

# Hank as a Youth



and other feline stories  
for Cat friends

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## Hank as a youth

**Yes indeed, children, it's time for yet more boring cat stories.**

**We'll begin our episode with the introduction of my new cat Hank.**

Hank was given to me as a birthday present last year by three of my classmates who were either well-meaning, or just tired of listening to me whine about Streak's passing away. (I am available for further whining on that subject, should anyone make the mistake of showing a passing interest.)

Actually, they gave me Hannah. It wasn't until we got Hannah to the vet that I was informed that my Hannah was really a Hank. (I suppose there's some irony there, but I won't go there just right nOw.)

Some of my other smart-alec friends (the best kind of friend, as far as I'm concerned) suggested that when I got Hank fixed, I could also get him six boob jobs, and start calling him Hannah again.

Financial concerns, as well as the dearth of veterinary plastic surgeons in the Storrs-Mansfield area sadly put the kibosh on that plan.

Hank is my little short-hair black and white "tuxedo cat," and approximately the most stupid cat in the entire world. It's a good thing that he also has the nicest disposition in the entire world, because I would have been tempted to send him back otherwise.

As it turns out, neither of these features is an accident. When my classmates went off in search of a new kitten for me, their primary selection criteria were that it had to be as cute and pitiful as possible. They scored direct hits on both goals.

When I got Hank, he was so hopelessly small that it was difficult to believe that he'd ever be anything other than an oversized rodent. He had such a short wheelbase, that he very nearly couldn't walk without banging his front and rear paws into each other.

This might have restricted his mobility, but for the first month, mobility wasn't the issue. He spent all his time hiding, either under the refrigerator, or in the bathtub. Later on, it was mainly the bathtub.

This provided a sense of consistency and predictability to the relationship. Every evening when I'd come home from work, I could be sure to find him in the bathtub, quivering with fear.

I had meant, one day, to leave the tub full of water, to see what I'd find when I got home in the evening, but sadly, he outgrew this habit before I put my plan into action.

This behavior was at least partially explained by his origins. According to the same people who told me he was a Hannah, Hank was taken from a litter of feral cats. Apparently, he just wasn't used to the idea of being around humans. Now, a year later, he still isn't used to being around humans, largely because he keeps forgetting what they are. For that matter, he keeps forgetting who I am.

His fondness for the bathtub was also one of the ways that I learned just how stupid he can be. At least twice a day for the first three months I owned him, he'd jump into the shower with me.

The only problem with this was that as is customary for cats, he really hates getting wet. So, he'd jump into the shower, make some noise indicating eternal kitty anguish, then try to jump out of the shower.

This is where his lack of kitty intellectual horsepower would get him again. He'd try to jump out of the shower, but he'd invariably jump into the shower curtain liner, only to slide back into the tub for another try.

After two or three abortive attempts, I'd pick him up and deposit him on the floor outside the tub. Five minutes later, he'd be back to repeat the process.

This is why Hank spent roughly half his first three months being soaked to the bone.

Nowadays, Hank spends most of his time stomping around the apartment on his continual kitty search and destroy mission. He swaggers around the apartment, with his tail straight up in the air, with the end flopped over, like a defiant question mark that follows him wherever he goes. Perhaps it is, because he never tires of rediscovering everything in the apartment, at least thrice a day.

I may spend a lot of time making fun of Hank, but I really should mention how insufferably cute he is. (Maybe I shouldn't, but since I am the all-time world champion cat-sap, I'm going to, anyway.)

He's also insufferably friendly, which ultimately proves to be a disadvantage, as he's fond of enthusiastically greeting strange cats, who usually return his enthusiastic greeting with outstretched claw. So, Hank got to spend today, his second Christmas day, getting the crap beat out of him by three cats with whom he'd like to be friends. And, true to an insufferably sweet cat, none of this has dampened his friendliness one whit.

All of which makes him just about the sweetest, nicest and friendliest little killer kitty kompanion I could ever dream for. Given all that, I guess his general lack of cortical capacity is something that isn't a problem at all.

