

Satisfaction

by Brenda Campbell

Her mobile woke me. I'd been asleep on the window seat, warming myself in the late afternoon sun. 'Hello to you too. Yes, I enjoyed last night.' She giggles, listens for a while, looks happy. 'I'm home now. Okay, half-past?'

She's going out? What about me? I purr, the endearing one, it usually works.

'Sorry Puddles, not now.'

Yeah, I know, dumb name. And no, I'm not telling you why.

So what's the hurry? It's him again isn't it? I purr again, louder.

She ignores me. Perfume, a dab behind her ears, a touch of blusher across her cheeks. Oh and lippy too. A shade too bright for her pale skin I fear. But yeah, it looks like she's going out with him again. She met him online a few months ago, on a dating app no less. It's not his real name, but to me he's the archenemy, Voldemort.

It's a struggle but she gets her dress zipped up. Whoa, Young Lady, that's a tad revealing. And tight to boot.

'What do you think Puddles? Will he like it?' She twirls in front of the mirror.

Of course he will, the pervert. I ratchet up the purring.

She looks at me. 'Puddles, you do like him don't you?'

Like him? Are you insane? Of course I don't like him. He's mean and nasty. He kicks me every chance he gets. You don't see because he does it when you're not looking. I'm bruised all over. And he's pulled my tail so many times I think the connection between it and my, er, you know what, is tenuous at best.

'Puddles, I think he's going to ask me tonight.'

I'm not sure I like these intimate revelations, but like my dear old Mum used to say, sometimes it's best to know the worst, so you can plan for it. So what do you mean, ask what? I don't think I'm going to like the answer, but then the doorbell rings. I glance at her clock. Five minutes before half past. I know it's him, Voldemort. He'd be hoping I'm outside so he can get a sly kick in. Or was he already here when he called? Outside, spying on us. But no, that's the way to paranoia, and anyway, he's not that smart.

So she rushes down the stairs without a backward glance. I'm already forgotten. I crouch at the top of the stairs to watch.

They embrace. He's bought champagne and flowers, the toady. She tells him to sit and opens every cupboard in the kitchen looking for a vase. I could have told her where it was. When she

returns she has an ice bucket and glasses. He makes a big play of opening the bottle, as if that makes him sophisticated. When it pops they giggle and he pours. They sit on the couch and talk for a while. So boring, but then he pulls a tiny box from his jacket pocket. He kneels in front of her and flips the lid. She's smiling, crying. Too mushy for me, I can't watch, so I scoot down the stairs, and out through the cat flap in the laundry door. I'm outside, this is my territory. I have calls to make. The local ladies are waiting.

When I come back he's still there, on the couch cuddling up to her. He has the whiff of someone settled and difficult to remove.

He sees me and gives me his 'you won't last long' look.

I slink into the kitchen, hide under the table and dream of past liaisons. Oh the stories I could tell. At last, I wake up to leaving sounds. I'd clap if I could, but I stand guard at the kitchen door to see him off the premises. But wait, she's heading upstairs, and, oh my God, he's following her.

Not on my watch Mate. I rush out and latch onto his ankle. Is that skin or bone? My teeth aren't so sharp nowadays, so all I get is a mouthful of denim. He shakes me off and I land at the bottom of the stairs. I check myself for damage, but it's okay, no real damage, just my pride.

All night they're in there. I know what they're up to. I'm a bit of a bad boy myself, or so the local ladies tell me. But I try not to boast, modesty being part of my *raison d'être*.

So I wait, I'm patient. No, I'm not really patient, but I have no choice, I'm locked out. My beds in there, and Hoppy, my one-eared bunny's in there too. Apparently I tore his other ear off one night in my sleep. Cats have nightmares too. Now I'll be awake all night with no Hoppy to cuddle. And no, the local ladies don't know about Hoppy. Nor do they need to.

It's early the next morning when he emerges from the bedroom, a smug self-satisfied look on his ugly face. Ah, he might think he has the upper hand, but he doesn't realise how vulnerable he really is. He's quite obviously spiteful, but I'm a cat, devious is my second name.

Silent and still, my grey fur blends into the carpet on the top stair. It's all in the timing, he'd appreciate that. As his foot hovers over me looking for the next step down, I arch my back and howl. It's my howl that does it. He didn't expect that from a cat. My inner dog. He grunts and trips. It was comical really, legs pumping for purchase in thin air, arms flailing and then a gratifying thud.

And there he lies, at the bottom of the stairs. Who's smug and self-satisfied now? Touché.