generally a 'help yourself to all you can eat' type buffet left in the kitchen.

There are however, a couple of notable problems. These come in the form of two huge cats called Ziggi and Misti that were already resident in my otherwise comfortable billet.

Unlike Eric, these creatures come intact with four, fully functioning legs and full sets of teeth. Despite an inexhaustible supply of food, they are obsessed with the chase and my days are spent ducking and diving about the house and taunting them during our many games of cat and mouse.

When I first took up residence this game was very frightening, but I soon became familiar with the rules. The cats and I have a respectful understanding (I think), as we systematically follow the rules of the game.

It begins when they crouch motionless next to the fridge for at least two hours while I taunt them with face pulling and bottom wagging and such like. When I think they are getting bored I make a dash for it into the sitting room and they follow in hot pursuit. Once under the sofa I taunt them for another two hours until they are practically comatosed. It is while in this state that it is safe to be caught and I saunter out pretending I haven't seen them and act all squeally when a paw is slammed down on top of me. At this point I am generally carried back into the kitchen and the next part of the game begins. I now have to see how quickly I can get back behind the fridge and that's it, game over, I win.

Of course sometimes I don't win. Sometimes they go over the top, tossing me up in the air back and forth like a ping-pong ball between each other and batting me senseless with their paws until the Paramedic arrives to the rescue in the shape of 'her'

At the age of twelve while getting some hay for her pony 'she' came across a dead mouse laying next to a nest of tiny baby mice less than a week old. Their eyes were still closed and they had almost no hair. 'She' took them up to the house and put them in an old slipper next to the fire. Hand rearing was difficult and one by one they all died. All except one that is. They were inseparable and Micky lived as part of the family until the ripe old age of four. 'Her' affinity with mice has never wavered and since then 'she' has saved hundreds from the jaws and claws of cats. 'She' doesn't talk much about 'her' brother though, who once had a job with Rentakil.

Anyway, back to the game. 'She' rescues me and carries me gently out to the garden placing me in the bushes to what 'she' imagines is my freedom. I give it five minutes before scuttling back to the house, through the cat flap and back to my home behind the fridge. So it goes on, the same pattern repeated over and over again. I don't even think 'she' realises it's the same mouse she keeps

rescuing!

It's a trade-off. The two cats allow me to live relatively comfortably. I in turn must keep them amused when they get fed up with hanging off the dog's jowls. Although I must say, their definition of letting me live comfortably, (not inflicting internal injury or broken bones), is vastly different to my interpretation.

However, one particular day I had a very strange and surreal adventure.

The previous night I had been nibbling on a supper of cheese and biscuits and inadvertently knocked over a glass of what I thought was blackcurrant juice.

I sipped at the liquid, full-bodied, cheekily fruity and robust. It slipped down my throat with a viscosity that gave it a texture that I could almost chew. The more I drunk of this fine smooth liquid the more I lost the power of my legs and the squiffier my eyesight became. What was more worrying was that I kept getting the urge to say a phrase I had never used before. '*She sells sea shells on the sea shore*' kept bouncing off my lips in a jumble of words as I keeled over the edge of the worktop and onto the floor in a fit of giggles that came out of nowhere. As I tried to compose myself, the hiccups suddenly started, setting me off rolling around the floor with laughter once more.

Through all this I hadn't noticed that my antics were being viewed at close quarters by Misti who was laying in wait only two feet away from me in complete puzzlement at this inebriated creature that wobbled before her.

I tried once again to gain control of my faculties. It was probably not the most opportune moment to have another fit of giggles, her paw shot forward and she grabbed me in her jaws. She carried my limp body into the hallway, and as I tried to stifle yet more giggles she spat me out into a large black holdall. At this point I was expected to play the Hide and Seek game. I really couldn't be bothered. The last thing I remember was crawling into the comfort of a quiet, soft corner of the bag before waking up in hell.

As I gradually regained the power of a throbbing brain, my senses became aware of what sounded like a thousand voices echoing in a pungent, yet strangely familiar stench filled atmosphere. A chill ran up my spine as I lay there, fearful of what was outside my warm and cosy sanctuary. How I got there was a little hazy but the delicate state of my body was in conflict with the memory of the Hootenanny of an evening I had enjoyed the night before.

Gradually the noise abated and a sense of calm and quiet filled the air as it dawned on me that I was still not alone.

I crawled out of the safety of my hideaway and clawed my way up the curtain that was before me. At the top I found an opening and hauled myself onto a flat surface before looking up.

