

JENNA RECKTENWALD

Meow Translate

If ever a cat could talk

Why do Mondays always happen on Mondays? I groaned and rolled over to grab my phone to check the alarm. By the time the bright “6:00 A.M.” processed in my brain, I realized how nonsensical my initial thought was.

“I’m glad my awake brain pilots me most of the time. If I let my asleep brain drive I’d probably be rolled over in a ditch somewhere.”

I paused to scratch my chin stubble and yawn once more before giving up the ghost of sleep and getting up to shower.

After standing under the scalding water for longer than necessary, I heard my wife call out beyond the door. “Honey, just so you know, it’s a quarter till.” She was such a sweetheart. Even through my grumpy mornings she babied my grown man ass. I didn’t deserve her.

Or rather, I should do better to make it up to her. While rinsing the last of the three-in-one bargain bin man cleaner off, I decided I’d pick up a bunch of flowers from the local grocery store on my way home after work. That is, if work didn’t run late.

My thoughts drifted back to last Friday when I’d been speaking to my small team of engineers. I had calmly, nicely gotten on Paul’s case to double check his numbers before giving the green-light for the next test of our machine. I realized part of my Monday dread was not wanting to find out if he actually did it. Paul had a habit of being so sure of himself he didn’t confirm his work.

He was a golden boy to the higher ups after a few successful formulas, so it was hard for me to ride his ass on that too much without seeming like I was targeting him unfairly. But we’re engineers

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for God's sake! Half our job is numbers and checking them again! He would find that out the hard way the first time his numbers are off.

I sighed and exited the bathroom, procrastinating wouldn't help our test today. If anything I should get there early to double check things myself. I'm the team lead after all.

"Coffee~!" My wife sang as she handed me a warm thermos. I smelled cinnamon and vanilla as soon as she danced into the room. Damn, definitely getting her those flowers.

"Thanks, Love. I'm sorry if you made breakfast already, but I have to head in early today. I'll take this to go." I kissed her as I took the thermos. In response she raised her eyebrow and gave me a look before throwing my tie at me from the bed.

"Pff, why do you think I put it in a bottle for you already? Sometimes I think I know you better than you know yourself. You've been going on and on about that project scheduled today, so I knew you'd be rushing out of here—and probably staying late. I won't wait up."

She was right. I might have been deemed the 'smart' one in our relationship due to my career path, but she was the one that knew every molecule of me. She could help me relax even before I realized I was stressed. She was why I kept at it in college and didn't drop out when I'd started having panic attacks at the thought of my thesis defense.

"Well..." I teased, leaning over her on the bed and beginning to play with a strand of her blonde hair. "If you know my schedule, then you'll be in bed by the time I get home I assume?"

"Probably..." She stretched out and turned away from me. "I'll be snug in bed with Dominick. No room left for you when you get back."

She knew I hated that cat in our bed. She playfully punished me when I worked late by pretending this fur-bag was her other man. One time I had come back after a particularly grueling meeting marathon

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with the C-levels and found her playing dinner with him using our wedding set of fine china. She gave him milk in a wine glass and giggled when I demanded she mark that one so I never use it again. Disgusting.

I rolled my eyes. “You can sleep with the cat if you want... or...” I intentionally drug my sentence out to get her to look back at me. I wanted those caramel eyes to be focused on me, forgetting her stupid cat for once.

“Or...?” She glanced back with a shy smile, imploring me to finish.

“Or you wear that latest little number you got from the mall and I’ll bring you back something and meet you in bed. I promise I won’t be too late.”

Before I could blink she reached up and wrapped her arms around my neck, burying her face in my chest. “Oh, you got it. But... Dominick and me are having a really snugly sleep in tomorrow if you don’t get back before I fall asleep. A girl has needs, you know.”

I put a hand on her lower back and kissed the top of her head. “Promise.”

Paul was extra insufferable today. He arrived to our workstation earlier than me but only used his time to clean his desk and print extra copies of the day’s schedule. He didn’t check his numbers, didn’t run the machine’s calibrations routine, didn’t check the code’s logs. Nothing important.

He only did what looked good to the higher up coming in to watch. The CTO, Vincent Parker, was bound to eat it up and listen to him go on and on about extrapolations we really haven’t proven yet, but Paul will be glad to swear on.

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I left my messy-but-methodical desk as is and headed straight to our real work.

Our latest project had been underway for the better part of three years. Tests started on a breadboard with messy wires and components sticking every which way. It was ugly, but it was our baby. With that first test we proved the first step of our theory: That particles could be observed in two states after high speed collisions and the presence of enough heat.

We didn't know what to make of the findings after that first step, but it secured us funding for larger tests. The next became a cluster of circuitry and lasers spanning a ping pong table. The lab one floor above was furious with us the entire year, but they hardly played on that table anyway.

Now to present day, this was the first real time using the latest system. This one was finally worthy to be called a machine rather than a collection of duct taped parts.

A good portion of the shell was tungsten. It had properly fabricated control panels, buttons that fit and were made for each purpose. The insides were a tapestry of perfectly managed cables ensuring each part got its needs met without encroaching on its neighboring component.

I ran my hand along the inside of the opened panel and felt a hot thrill run up my spine. We were turning her on today. We would have a new set of data to work with afterward. A set that no one has ever gathered before.

I didn't like to think of myself as a proud man. I'd rather move on to the next project than to croon about past works to big wigs in large rooms with long tables. But I was proud looking at this work. It was meticulously planned, painstakingly assembled, and sensitively tuned. It followed our last test with the next best leap.

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Earlier anxieties still lingered, but having a hand on the machine itself began to steady me now. I went to work cross-checking every last thing I could before we were set to begin.

At eight o'clock precisely, the doors opened and Vincent and his assistant strode in. He was a tall man who always looked at you down his glasses. His arrival gave an air of shoulder straightening to the room.

As lead to the team, I stepped forward to greet him first. Despite my aversion to the pomp and parade, I knew my place when it came to keeping higher ups in communication and showing them where their funding was going. However, Paul predictably cut in front and held his hand out.

"Welcome! I'm so glad you could watch my next test! We're all prepped to begin." Paul took a few schedules from his stack of papers and handed them to Vincent.

I looked over to our other colleagues, Darius, Ravi, and Katie. Katie and Ravi looked downright embarrassed, but Darius particularly shook his head 'no' at me, apparently thinking I may have something to say about his use of 'my' in our test.

