

Curiosity

I woke up suddenly, arms crossed in front of me, slouched on top of my books. Under my arms, I saw a drawing of a sassy monkey climbing a rope, arrows labelling the directions of forces being exerted on the monkey. *Physics...ugh*. I rubbed my eyes and recognized my favourite coffee shop's drab gray walls. I groggily checked the time on my phone: 7:30 PM. *If I leave now, I might return home before 9.*

I quickly walked towards the shop's front door, the sassy monkey safely stored away in my backpack. The shop was virtually empty; the manager was the only one left, making final checks for the night. He waved to a young boy and girl outside in the rain. *Young love? How nice.* A familiar jingle played as I pushed the front door open and stepped outside.

I fumbled with my umbrella under the veranda. A small figure brushed past my leg and I looked down to see a small orange cat. Rainwater dripped from its coarse, matted fur, and it wobbled towards the couple behind me. I shrugged, raised my umbrella, and walked towards the bus stop.

"The cat peed on my shoes!" screeched the young girl. I spun around, just catching a glimpse of her golden hair as she ran back into the shop to grab a change of shoes. The boy was crouched, facing me but looking behind him. He quickly glanced into the shop and dropped his umbrella.

"What happened—" I started, but he quickly disappeared down the street. *Why did he glance back into the shop? This can't be good.* I cursed my suspicions and started running after the boy.

I squinted to keep the drizzling rain out of my eyes. The boy turned sharply into an alleyway and my heartbeat rose. *Please just let this be a misunderstanding...*

I stopped just before the alleyway and peered inside. I could make out a low shifting figure a few steps in front of me, facing away from me. The putrid smell of blood washed over me and I heard a squelch. I shuddered. The faint silver moonlight crept its way into the alleyway, past me and finally just onto the figure. I realized that the figure was the young boy from the shop. I took a step into the alleyway.

"Wh... What are you doing?" I asked, my voice trembling.

His right arm jerked slightly, but he continued with his slow, methodical movements. I squinted to look for anyone further down the alleyway beyond the moonlight, but I might as well have had my eyes closed.

“You left your friend,” I continued shakily, “It’s not safe here.”

He slowly stood up and turned to face me, his eyes hidden from the moonlight. In his hands glinted a thin, small blade. Blood streamed from the blade, eventually slowed to a drip.

I took a step backwards, “What did you do-” I croaked, my voice barely a whisper.

He slowly brought his left hand closer to his face, putting his finger over his lips as if to shush me. I was screaming at myself to run, but my body wouldn’t move. He took a step towards me, his narrowed eyes now in the moonlight staring into mine.

“Please, I won’t tell her-,” I begged, but he wordlessly brushed past me, disappearing once again into the darkness.

I felt a twinge of pain in my neck and I slowly raised my hand to my neck. I brought my hand into the moonlight. My fingers were covered in blood. My blood. My knees buckled and I fell forward, my cheek pressed into the rough gravel of the alleyway. My bag ripped and my heavy physics textbook landed in front of me. I saw the monkey, his sass replaced with dread as his tail slowly turned a deep red. My neck felt warm. The soft rain that had once been a whisper in the air felt suddenly fierce. The orange cat lay lifeless a few feet away from me, its dirty orange tail now caked red.

In the distance, I heard the familiar jingle of the shop’s front door. The rain had resumed its soft, steady rhythm. My eyelids felt heavy. I tried to cry out, but my voice had deserted me, now just a low, dying croak.

“Can you *believe* that cat peed on my new shoes?!” The girl squealed, giggling.

“Some cats are just born bad,” the boy laughed, his calm voice putting the girl at ease, “but they can never hurt you as long as you stay with me.”