# Hank, the Amazing Snorkel Cat!

## Underwater Breathing and Other Feline Failures

**My cat Hank has always been fond of the bathtub. In fact, he spent his first three weeks in my apartment living in the bathtub full time, and used it for the following year as a sort of kitty bomb shelter to protect him from strange and frightening sounds, like the refrigerator turning on, or the upstairs neighbor whispering something.**

Hank has always found great comfort in that tub, and for the time he's been with me, he's been telling me that there's something more for him.

I should have guessed what that was when as a kitten, he'd often climb into the shower with me. I thought it was cute how he'd jump into the shower, then be surprised at how wet it was and try to jump back out. His attempts to jump out of the shower were always impeded by the shower curtain liner. He'd generally splat into the liner at full speed, only to slide back into the tub.

I'd watch him do this two or three times before taking pity on him, and gently lifting him out of the tub. What was so surprising was that he'd always jump back in. I've always attributed this to the fact that Hank is so stupid that I often wonder if he's some bizarre cross between feline and Labrador retriever.

What's even more surprising is my putting all of this in the past tense, because he still does this. He also tries to climb into the tub while I'm taking a bath. When I'm done with either bath or shower, he's always there to swat at the water as it goes down the drain.

I used to think that he did this as a way to remind me to fill his water bowl. I used to think that until I noticed that he'd do this, even when the apartment floor was virtually covered with full water bowls. I'd still rack this up to stupidity on his part, remembering when he went hungry for a week, just because I moved his food dish from the right side of the refrigerator to the left side.

After two years, I've realized that perhaps Hank isn't the only stupid one in the apartment, and that perhaps he's trying to tell me something about his hobbies. I eventually caught on, because whenever I'd go to the bathroom, Hank would race in, sit in the bathtub, and make all manner of kitty noises conveying great longing and deprivation at me.

I'll note that of the three cats I've boarded in recent years, all three have found my going to the bathroom to be the single most fascinating unifying activity in the Banks household.

Whenever I go into the bathroom to contemplate the world, both my current feline boarders will race in to discuss the matter with me. Hank will generally retire to the bathtub, and Ruby will just sit next to my feet, as if to stand guard while I go about my business.

So, in recent months, I've taken to running the water in the bathtub for Hank, so he can swat and chase after it as it rushes down the drain. As exciting as this has been for him, he has persisted in conveying to me feelings of further longing and deprivation.

One day, I closed the drain on the tub and ran the water long enough to leave about a half an inch in the tub. Hank was transported to Labrador-kitty heaven. He stomped around in the water for a full half hour before rejoining the rest of us. I had go back to the bathroom to check up on him every once in a while, just to make sure he was still OK.

Since then, I've been in the habit of leaving water in the tub all the time. This has transformed my relationship with Hank.

Where before, he accepted me as his keeper, this one change in my behavior has been rewarded with never ending expressions of love.

He purrs louder, cuddles with me more, spends more time "helping" me work on the computer, and doesn't try to escape from the apartment quite as often.

And, of course, he never has dry feet.

Sometimes, I'll just sit in there watching him in the tub. Some days, he'll just stand there, staring at the water he's up to his kitty ankles in. Other days, he'll try to drink it all.

Usually, he just stomps around in it, occasionally sitting down (yes, really sitting in the water). Lately, he rarely has a dry butt.

So, just the other day, I was sitting in the bathroom, contemplating solutions to all the world's suffering. Ruby was sitting patiently at my side, and Hank was happily stomping around in his wading pool. Just as I was about to have it all solved, I was jolted from my reverie by the sound of a cat choking.

Ruby and I casually turned to the right to see what was up. Hank, for whatever reason, was staggering around, coughing and hacking. We watched and waited.

Before long, I noticed that a bug had died, become waterlogged, and fallen to the bottom of the tub. I noticed this because Hank was paying quite a bit of attention to it. Then, I saw it: Hank walked over to the place where the bug was, placed his nose against it, and commenced sniffing. Of course, it was under a half an inch of water, giving Hank one major snoot full of water.