I wasn't about to waste brain power interjecting in Paul's monologue though. Soon enough Vincent waved his hand and motioned for me to come into the conversation. "What are we really expecting from this one, Chris?"

I didn't want to bullshit him, even if he was an important player in deciding if we got funding for the next steps. No good came from lying in fields where numbers ruled. Well, no long-term good. Someone like Paul might be tempted to get away with it for a while.

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“We’re expecting a whole new set of data from this, but what that data is I can’t say yet. This is all new, as you know.” I turned to look again at our latest metal marvel.

Vincent wasn’t the easiest man to impress. He looked at his wristwatch and showed no excitement. “Well, let’s see what that is then. Please don’t wait on my account. I’ll take a seat and let you and your team proceed.”

I turned and nodded to Katie. She was our main controls engineer and would start us off today. Katie was an unassuming woman, small in stature and quiet in most rooms. But she was invaluable when we got to initial schematics. She could also get quite loud when necessary, as a few of us found out when we suggested some shortcuts in the latest prototype. She was right though. Her ideas got us to our next step in an amazingly efficient manner.

As she began checking her console, Darius and Ravi took their places as well. Darius was our safety officer in addition to his physics role. He began monitoring the output of our plethora of instruments and going over checklists. Ravi was backup for controls and our statistician. He practically dove into his workstation chair and rolled behind a series of monitors.

Paul, the golden boy, was the dreamer and mathematician, although I don’t know how he got that credential with his hatred of proofing his work. He was also second chairman to the power switch, with me as the first.

Vincent and his assistant dutifully stayed out of our way and sat in chairs further back. I was thankful he wasn’t the prying type. Some supervisors thought their duty was to literally stick their nose into the work you were doing, and with the amount of heat and pressure we were about to shoot through this baby, that would have been a Darwin-worthy idea.

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When we reached the last item in our checklist, my heart was about in my throat. It pounded heavily, and swallowing was difficult and brought no relief. I felt anxiety at every test like this, but I always worked through it. Thinking of my Love, Jamie, steadied my hand. Her words from earlier in my college days replayed in my mind. “Even if you fail at this test, you’ll go to the next and succeed. What’s important, and what you’re amazing at, is keeping going despite the difficulty.”

Paul turned his half of the power switch first, and my hand started its rotation next. But I caught myself and halted short. There was a screw dropped out of the front panel! It wasn’t likely to affect the test, but I didn’t need it to become a projectile should the machine’s pressure be more than we expect.

“Paul, hold on. We need to fix this and restart.” I took three steps forward and heard a click behind me. Before I could register the sound, the heat in front of me seared into my exposed skin.

My arms reflexively covered my face, but the bright light shone straight through to my eyes. I saw pure white and tasted copper. My hearing was gone. My legs could not be felt! Terror overtook me in an instant, and the next I ceased to feel or be anything...

I saw Jamie, at home in our bed. She had her favorite fluffy purple comforter pulled up tight to her neck. Her hair laid in golden waves around her sleeping face. Even comfortable in bed she looked like an angel plucked from Heaven. How did I get this creature to stay with me this long?

I got closer to take in her familiar and warming scent, but that sense remained absent. I’m not even sure I breathed in. Am I... dreaming? Did I even wake up Monday morning at all?

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I moved around to her left side and took in more details of her face. She was wearing mascara, blush, and that rosy tint of lipstick she saves for our date nights. Why is she asleep in her makeup? I tried to think, but my head feels light. I shook it, but I didn't feel any wind or movement against my face.

I should be panicked. I should be flush with heat as my heart pounds. I am... nothing. It is a sensation I have no recall for, no experience to know what it means or how to fix it. Instead, I settled on watching Jamie's chest subtly rise and fall under her covers.

The steady rhythm felt like home, but I can't tell how long I watched.

I know where I am now. I'm in Hell. And I deserve it for what I did to her...

I've been watching for weeks. I can tell by cues in the surroundings. Habits of humanity. Rhythms that complete. But I cannot feel time pass in myself. For me this is never-ending agony. I am a selfish, disgusting creature to even consider my pain in the context.

The real pain is hers. She has her full humanity unlike me. It started sometime when the sun was still down, and when I still watched her sleep. She stirred and arose, seemingly called to the door. I followed her down and watched as Vincent and a man in uniform stood beyond. Words were exchanged, and my Love crumpled to the floor.

I thought I couldn't hear in the place I am, but her wail of agony reached either my ears or my soul. They told her I was dead. And I guess I am. My Monday wasn't a dream. This is my afterlife.

Now I watch her. It is all I have. I watch as she cries. I watch as she doesn't eat. I watch as she doesn't get out of bed. And it is my fault. If only I was better at my job or smarter, I could have avoided the

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accident at work. Or if only I wasn't such a workaholic, I wouldn't have been there in the first place.

But I was, and I am, and I am dead. And she is broken...

Counting is a difficult thing in Hell. I would normally note down a new number in my laptop, phone, or on a whiteboard. But I can't touch anything here, so there is nothing to retain my counts but myself. I used to think the most difficult situation to count in was when someone was beside you saying random numbers, but counting when you have a sense of eternity is worse.

I think it was day 28 when she cooked her first real meal after my death. I was so proud to watch her. She can't hear me, but I cheered her on all the same. I didn't feel wetness on my eyes, but I felt like if I wasn't in the state I am I would have been crying.

She turned off the stove and sat down at our dining room table with her meal. It was conspicuously empty with only her in the chair at the end, and I saw her face fall again as soon as she looked at my empty place.

I 'sat'—as much as I can pretend to touch things here—in my empty chair. I've begun to talk to her instead of only watching, even though I know she can't hear me. "Love, I know you still miss me, but you did such a good job on dinner tonight. It looks wonderful. I hope it tastes great to you and you eat the whole serving."

I looked over her wrist as she brought her fork up from the plate. She was so frail now. Nearly a month of not eating will do that to you. I wanted to see her get healthy again. She should eat, sleep, get out of bed and enjoy things.

I watched as she ate four bites and then hesitated as she looked towards the floor. I was confused until I looked down myself and saw

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him. That damn cat. He stood by her feet, begging with one paw in the air. As I scowled at the little beggar, I saw a plop of food hit the floor which he immediately began lapping up.

“HEY! That’s not fair you selfish little flea bag! She’s skin and bones and you have the nerve to take food from her mouth?!” Anger overtook me, and I jumped up and swatted the air where his greedy little butt wiggled in the air as he ate. “You are damn lucky I can’t grab you! I’d throw you out of this house!”

