Jonathan Brown

Notebooks

*Vomit and cat piss, she smells like vomit and cat piss.* Jack Randson had spent the last twelve minutes trying to put his finger on the not-so fragrant aroma that emanated from the large, rather unkempt woman seated next to him on the bus. He realized this upon seeing a homeless man regurgitate his latest meal on to the sidewalk, only to have it quickly licked up by an emaciated, grey cat. Needless to say, Jack hated New York public transit. Forced to cope with her stench, he did his best to lean away from the women and pulled out a small red notebook, penciling in

*5:44-Woman on bus smells like barf and cat urine*

Jack arrived to work at exactly nine o’ clock, as always. He walked past reception without saying a word and sat down at his cubicle, ready for another day’s work. Just as he was about to turn on his computer he noticed something rather unusual, there was no one else in the room. After waiting for precisely eleven minutes, he began a thorough search of the offices. Checking first all twenty-four cubicles in the main room, then the bathrooms, and the break room, but there was no one to be found. Satisfied that he must have made some sort of mistake in coming in that day, he picked up his bag, put on his brown corduroy coat, and walked out the door. As he did this, he noticed at his feet a piece of paper that had apparently been taped to the door, but had been ripped down. It read:

*Attention valued employees: we regret to inform you that due to recent budget cuts the New York branch will be closing effective immediately. Please address all questions to the help hotline. Thank you and have a wonderful day.*

Jack looked at the announcement curiously, and then returned it to its rightful place on the door. Once again he removed his little, red notebook and wrote:

*9:36-Unemployed*

At his small, rather plainly decorated apartment Jack found that he had one message on his answering machine. While it played, he took off his shoes, placed them in the closet, and removed his coat.

“Jack, it’s Laura. Listen I’m sorry and I know it’s horrible to do this over the phone, especially when you’re at work but, it, it’s over Jack. I can’t do this anymore. It’s like you don’t even feel anything, we hardly ever talk, it’s just not working out. I’ll come by next week to get my stuff. I know it’s stupid to ask but can you still watch my aunt’s cat when she goes out of town? And Jack, I really am sorry.”

Jack simply paused for a moment and carefully placed his coat on the coat rack. He called Laura back right away, letting her know that it was o.k. and that of course he would take care of the cat. Jack then went about the business of doing some chores he hadn’t had time to complete, stopping to take notes all the while.

*10:51-Waxed the kitchen floor*

*11:33-Watered the flowers in the window*

*12:42-Dusted the living room*

The day went along like this until about seven o’clock. Jack was in his kitchen, making a bologna sandwich, when through his window he saw another grey cat. This time scurrying into the street, where it stopped and looked up at him, licking its chops. He stopped for a moment, meeting its gaze. Their standoff was cut short when a dark four door, blaring its horn, sped past the cat. Jack plopped the bread on his sandwich and took a large bite, taking a moment to stare at the empty space the cat had occupied. He wrote down another note, walked out of his home and up the fourteen flights of stairs to the top of his apartment building, leaving his little red notebook closed on the kitchen table.

He took each step gingerly, anticipating the sensation as his feet hit the cold concrete, counting his steps all the way. He walked three hundred and seventy-eight in all. When he reached the exit door Jack stopped. He stood there for exactly eight minutes and thirty two seconds; arms hung loosely at his side, staring into the blaring red exit sign. Then, with a sudden angst he threw the door open and ran the short distance to the edge. As he reached it, and stepped up onto the ledge, he felt the cold, night air pushing against him, cradling him. Jack looked down into the city street. There were still plenty of cars and people going about, but this is not what drew his attention. Sitting on a dumpster, just below him, he thought he could see a small grey cat. It looked angry with Jack, upset that he had found such an effective loophole, an escape. Jack leaned forward and a broad smile stretched across his face.

A few hours later, the police arrived to do a once over of the home, everyone knew it was a suicide but it was policy in cases like this. They nonchalantly looked around, opening a few drawers, the closet, peeking into the bathroom; completely ignoring the little red book. Two weeks later, after no relatives came forward, the landlord decided that it was time to get rid of Jack’s things himself, which of course meant hiring someone else to do it. The movers had instructions to save anything of value and throw the rest out. At the bottom of the hallway closet, they found a large cardboard box, filled to the brim with little, red notebooks.

Seeing that the notebooks had already been used, and not exactly being the brightest that New York had to offer, they took the box and threw it directly into the dumpster. Finding the notebook on the kitchen table later, they threw it into a garbage bag with similar disregard.

So, the record of the life of Jack Randson was to disappear into obscurity, but as the garbage man drove away from the now empty apartment an unexpected event occurred. A small, grey cat darted in front him, causing him to jam on the breaks, jostling his load and removing a little, red book from one of the bags. The man standing in back noticed it, and being more curious than the movers and a credit to his profession, reached in and picked it up. Later, sitting in his armchair at home, he fanned through the pages, starting from the back, until he came to the final entry.

6:57-Made a bologna sandwich, I hate cats.