

Excerpt from "Why Is There A Lemon In My Fruit Salad"

Peace: Or Learning to Cat Nap

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear. --Romans 8:15a

I own a cat with a severe anxiety problem. It got so bad once, that she even had to go on kitty-Prozac.

Duane and I should stop getting pets. First we got a rabbit that goes for your jugular…now a cat with anxiety problems.

It all started out so innocently, really.

My dear, dear husband knows how much I love animals. I grew up surrounded by them on my parents's farm, and I owned, showed and/or trained horses since I was nine years old. And since the rabbit didn't work out too well as a "cuddler," Duane thought a kitten would be a great idea.

"But what about your allergies?" I asked. Unbeknown to us at the time of purchase, Scamper was an allergen. Duane was allergic. But rabbits only live about four or five years, and since she was now in year three, we figured we might as well keep her. After all, who else would want her?

"We'll check it out," he said.

So my wonderful husband went with me to a friend's house. Christine had three house cats. We sat in the living room, figuring surely there was cat dander somewhere around, and Duane was fine. No reaction. No asthma attack. Not even after a couple of hours.

Test completed, we went to the Humane Society.

There were so many kittens! Cages were full of litters; some with two, some as many as five.

I fell in love with a tortoise shell and she lounged in my arms, purring peacefully when I took her away from her littermates. She was definitely a cuddle-cat.

"What about this one?" Duane's voice broke through my reverie.

He pointed to a lone little kitten in a cage all by itself. It had climbed up onto the bars of the cage and was hanging from the door, claws extended, groping for dear life. All its little hairs stood on end, and it's tiny pink mouth opened in loud yowls of fear.

"It's scared," said Duane.

The shelter manager took the kitten out and handed her to Duane. She was the tiniest kitten I had ever seen. She curled up against his chest and fell immediately to sleep, like she had found peace at last.

"We've got to get her," said Duane.

My husband has never been an animal lover, and it warmed my heart to see him attached to this tiny creature.

"Well…okay," I said. But, I did point out the tortoise shell kitty sleeping in my own arms.

"She needs us," he said, cuddling the sleeping kitten closer.

"Gardener," as the shelter workers called her, was found in the parking lot of a grocery store. She was alone. They averaged her to be only about four weeks old, so we had to give her a special milk formula since she was supposed to still be nursing.

At home, I fixed up a basket with some blankets, and rolled up some socks for a chew toy. She was happy.

My mom said if we ever had children she loved the southern charm in the name Ashley Mae for a girl. Since we didn't have a child, we named the cat Ashley.

Ashley had a good kitten-hood, and all appeared normal. We kept her separated from Scamper for fear the bunny would hurt the tiny orange kitten. Silly, silly us. We should have let them duke it out.

All went well until the Bag Incident.

I was home alone at the time. I returned from a shopping trip and was putting groceries away. Apparently, Ashley thought the white plastic bags looked like they'd be fun to crawl inside.

But on the way in, her head got stuck in the handle.

I heard a yowl and turned just in time to see a streak of orange sail into the living room dragging a bouncing, billowing white bag along with her. Then, the streak sailed back past and into the bedroom.

"Ashley!" I called, running after her. "It's okay girl!"

She sailed past me again, fright and adrenaline giving her speed. She was in a panic, blindly running around the house "away" from the terrifying bag, which billowed out behind her like a parachute. I couldn't catch her and I started to get scared she was really going to hurt herself.

The more she ran, the more air "whooshed" into the bag, adding height and size to its scary white plastic proportions. She couldn't get away from it. And here I was, running after her pleading with her to stop.

She ran around the house like this for several minutes and finally ran into the bathroom where she took a blind dive at the window above the bathtub. Her head hit with a loud thunk and she left a smeared wet mark on the glass, probably from her nose. She landed heavily in the bathtub below where I quickly threw a towel over her, secured her legs (and claws!) in it, and pulled the bag off her head.

She had changed. Her eyes were dark with fear, and she looked at me like she didn't know me. Her lips curled back in a snarl and she started growling.

I put her down.

The next several hours were a bit traumatic for both of us. She seemed to be okay physically, so I went downstairs to start a load of laundry. She got on the steps above my head and assumed some type of attack position. She was crouched low, glaring at me as if the whole bag incident were my fault, and she was growling and yowling in that way that cats have. She had gone mad.

And I couldn't get up the stairs. Every time I tried, she crouched as if she was going to jump on my head from above.

I was trapped.

I considered grabbing the broom and "sweeping" her off the stairs, but I didn't want to traumatize her further. So I did the next best thing. I called Duane.

"The cat has me trapped in the basement," I said.

He laughed. Obviously he didn't understand the severity of the situation.

"No, really, she has me trapped," I said. "What should I do?"

He tried to calm me down, but I could tell he was holding back laughter. That made me mad. My cat was traumatized. She had gone mad. I was her victim.

So I hung up and called the Humane Society. First the lobsters, now the cat...they probably put my caller ID down on a list under "do not answer when this crazy lady calls."

"Put her in a dark, quiet place until her anxiety attack disappears," the nice guy on the other end of the phone said. "Then you'll be able to tell if she needs to go to the vet or not."

Well, I would gladly put the cat in a nice quiet dark place if I COULD TOUCH HER. So, I did what I should have done all along. I prayed...for my life.

I'm not sure if God answered or if I finally got a clue, but I found her kitty-carrier that we used to take her to the vet and I opened the door and set it on the ground. She hates the thing, but apparently it looked appealing because she ran for it, curled up inside--facing me, of course--and continued her growling.

I ran up the stairs for safety.

It took Ashley several days to "come down" from her anxiety high. She was okay physically, but she was never quite the same mentally after that. She wasn't mean, exactly, but she was prone to anxiety attacks if things got too loud, or people came to visit, or we rearranged the furniture. And it always took her a few days after each event to crawl out of the kitty carrier and rejoin us upstairs.

I tell you this story because I can relate. Several years into my marriage, I started battling anxiety myself…

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