He licked the floor a last few times and then crooked his head up. He stared into my eyes before turning back to Jamie to beg for a second helping.

The realization hit me. He... stared at me. He can see me. THIS BRAT COULD SEE ME THE ENTIRE TIME?! I let out a scream of frustration and rage. “WHY YOU? WHY CAN’T SHE SEE ME? I COULD HAVE HELPED HER! YOU ARE MAKING THINGS WORSE! YOU DON’T DESERVE TO STILL BE WITH HER!”

During my episode, he occasionally looked up, tongue still sticking out with food, and gave me a bored look. He didn’t even have the courtesy to be frightened by my volume! I fumed the entire rest of the meal. Jamie took one bite herself for every bite she gave him. He ate HALF her dinner.

This couldn’t stand. She needed me to help her. She needed to eat more. I tried to brainstorm what I could do while she cleaned her plate in the sink and walked over to the couch to wind down for the night. Maybe I could bother him every time she had a meal, enough to get him to leave her alone to eat. I could swat at him. Even if our molecules didn’t make contact, it could unnerve him enough to leave.

As I thought of more plans, I watched her sit down, and the sadness returned to her eyes. She looked towards my spot on the couch, now empty as was the table. I moved to also sit there. “Love, call a friend over. You don’t need to sit alone in silence like this. I know

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you don't know I'm here, but I want you to get your smile back, the smile I fell in love with. You deserve to have it again, even if it won't be for me."

As I finished my sentence, she leaned forward to embrace. I froze in surprise but sighed when I realized the cat walked across the couch arm onto my seat. She hugged him a few inches below me, and I heard her speak in barely a whisper.

"I love you, Dom. Thanks for being here. I know I've been a bad cat mom and haven't fed you on time since that night. I miss him so much...!" Her last words were choked by soft sobs, but she laughed soon after as he nuzzled her face with his own.

That... was the first time I heard her laugh since this started. I felt deep shame. Here I was planning evil for her cat while he was the only one giving her comfort. I relinquished the seat to Dominick. He deserved it more than me now. I suppose this is a little part of my hell too, watching him finally fully replace me. But it's fine if she's happy. That's what really matters.

More cycles passed, but I didn't count them anymore. Some days she eats, some days she only feeds the cat and strokes him. Things change slowly for her, but even more surprising are things changing for me. I'm able to fully hear now. No longer is my hell a mute landscape except for the few times I heard Jamie. I hear the birds singing outside, cars going by, and even that cat meowing at all hours when he hasn't been fed.

I don't know what to make of it. If I'm dead, why am I changing? What's going to change next? That and the cat seeing me are the two big mysteries I fill my time pondering. I long to gain the use of my hands so I can get books off the bookshelf and read. I might be

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considered a smart person, but I don't know much without doing research. And it is hard to research without the ability to open books or use a laptop. So I'm stuck with my thoughts going in a loop with no new input.

I hear the doorbell, and Jamie stands up to go answer it. I hope it is her sister. She came by for a week soon after my funeral but had to go back home on the East Coast afterward. I know a visit from her would cheer Jamie up more.

I follow behind Jamie to see, but I was surprised to see one of my colleagues instead. "Hi, Mrs Reed?" Ravi stood in the doorway with an unsure and nervous look on his face. Jamie was polite but seemed unsure as well. "Yes. You look familiar, but I'm sorry I can't recall your name. You were-..."

Ravi let out a big sigh, seemingly relieved that she did recognize him. "I was at Bashfeld Co.'s Christmas party last year, yes. It's Ravi, no worries. It's been a long time!"

Jamie moved aside and gestured for him to come in. "Sorry, I should have known anyway. Chris talked about his team all the time. Would you like to come in? Did you need something from Chris' office?" Ravi vigorously shook his head. "No! Nothing like that. Well, uh... I mean, I did want to talk if you're alright with it." Judging from his nervous demeanor, I half wondered if he was going to hit on Jamie now that I was dead. I really didn't take Ravi for the type though.

They sat on the couch, and Jamie pulled a photo off the nearby end table to look at as they talked. "Now I remember your name. Chris always said 'Ravi this' or 'Ravi that' when he was starting a new project. You ran numbers for him, right? Whatever that means." Jamie paused and let out a little laugh. "I admit I don't know much about the details of his work. He always tried to share, but it went over my head. Something something particle acceleration, you know."

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Ravi smiled. “I did. We ran numbers for weeks sometimes at the beginning. He is a great team lead, the best I ever had. He never once got mad at me if I gave him numbers he didn’t like.” I saw Jamie flinch at the use of ‘is’ in his sentence, but she was graceful and didn’t correct his mistake.

“He didn’t get mad often. He was a pretty cool guy.” Jamie smiled towards the wedding photo in her lap. “I think the most he got angry was at my cat, Dominick.” On cue, the black and white terrorist sauntered into the living room and perched on the couch’s armrest. “They fought so much! Like... well, like cats and dogs. I guess I didn’t help their relationship much with my teasing. I always told Chris that Dominick was my first love since I had him before we started dating.”

Despite the cute reminiscing, Ravi’s expression didn’t change. I grew more suspicious of why he was here.

“How... have you been since Chris went away? How have things felt?” The last question was poorly worded, I thought. How have things felt for a fresh widow? I hoped Jamie wouldn’t be too upset by his blundering word choice. Ravi was never the most social guy.

Jamie took an extra moment to answer. “Well, I’m picking things up. My family calls a lot which helps.” Ravi leaned forward an uncomfortable amount. “That’s-That’s not it. Have you felt anything unusual? Have you felt Chris?”

“That is over the line!” I shouted to no one. “Ravi, what the hell man? What are you doing to my wife?!”

Jamie jerked away from Ravi and stood up. “I-I always feel like he’s with me, but I’m also settling in... He’s gone. I didn’t even have a fucking body to bury, but he’s gone!” I could see tears welling in her eyes. “I need to feed Dominick and lay down. Thanks for stopping by, Ravi. Let me walk you out.”

Jamie was always terrible at dealing with pushy people. She was far too polite for what Ravi deserved, but I watched as he continued his

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rude questioning as she led him out. “That’s why Vincent wouldn’t let us call the police sooner! There was no body! It doesn’t make sense! Have you heard him? Seen him? Anything!”

Jamie shut the door on his last question and locked it. I could see her hands tremble on the door as she leaned against it for support.