Directly in front of me lay Ziggi. A malevolent grin spread slowly across his face as he glared at me. The shock of it forced a sharp shriek from my mouth. I felt the sensation of eyes boring into the back of my head, and very, very slowly, I turned around.

The horror of row upon row of wide-eyed feline faces staring back at me was the stuff of nightmares. The whole room was now silent, nobody moved.

It took me two seconds to scurry back down the curtain out of view and a full ten minutes to realise that no one was in pursuit. I poked my head out to assess the situation before realising that they were all being held prisoner. Oh happy day!!!

My confidence restored, I crawled back up to the ledge to set out on a scouting mission. I jauntily swaggered from cell to cell peering in at the various feline specimens. There were cats of all shapes, sizes and colours.

Skidding past them and poking my tongue out shouting Yee..haa created a variety of reactions.

These ranged from frustrated anger at not being able to get at me, through to indifference from those who considered they were just too posh to pounce.

I suddenly stopped dead at the sight of one pathetic creature who obviously suffered with some sort of dreadful skin disease. It reminded me of an allergic reaction Uncle McJock had when he sampled the Dippy Doggy Dental Treats New Improved (that's a laugh) chicken variety and all his hair fell out.

Staring at this pitiful creature, solitary and naked bar a leather diamond studded collar, it occurred to me that it looked as though she had been at a bondage party when she had been abruptly taken prisoner. Her embarrassment was as evident as her nudity amongst the throng of fabulous fur coats that surrounded her as she tried to cover her modesty beneath her snake like tail.

All of a sudden a table came around the corner followed by two people clad in white coats. They stopped in front of one of the prison cells, and after opening the door, grabbed hold of a reluctant beige ball of fluff and proceeded to torture it. Forcibly opening its mouth and prodding and poking at every orifice and appendage. Every cat had to endure this procedure. While some seemed quite resigned to it, putting up no resistance, others unashamedly actually seemed to visibly enjoy it. There were also those who battled with their captors in the hope of breaking loose and making a bolt for freedom.

I tip toed back to Ziggi, who, like many other cats, was asleep; oblivious to the impending suffering that he would soon have to endure.

He looked so peaceful and I giggled as I realised that it was too good an opportunity not to take advantage of the situation and have a bit of fun!

Rooting around in a bag behind the curtain I came across the ideal instrument for my mischief and within a few minutes the deed was done.

I could hear a table rattling it's way towards Ziggi's cell and, as he began to stir, I quickly hid behind his white litter tray.

He got up, stretched and checked his blanket for any stray ruffles before sitting down and putting on a phoney grin that was convincing enough to melt an iron bar. The cell door opened, obviously his cue to start purring, and unprompted, he strolled out onto the table and gazed up at the white coats with an endearing expression dancing around his eyes. What followed was not the usual reaction he was used to with this well-rehearsed routine.

The howls of laughter that emanated from the white coats sent more white coats rushing in their direction. Soon there were a dozen of them almost wetting themselves with laughter as they stared and pointed at this object of ridicule that stood before them. The grin had by now, been wiped off Ziggi's little face and his jaw dropped.

If there was one thing that sets a Bengal apart from other cats, it's their wonderful and unusual spotted and gold glittered coat. They are immensely proud of their spots, to them a physical sign of their majestic wild ancestry. So when Ziggi turned around to find that all his spots had been joined up with a black felt-tip pen his head dropped in total humiliation. It was all too much for him to bear and he slunk back into his cell and hid under his blanket in utter shame.

For the next couple of hours I busied myself with the abundant array of delicious food that I had discovered behind the curtain. I ran up and down sampling various delectables. Succulent chicken, fresh prawns, diced ham, Chum, turkey, fish err....Chum??

I collected as much food as I could, before settling down to the biggest banquet imaginable. Afterwards, feeling rather sorry for old 'spottie' up there, I took a chunk of chicken up to the ledge to offer him.

I gazed around and gasped in awe and amazement at the spectacular array of wonderful coloured ribbons and cards that adorned every prison cell every cell except Ziggi's that is.

His was totally bare. Behind the bars sat a cat with a look of loathing written across his face. The deep guttural growl aimed in my direction said it all. I had better keep out of his way for the next few days.

Having gorged myself on such a delicious feast, I soon fell into a deep and contented sleep.

When I awoke, I was back in the hallway at home. My conjecture as to whether the memory of the previous days events had been an hallucination was quickly dispelled as I poked my head out of the holdall to see if the coast was clear to get back to my home behind the fridge.

The two cats were lying in wait. Their glistening sharpened claws, and the look on their faces as they licked their lips, told me that the rules of the game had changed.

I had suddenly become the flavour of the month.