Again, Hank went into spasms of coughing and choking. And, no sooner did he recover, but he returned to the bug to sniff it again.

He did this four or five times. I nearly fell off the seat, I was laughing so hard. (Here's another reason why I think Hank may be part Labrador Retriever: unlike other cats, it doesn't bother him when I laugh at him.)

Ruby looked up at me with an expression on her face that said: "This is so embarrassing. He's violating the whole kitty paradigm."

After Hank's fifth or sixth bout of coughing, Ruby (ever so gently) stood up on her hind legs, and with her left front paw delicately propped against the top lip of the bathtub, leaned into the tub and clobbered Hank with her right.

Hank did what he always does when Ruby hits him: he simply dematerialized. Ruby chased him down and punched him in the nose again.

This hasn't slowed Hank any. Last night, he came to bed with a wet butt, and while we cuddled, I could have sworn that I heard Ruby splashing around in the tub.

## Meet Ruby! Someone has to...



**As we all know, there are only two meaningful activities in my life: complaining about graduate school and writing sappy things about my cats.**

**What better way to continue in that sappiness than to write about the new kitty-presence in my household?**

**. . . I'm not talking about Hank here.**

**I'm talking about a cat who muscled her way into my life, even though she didn't really have any muscles at the time.**

It all began when my next-door neighbors moved out. I remember this well for the two major events that accompanied their departure: First, they did something to their plumbing that caused my toilet to be backed up for the second half of July and all of August.

Those who make it a habit to read my rantings will recall just how important indoor plumbing is to me.

The second major event was that they abandoned their cat and her three kittens. According to one of the other neighbors, they just left these four felines locked in the apartment when they left. Some kind soul heard the noise they were making, broke into the apartment, and let them out.

This was when they came into my life. They camped out on my front stoop, and the mom-cat spent the next week banging on my door, demanding food while her kittens played with each other and shared a hiding spot under the building with the neighborhood skunk. Needless to say, these cats were not the most appealing critters I've come across.

The mom-cat, who I later named "Ruby," was definitely the ringleader. When I first met Ruby, she was little more than an extremely angry pipe cleaner. She had a cold or flu, infected eyes, ear-mites, fleas, intestinal worms, and was severely malnourished.

Oh yeah, she was also in heat.

She really didn't have much going for her at the time. I probably wouldn't have given her any more note than I give to any of the hundred other strays that hang around the apartment, but I saw something special. Whenever I'd put food out for her and her kittens, she'd sit and watch patiently while her kittens ate their fill before she'd touch any food, even if that meant going hungry.

And she was very hungry, especially after the kittens were done nursing.

I realized that if I took them to the animal shelter, the kittens might have had a chance for adoption, but that mom would probably end up being put down. Her selflessness with her kittens touched me so much that I decided to adopt her, and to try to find homes for her kittens.

I spent the following two months trying to figure out why it was that I did this. At least six weeks of that time was spent with two to four cats locked into the bathroom (the one with the overflowing toilet), while Hank tried to squeeze under the door. (I thought he was trying to get to the other cats, but it turns out that he had something else in mind, as documented elsewhere.)

As it happened, finding homes for the three kittens was relatively easy. I found a family who were susceptible enough to guilt trips that they took all three.

I am told that these kittens are quite happy in their new home. If I were them, I wouldn't be so happy with the names they got, but I guess there are worse things to worry about in life (like being eaten by the neighbor strays).

First, there's "Thumbsley," who was actually the last cat to be adopted out. I originally called him something rather mean for his energetic spirit. Many have assumed that the name I chose reflected some defect in his eliminatory habits, but he was actually the first to make proper use of the facilities I provided for him and his family.

He was later renamed to "Thumbelina" by his new owners, for his opposable thumbs, until the vet suggested that a more masculine name would be in order. This isn't the first time a cat from my household has met such a fate.