“Love, it’s okay. I don’t know what Ravi is on about, but you’ve had such great progress. I know you still feel pain when thinking of me, but it’s okay to... let go. You can let go. I want to see you move on and be happy.”

I felt like my last sentence was half a lie, but I was ashamed to admit I still wouldn’t want to see her with a next lover. Maybe before she got that far, I’d dissolve into the ether like... my body already did? What was that about?

The more I think about it, the more insane I go. I try to grab the sides of my head to ground myself, but it’s not enough. Nothing is real enough in this place, ever. It makes no logical sense that there wasn’t something left of my body. I ran thousands of computations on what that machine could do, but incinerating a human body entirely while other people ten feet away are fine was not in the list of possibilities.

And if I wasn’t incinerated to death, I’m not dead. Damn it! I wish I could hit something right now! I want to feel pain! I want to know that I’M ALIVE! I need to prove it!

I’ve been pacing for nearly a day now. I can tell Jamie is about to do her bedtime routine, but I don’t need rest where I am. I feel no fatigue, only an inescapable need to make progress. It would be suffocating if I felt air here too.

I need to stop getting ahead of myself. I can’t prove I’m alive and come back all in an instant. That is too much. To help slow my

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thoughts, I forced myself to stop walking. I need a small step. A baby step. A molecule of a step...

A cat-sized step... I can do it. He can do it! My head whipped back and forth looking for my target. He's nowhere to be seen in the living room or kitchen, so he must already be in bed with Jamie.

After scaling the stairs and going straight through the closed bedroom door, I see him stretched out, taking up my whole side of the bed. I've never been so happy to see this jerk.

My thoughts drifted back to my first year of dating Jamie, back when she still had hope of 'her boys' getting along. She would often show me the cat's tricks she taught him and try to get me to work with his training. As much as I resented his fur everywhere, nighttime yowling, and clinging to Jamie, he was an objectively smart cat.

He could jump where she pointed, press buttons with his paw, lift his front paws to beg, and even jump through a child's size hula hoop Jamie bought. I always thought she was a little nutty with his training, but she said it was part of how they had fun together. I was glad for it now, it meant he could press on a tablet or laptop and help me prove the first part of my theory!

I waited by his side as Jamie finished up in the bathroom. "Hey, buddy. How are you doing? Waiting for Mommy to go to bed with you?" I tried talking in a high-pitch voice as Jamie often spoke to him. I never really tried in the past to get along. I didn't see the point. But now that I had a reason I was sure it was doable. If I could build a machine that phases me to another dimension, I could fake befriend a dumb animal.

He didn't yet show any signs of listening to me, but he perked up as Jamie opened the bathroom door and re-entered. "Ughhh, I tried to wash today off me, but I still feel heavy and achy." She dropped a towel in the laundry bin and sat next to Dominick. "But sleep should help.

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I'd like to file away that weirdo's questions and not keep replaying them."

I waited and watched carefully as she kept her phone in her left hand. I needed her to set it on the nightstand so the cat would have a chance at pawing at it.

Dominick stood up and began rubbing along her side. Jamie obliged and stroked his back. "You help too, baby. Come on, it's already pretty late."

She plugged the phone in her charger and set it down before pulling the comforter up and switching off the tableside lamp. Now was perfect!

The room was dark, but that didn't matter to a cat. I crept over to the bedside and pointed towards the phone, trying to remember his voice commands Jamie always used. "Place!" His eyes opened, but he made no move.

"Jump!" Nothing.

"Go!" He looked annoyed.

"Here!" He closed his eyes again.

I clenched my hand to keep from yelling. He was an animal. Animals responded to positive voices in nearly all studies. I had to be positive dammit!

I lowered myself to his level and tried again. "Dom!~ Domi!~ Baby!~ You know this one. I point, you go there and put your paw on the thing. I've seen you do it a million times for Mommy, I know you can do it. Here, let's try again." I straightened up and resumed pointing. "Go here! Go here, buddy!"

He stood up and stretched. It was going to work! I emphasized my pointing a few more times as he got low in his long stretch. "Yes, Dom! Here, right here, boy!~"

Maybe it was my sense of skewed time, but he remained stretching for what felt like eons. And as he finally came back up, he moved one

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paw and then paused to yawn. Hurry up you lazy bastard! “C’mon, here!”

As his yawn ended, he sat again and licked his paw. I was shaking at this point, but I had to hold to the plan. “Please, Dom. Please, right here!” He looked straight up at me. “That’s right! Look, here!” He resumed walking at a snail’s pace, but he was about to step over Jamie and be within reach of the phone.

“Good boy!~ Dats a good boy!~” Right as he was about to lower his paw, he looked up, locked eyes with me once more, and threw himself down on Jamie’s chest with a ‘whump’!

“Ow, Dom. You don’t need to lay so hard. C’mere, baby.” I watched in blinding white rage as he was enveloped into Jamie’s arms and held tight. His eyes never left mine. That FUCKER...

The night was long. I racked my brain in the dark, planning. He was still only an animal. I’m a human. This is one plus one equals two. I am smarter than him.

Everything in animal behavioral studies still pointed to positive tones and interactions as key to bonding and eventual cooperation. We had been enemies for years. I had to pretend to be friends for longer, that was all.

In the morning, I set next steps in motion. I couldn’t actually touch him, but I pretended to stroke his fur. “Hi, Dom!~ Morning! How you doin’, bud?” He stared for a moment before snapping his neck back to nip my hand. I held my composure. “Ohhhh, bud. You can’t do that. You gotta be nicer, okay?...”

For the first time in my hell, I was glad I couldn’t touch anything. If I had to swallow my hatred for this flea motel, he had to put up with me and couldn’t touch me back. Game on!

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The rest of the day was spent baby talking, praising, pretend-petting, and spending time near him in general. I couldn't measure progress in a specific metric, but I felt good about it. I was hopeful for the first time in... however long I had been stuck here.

We fell into a comfortable rhythm in the following weeks. I greeted him in the morning, we hung out on the couch in the afternoons, and I sat in my chair and pretended to pet him at dinner. I must have been doing something right, because even Jamie noticed his behavior changed a bit. She would catch him beside me somewhere and call out, "You okay, Dom? You haven't followed me to the next room..."

He seemed more at ease with me, although I knew I'd never be his favorite. He still ran to catch Jamie whenever she called.

I wish I could say Jamie made more progress, but after one particular phone call with her mother she stopped cooking again. I cursed myself for not being in the room listening. I was on Dominick watch at the time, talking softly to him in the living room. I can only guess what her mother said that upset her. I don't know many people that rave about their mother in law, but I thought mine at least wasn't on the bad end of the spectrum.

She could occasionally overstep boundaries and push Jamie on things that annoyed her, but for the most part I was left alone and they worked it out between themselves. My first theory wasn't one I liked. She could have been insisting Jamie start dating again or even had a guy in mind...

I tried to not think on it. It hurt my very being to see her this way, but keeping on my plan was the best way to get back to her and bring her beautiful smile back. I told myself that on repeat as I hung out with her cat.

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“So... seen any good movies lately?” He never responded, but that’s okay. Keeping a level, but happy voice should help bring up our bonding levels. I was going to science the shit out of my return from the dead.

I was halfway through a one-sided conversation about comic and video game characters that were real cats versus ones that were people with cat-like features. “That’s why Hello Kitty falls in the second category, but I know, that’s not fair to what I said about Garfield. The data sets are a little uneven, but more weight has to be given to the author’s own statements about the character’s cannon.”

And then the stars aligned... Jamie placed her tablet on the floor, unlocked and on-screen keyboard pulled up! This was my chance! Our chance!

I broke from my monologue but kept the chipper tone. “Hey, Dom. Want to do your trick?” I calmly walked over to the tablet and squatted beside it. “Here, buddy. Go here.” I pointed but refrained from doing so wildly. Animals could pick up on nervous energies.

Immediately he left his spot on the couch and sauntered over, making a direct line to where I pointed.

This had been a long ordeal, but I was beginning to be thankful for it. I learned a lot about myself, and my hundreds of hours practicing with Dominick would surely make Jamie happy. She always wanted her boys to get along. We both loved her dearly. I don’t know why it took me as long as it did to see what we had in common.

Our lovely woman was worth all of this and more. I couldn’t wait to embrace her and take in the scent of her hair...

Dominick was sat in front of the tablet now. I gently smiled and pointed to the first letter, ‘S’. A simple ‘S.O.S. Chris’ should do the trick. I had many long weeks thinking of what message to share, but simplicity won in the end. It would be something Jamie could

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immediately take back to Ravi. From there we could work on getting the machine to undo whatever it did.

He raised his paw and accidentally hit the 'D' key. Not a problem, no one would blame a cat for a few misspellings. I praised him in a loving voice and pointed closer to the 'S' again.

The cat seemed to study my hand closer this time. He sniffed my finger and almost nosed the key. "That's it. Thanks, bud." I encouraged. His paw came down a second time... on the 'F' this time. "That's okay. You almost did it. Here, this one."

This time it was the 'R'. "No, no, here, Dom"

The 'W'.

"Bud, please. Look. Right. Here." I emphasized.

Jamie walked back into the room, and I feared my attempt was almost up. She might pick the tablet up before he could finish the message... He was focused, though. He stared hard at my finger, then my face.

The 'P'. Not even close. I was begging at this point. "Please, please, Dom. You have to. This one, please!"

This time I understood. I was the stupid one. He very firmly pressed the 'J', looked me in the eye, and turned tail to walk over to Jamie. He sat curled at her feet, tongue stuck through his tiny front teeth.

I fell to a kneel, shaking. My plan, I- Everything it-... "FUCKING DAMN IT! YOU FUCKING PRICK!" I stormed over and shouted, pointing at his stupid dumb little face. "YOU NEVER HAD ANY INTENTION OF HELPING ME! NONE! I groveled to you for WEEKS! What the hell are you?! You're not a cat! You're a demon! A hell cat!"

I heard him purr all the louder over my tirade, but I couldn't stop.

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“I should drive you out to the country when I get back! Leave you in a field somewhere! You forget I’m bigger and stronger when I get my body back!”

I kicked the base of the couch and nearly fell on my back Charlie Brown style when my leg went through it. “Oh my gosh...” I cupped my face with my hands. “I am a loser. I can’t even trick a cat...”

A few more days passed, but they felt slower than ever. Without a plan and schedule to keep to, I was aimless. I no longer greeted Dominick in the morning, nor sat with him in the afternoon. I did intend to sit at the table for dinner, for Jamie’s support, but she never went into the kitchen.

It was already dark, and she stayed seated on the couch. She didn’t even bother to turn the TV on, instead staring ahead blankly. Sometimes she did this, and I hated to see it. Some people think depression is the opposite of happiness: sadness. But it isn’t really. Depression can be apathy, a complete inability to care for anything.

She doesn’t care to watch TV. She doesn’t care to read. She doesn’t care to eat. My heart hurts. On instinct, I sit beside her and try to talk. “It’s okay if you don’t want to watch the evening news, Love. It’s all rage bait anyway. We can just sit together. It’s okay, Love.”

I try to touch her hand, but I know it’s useless. There will be no powerful moment of love where she feels me here.

We sat like that for a long while. Dominick came to nudge her hand a few times, but she even ignored him tonight. If I wasn’t so angry at the little idiot, I might have felt sorry for him. I would give anything to help her. I’d cut my own arm off at this point. But I was less than a gust of wind in her world. I couldn’t affect anything.

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I was relieved when she finally stood up. I hoped she would go to the kitchen and eat something, anything. “I bet you still have some of that canned soup, Love. Please get yourself some.” I walked alongside her, remembering the last time I caught the flu.

I had tried to go to work that morning, but each task took every ounce of attention and energy my body had. I was attempting to make coffee and somehow put the filter on top of the ground beans when Jamie caught me. I was promptly drug back to bed, protesting the entire way about my important company-wide meeting.

To this day I don’t know if I was that weak and out of it that all five foot, four inches of that petite woman was able to overpower me, or if she got super strength at the thought of me driving while feverish and dizzy. Either way, she won and my ass stayed in bed till I could stand without wobbling.

Entering the kitchen broke me out of my memories, and I looked to my side to see Jamie was no longer there. I turned just in time to hear the thud and see her body on the living room floor, unmoving.

And then I screamed. “Hey... Hey! HEY! HELP! SOMEONE, PLEASE!” I ran and tried to grasp her shoulders, but my hands went straight through as every time before. “God! Please! Jamie, wake up! Get up!” Panic gripped me. She was alone for days at a time at this point. There was no guarantee that anyone would visit and help her if she didn’t get up.

“Jamie! Love, your phone! It’s right beside you! I’ll help, okay? All you need to do is touch it and press the emergency button on the lock screen. Please, Love!” I kneeled by her face and tried grasping her every which way. Something had to work. It had to!

The only higher being that heard my cries for help came in the room then. Dominick ran to her and sniffed. When she didn’t even flutter an eyelash, he too joined me in my panic. His yowling sounded loud in the dead of night, but our closest neighbor was an elderly

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couple at least 200 feet away in their bedroom. They would not hear him.

I began crying now, although in this place my face felt no wetness. My chest heaved and felt a painful tightness. If it were not for the circumstances I might have been glad for it. Pain proved my body wasn't dead.

After circling several times, Dominick paused and looked to me. He held my eyes, and I saw a glimmer. I had to try, for her.

"Here, Dom! The phone, right here!" I jerked backwards to where her phone fell and pointed with a shaking hand. "Right here! Press it!"

He ran straight away and pawed at the device. The screen lit up, and he frantically pawed near the center. "Now here, bottom! Bottom!" After a few tries, he pressed the small red emergency button, and it began dialing 911.

"Haha, yes! Buddy, yes!" I felt a surge of energy, elated that there was hope!

The phone did not ring through for long. A small click was heard, and a female emergency operator gave their standard greeting. "Hello, 911. What is the nature of your emergency?"

Oh, no. No, no, no. I had gotten too ahead of myself! In my adrenaline haze I had imagined I would shout for them to come to our address. How could I forget that they can't hear me?

Dominick circled the phone, yowling and pawing. He tried his best, but he had no idea of meaningful communication. The more he pressed random buttons, the more the operator would assume this was either a prank call or a misdial by a child or pet.

I had to think. I had to be smarter and solve this next hurdle! Maybe he could be coached to press the buttons at a set frequency, make the operator understand it was a purposeful pattern and that this wasn't a mistake or prank.

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“Oh, kitty! You sound so distraught!” “Meooooooooow! Mrow MROW!”

Without my intervention, they started the strangest but most wonderful conversation I had ever heard in my life.

“Is that right, Mr Kitty? I still need to send someone?”
“MROOOOW”

“Okay, let me check the phone coordinates as best I can. We can narrow this down.” “Meowwww! Mroooow!”

“The phone is pinging between Terrance Street and Westport. Do you know if it’s the first one, or second one?” I couldn’t believe my ears. This woman was talking to the cat. I snapped out of my shock and leaned forward to point to the phone again.

“One tap! Like this!” I mimed what I wanted from Dominick, and he dutifully obeyed. He tapped a button once, eliciting a shout from the operator.

“Good job! That’s Terrance Street then! Good on you! I don’t suppose you know the house number?” I again mimed the taps, timing them out. “Two, one, three. Just like that, bud!” His paw followed, and I had him repeat the same rhythm again for good measure.

“213! I have a squad car and ambulance headed your way! What a good kitty! Good job!” “Mrow!”

The woman stayed on the line, giving the usual messaging of staying calm, giving time updates, and reassuring us. Dominick alternated meowing to her and nudging Jamie’s face.

I sat on the floor next to her, beginning to come out of my panic. I whispered to my Love, if by any miracle she could hear me, how much I loved her and that she would be alright.

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The next events were a blur. The police did indeed find our house. They saw Jamie lying on the floor through the front window and promptly broke the door in to allow the paramedics access. Jamie was laid on a stretcher and taken out as they checked vitals.

I decided to stay with Dominick. I wasn't sure how this plane of existence worked, but I feared I might not make it back home if I tried to leave. Jamie was in good hands with the medics, and the hospital would contact her mother and sister to come down. She needed people that could touch her and speak to her right now... I was still in no state to offer much help.

I paced for the next day, and Dominick stayed close by and watched. For once he seemed genuine in wanting to be near me. Despite his insane levels of brattiness, he was a lost little kid without his person around.

"She'll be alright, you know. She has her family, and the doctors are taking care of her." I considered the cat's actions as the beginning of a new truce, so I tried my best to comfort him. Although I may have been repeating this more for me.

Every time a car drove past, he would trot to the front window and wait. We were both kept disappointed until late afternoon the next day.

The car belonged to my mother-in-law, and this time I too ran to look out the window. I could see Jamie in the passenger seat. Thank God! If they released her this early, it was likely nothing serious. Not that exhaustion and not eating wasn't serious, but it was easier to fix than a stroke or heart attack.

I strained to hear their conversation as they walked up, but I only heard words after the front door was opened. "I just- I wouldn't think on it that much, Honey. He's a good pet, but the lady sounded a little off her rocker too. I'm sure she exaggerated. You might have dialed the number yourself before you passed out and forgot in your fatigue."

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“It wasn’t just who dialed, Mom. She told the EMTs that the cat used Morse code to send the correct address! They have the tape copy. I certainly don’t know Morse code.” Ah, so the story was getting exaggerated. Tapping once for “one” and twice for “two” was not Morse code by a long shot.

“Well let’s see if Mr Whiskers knows Morse code—after you eat lunch! I’m going to make it as soon as we set your bags down. Sit, sit. You wait here.” Her mother led her to the couch, and Jamie sat down despite her exasperated look. “His name is Dominick, Mom.”

“Oh, cats don’t care. They don’t know their names like dogs do!” Dominick ran to jump up on Jamie’s lap, sniffing and purring. I was back to second place in his world, probably slightly higher than dirt on the carpet on terms of interest and loyalty. But that was okay, my Love was home.

I sat next to her and tried my best to hug her without going straight through. “Welcome home, Love. If only you knew the half of it. And I believe you, he’s definitely smart enough to know his name.” To my surprise, Dominick looked my way and left Jamie’s lap to walk up to me. He leaned up for a pet, but I of course couldn’t really oblige. This must have been his way of saying ‘thanks for helping my mommy’.

Jamie furrowed her brows and stared at him for a moment. “Seeing ghosts again, Dom? I’m right here, baby. I’ll pet you.” My eyes lit up. I might still have a chance! I jolted up and looked around the room for anything he could work on. Neither of the women left their phones out, but Jamie’s tablet was on the kitchen’s breakfast bar. I strode over and noticed it was facing down. Damn!

“There’s never going to be a perfect scenario” I told myself. Let’s do this. “Hey, Dom! C’mere, boy. Here!” I called, pointing at the tablet anyway. He trilled a response and hopped off the couch.

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“Good job! Right here, bud!” If this did work, I hoped it wouldn’t scare Jamie too much. She was in a fragile state, and I didn’t want her fainting again. But I had to get back to her!

He jumped onto the high breakfast bar and sniffed the tablet. I pointed again. “Paw, right here. Just keep pawing at it.” If this was suspicious enough, hopefully Jamie would walk here and turn it over for him to check it out.

Jamie cocked her head, watching him. “What’s wrong today, baby? Oh! I didn’t feed you last night! You poor thing!”

No! I didn’t need him getting distracted! I felt hope slipping away. While Jamie went into the kitchen to retrieve his food, I remained resolute. “Bud, stay with me. Keep doing paw right here! I’ll get you a mountain of treats after! It’ll be soooo much better than your dry food. Please!”

His ears perked up at ‘treats’. He pawed at the tablet a few more times, looking at me still.

Jamie placed his full food bowl next to him. “Here you go, baby. Go on and eat.” He turned to sniff the food, and I could tell I was losing. “T.R.E.A.T.S. TREATS, BUD! A LOT!” I begged and pointed more.

We were in a brief invisible war now with Dominick conflicted between us. Jamie on the left, pointing at his food bowl. Me on the right, pointing at the tablet. The spoiled brat chose a compromise: Shovel his open jaws into the food, scooping up as much as he could, then walk back and paw at the tablet. Dry food and treats. He was smart...

“Alright, alright. I don’t know what you think is here, baby. Is there a bug under my tablet?” Jamie carefully flipped it over, looking underneath. “There’s nothing, Dom.”

Half the battle won! I nearly jumped for joy. “Again, bud! Right here to turn on the screen!” I had never been so happy for touchscreens.

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Technology may have put me here, but by God technology was going to get me out too!

In-between crunches of dry food, he followed along and pawed where I instructed. The screen turned on. The on-screen keyboard pulled up. I pointed to the first letter, 'S'.

"No! FUCK, NO!" I cried as I realized. The keyboard was focused on the login screen! Right now any keys typed showed up as asterisks! I scrambled to remember Jamie's passwords. If I had to guide Dominick to unlock the screen first, this was a whole new beast.

"Honey, can that thing please not eat on the counter top?" My mother-in-law butt in. "It's unsanitary! No wonder you got sick. Wouldn't he rather eat outside?"

I stood up straight, suddenly indignant. "First of all, Barb, fuck off. This is not your home." It was a shame she couldn't hear me either.

Jamie came to his rescue. "Mom, he always eats here. It's his spot. If it bothers you, we can eat lunch on the couch." Barb only huffed in response, and Jamie went back to watching Dominick's antics. "Maybe you want to play your fish game, baby? Here, let me set it up for you."

Jamie took the tablet, unlocked it, and pulled up a fish-tapping game for toddlers and pets. This was better! I could work with this! Dominick began to get distracted, occasionally tapping a fish, but I redirected him to a specific corner of the screen. "This is it, bud. C'mon."

The game closed, and I pointed to a notes app. Jamie's face went from smiles, watching her baby kitty tap on fish, to unworldly horror as the words formed: 'S.O.SS CHRIS' I could forgive him for the typo. Maybe it stood for 'Save Our Sorry Souls'.

"MOM, MOM!" I watched Jamie run into the kitchen, clutching at her mother's shoulders. "It's Chris! It was him! He's here!" Her shouting was getting panicked, and Barb looked frightened but for the wrong reasons. "No, no! Honey, you need to sit down! No one is here!"

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“How do you explain this?!” Jamie grabbed her mother’s arm and pulled her over to the tablet. I pointed and had Dominick attempt ‘S.O.S’ again for good measure. It came out with another extra character, but it was close enough for the horror to reach Barb too.

“I- I think we need a priest, Honey.”

Luckily Jamie didn’t call a priest. She called Ravi. I had a team better than any Ghostbusters remake currently assembled in my living room. Darius, Ravi, Paul, and Katie were assembled, staring at a black and white tuxedo cat munching on a small pile of treats.

“And here’s the tablet. That’s the exact message he typed” Jamie handed it to Ravi who in turn passed it to the next team member after reading.

“I don’t think he’s in the cat.” Katie spoke up. “The machine wouldn’t do anything like that. But it could put his molecules in another phase I guess.” Jamie looked hopeful. “So he’s here, but somehow Dominick can see him?”

Darius shook his head. “This is some crazy shit. Chris, is this really you?” He spoke to the air in general, and I had no way to answer with Dominick distracted and the tablet in Paul’s hand.

Ravi jumped in to argue. “I said it! I said it didn’t make sense! You all didn’t believe me! But he is here in another form!”

Darius and him exchanged some quips, but Paul turned to Jamie. “There’s obvious typos in this, but you saw the cat do it?”

She was buzzing with energy. “Yes! I watched every keystroke!” It was good to see some life in her after all she went through. While waiting for Ravi to get my team together, she had scarfed down the lunch her mother made.

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“That’s not good.” Paul replied. “We can’t base things off bad data. We need a method without typos...” Now Paul was concerned with double checking his data? I rolled my eyes.

Within the hour, my living room had transformed. Paul set the rest of the team to task. They had gathered papers and printed single characters on each one. The entire qwerty keyboard was before me, laid out on the floor one paper at a time.

Paul kept a notebook in his hands, poised ready with a pencil. “Well, don’t keep us waiting, Chris.” And so began the first cat seance with a homemade Ouija board. The papers were spread apart well, so Dominick had no problem with his instructions. Jamie fed him one treat for every character.

I guided, and the characters formed: ‘HELP’

Paul wrote as the cat went. “We have to do this methodically. Right now we have proven that some smarter being is guiding your cat around, unless your cat knew how to spell before?” Jamie gave him a look. “No! He’s smart, but not that smart! It’s Chris!”

“It’s someone.” Paul corrected. “We haven’t proven it’s Chris.” Katie sighed. “If you want to be pedantic, but let’s not scare her. Chris, what’s the password to our floor door?”

I chuckled. They were a good balance for each other. I had a good team. With his steady flow of treats, Dominick went to work again. Paul wrote down the digits: ‘13379’

“That’s right.” Katie stated. “Only we know that, so we can know this is Chris and move on.” Paul shifted, looking like he wanted to argue. I got the feeling that Paul had taken over my team lead role and wasn’t looking forward to giving it up to not-dead me.

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Finally, he moved on. “Okay, let’s go back to the events that morning. Chris, when the machine came on, what did you experience? This might help us know what your status is and what we can theoretically do.”

I thought for a moment before instructing Dominick: ‘HOT WHITE HOME GHOST’ That sounded like an ad for a new kind of strange escort service, but I hoped they understood what I meant. I was relieved when I saw Ravi nod. “There was a lot of heat and white light when the machine started. We all experienced that. But when we shut it down, you were completely gone. You went home and thought you were a ghost?”

Jamie looked around for a moment and snatched the notepad from Paul. “You forgot the ‘YES’ and ‘NO’ options. Don’t make him spell out each one. Have you never been to a sleepover?” Paul looked insulted, and I got the feeling that no, he wasn’t invited to sleepovers with his attitude problems.

Jamie scribbled ‘YES’ on one paper and ‘NO’ on another and placed them in the corners on the floor. I quickly pointed to ‘YES’, and Dominick padded over and whapped it with his paw. Before Paul could ask another question, I had one myself: ‘HOW TURN ON?’

That was one thing that didn’t make sense to me. I left the power control board with my key unturned. The machine should never have started up if only Paul turned his key. It literally was not possible with how the board was wired.

Darius spoke up before Paul could explain. “That would be Paul’s fault! He reached over and turned your key for you!” Paul looked embarrassed and angry. “You were taking us off schedule, Chris. You shouldn’t have stepped toward the machine after we started.”

That figured! Oooh, Paul would be hearing from me after I was back. He was going to be calculating our data by hand with a pencil for the next month, and double checking it!

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We went on asking and answering questions like that for the better part of the evening. They shared some theories with how the molecules could be converted, but Katie insisted they would test on some objects before I ever went near the machine again.

She also looked between our teammates and said no one should tell Vincent what was going on, on the off chance the corporate big wigs wanted to prolong this science experiment or use the fact that I was legally dead to their monetary advantage.

I thought that was a great safeguard, but Paul tried to argue. Katie put him in his place right quick. “You can look good for Vincent after Chris is back! I swear on your mother’s grave, if you tell him beforehand I will put you in our machine!” Paul countered. “My mom isn’t dead. She has no grave.” “Yet.” was Katie’s simple reply which cowered him.

They made plans to go back to the office and run tests in secret. For now, I was instructed to hold tight and stay with my translator, Dominick. Jamie could text them if I had anything new to say. I agreed with the plan, and they each left. Ravi gave one last parting comfort before he shut the door behind him. “Please try not to worry, Mrs Reed. We’ll get Chris back. We’ll take shifts working on it till we do.”

Now alone, the house fell silent. Dominick was long ago full of food and sleeping. With my translator off shift, I had no way to speak to Jamie. It had been so long since my words made it to her, months ago before I left for work that Monday morning.

“Chris, I’m so sorry I didn’t know you were there. I’m sorry I didn’t help you sooner.” Jamie spoke. A tear rolled down her cheek, but she brushed it away as soon as it started. “But I’m with you now! I’m going to do my best too, and we’ll get you back...” Her voice cracked, betraying her strong front. “I-I’ll get you back...!”

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“My Love, I’m the one who should have helped you.” We fell into silence on the couch, and eventually she fell asleep. This time, I was sure that my presence was with her.

It was a long week before Ravi reported they were ready for next steps with me. Jamie and I had spent the time conversing through Dominick, when he was willing. Jamie had taped the papers to the floor so that they wouldn’t be disturbed any time she or Dominick walked through the room.

It was so good to talk to her, even if our method was strange for now. She was back to eating regularly, and the sight made me hungry myself. I thought I couldn’t feel hunger in this phase, but I would have a lifetime to figure out the science behind this after I was back.

On the last day, Ravi and Katie came in a car to pick me up, although they weren’t sure how this would physically work. They picked a Friday afternoon because they were confident they could sneak even Jamie and Dominick in the office. Most of the higher ups were out already.

Dominick had a simple ‘YES’ and ‘NO’ taped to the front floor of his carrier. We got into the car and they checked with me every step of the way. Was I still with them: ‘YES’. Was I comfortable with their plan: ‘YES’. Were my molecules still feeling alright: ‘YES’??

We went in a back door and around to a service elevator. We were halfway to the office when I remembered I could have walked through the front doors and straight through the locked doors. There was no need for me to sneak around, but I chuckled and followed.

If I wasn’t so worried about Jamie the entire time, I could have had some fun with this. I was always annoyingly curious what was really in Area 51... But I suppose I missed my chance.

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Everyone made it to our workstation floor and entered. The desks, control panels, and tools all looked how I left them. I was glad Paul didn't chuck my workstation into the dumpster after my 'death'.

Katie took the lead from here. "Alright, Chris, we need you to stand on the 'X' we placed on the floor. When you are there and waiting, please have the cat indicate. Then we will all get back a safe range and get started."

I walked over and Jamie took Dominick in his carrier too. I stood on the designated spot and waited as Jamie set Dominick down. I pointed, and he pawed: 'YES'. I wish they had brought more words for him. I wanted to tell Jamie I loved her one last time, just in case anything went wrong. But a 'YES' was all I had...

"I love you, Honey. I'll see you soon, okay?" Jamie wiped her face and stood back up, taking herself and Dominick across the room.

For a few minutes Darius and Paul looked over some instruments, and Ravi and Katie started the checklist. Finally, Katie spoke again. "We're ready. See you on the other side. Er, our side. The right side!"

Gosh, I hope someone made Paul check his numbers.

The blinding white light returned as the machine powered up. I tried to cover my eyes to no avail. It consumed me along with the heat as before. I knew I was yelling, but I couldn't hear myself over the sound from the machine. Then everything faded...

I woke up to Jamie hugging me on the floor, actually hugging me, touching me. I hugged her back and cried. "I'm back, Love. I'm back. It's okay!" I could hear my team cheering and excitedly checking instruments, celebrating their accomplishment. But Jamie and I stayed like that a few moments more.

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I was broken out of my focus by a loud ‘MROOWWW’. I let Jamie go and sat up to open Dominick’s carrier. I took him out and hugged him as well. “I can’t forget to thank you, buddy.”

“Hey! What is this?” Jamie looked surprised and left out. “What, are you jealous of my new man?” I quipped. “He’s mine now. We bonded.” She playfully smacked my arm. “Oh no, I’m not letting that happen. We’re just going to have to be a throuple I guess.” She squeezed in on my side and put her arms around mine and Dominick. “I love my weird boys.” “I love you, Love.”

END

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