Thumbsley is apparently quite content in his new home, and busies himself with operating power tools, working out on the parallel bars and eating corn on the cob. He also enjoys dancing the "grapevine" (did I mention that he's also bipedal?).

The other two kittens are longhaired cats, starting with Pooh.

No one knows where her real name came from, which is probably how it should be. For the time I knew her, she spent all her time beating the crap out of her other brother. Sadly, both she and the other kitten ignored Thumbsley most of the time.

I think Thumbsley probably wouldn't have lasted too much longer had he not been rescued.

When Pooh wasn't busy playing with her brother, she was attacking her mother (which explains why Ruby spent a month hiding in the bathroom sink) or hissing at me. She also has a fondness for finding hiding places which do not exist in three-dimensional space.

Finally, there's Spudley. No one knows where his name came from, either, but no one doubts that it's the most appropriate possible name for him.

No one really knows what Spudley does, other than living up to his name.

But back at home, Ruby presented a special problem mainly because, unlike her children, I was actually trying to nurse her back to health. She needed ointment for her eyes, drops for her ears, pills for her worms, drops for her fleas, drops for her cold, and she needed to be fixed.

Her first visit to the vet earned her some notations in her chart that indicated that neither she nor I would ever be welcome at that Kitty Hospital ever again. At 7.5 pounds and nearly dead, she easily outfought three people and converted one terry-cloth towel into terry-cloth confetti. By the time the appointment was over, she didn't really look any better, but she'd seen to it that the vet, the vet's assistant and I looked just as bad as she did.

I'd like to detail the specifics of this incident, but to tell the truth, it happened so quickly and so traumatically, that I just can't remember exactly what happened. Well, it all started when they tried to take her temperature.

She made a face that I'll probably never forget, and followed it with a retaliation that pain prevents me from remembering. This was replayed in microcosm over the next month as I attempted to administer her medicine. I ultimately decided that it was just a lot easier if I took it myself. My ears feel much better now.

Ruby has fared much better since that first appointment. In the first weekend after that appointment, she put on 1.5 pounds (as verified by the vet's scales). Unfortunately, she has kept that pace of weight gain ever since, and has recently started looking a bit like Sally Struthers.

For the first month she lived with me, Ruby was about the most ornery cat I've ever known, and she viewed me as little more than an elaborate can opener. The closest she came to affection was when she'd order me to scratch her face, which she required about 12 hours per day.

Although Hank was delighted to have a new pal, Ruby could find nothing but contempt in return. She would often interrupt whatever she was doing just so she could go find Hank and punch him in the nose for no reason other than the fact that he is Hank.

When she went into heat (about 20 minutes after moving in), her animosity toward Hank increased 10-fold when she discovered that Hank just doesn't have a clue as to what part he is supposed to play.

Hank's nose is now permanently scarred.

I was really worried that Ruby was going to be too difficult to keep. I was pretty sure of that the time she decided to signal to me that the cat box needed cleaning by attempting to use my foot as a substitute.

But, just as I was about to make other arrangements for her, something wonderful happened. I took her in to get fixed, and I think the vet accidentally sent me home with the wrong cat.

Ever since she's been fixed, she has been the most affectionate cat I've ever known, surpassing even Hank. (Hank wins on sincerity, but this advantage is cancelled by the fact that he keeps forgetting who I am.)

Ruby now spends her days purring, sleeping, and cuddling both me and Hank. Hank spends his days swimming, tracking kitty-litter into bed, and punching Ruby in the nose for no particular reason.

So, even though I never wanted to be a two-cat family, I have the best two cats I could ever imagine. Or, I will until the next time Ruby goes to the vet, and they correct their little mistake. In the meantime, Ruby sends her best wishes.

## **Hank's Cat Audit...** **the day that they checked up on Hank**

When I awoke, Hank was laying at the foot of my bed. He spends roughly half his time there. I have always envied him this; had I the choice, I'd do the same. I don't think I'd do as effective a job of sleeping as he does, though. Hank spends his time in one of two states. One of them is profoundly deep sleep. I really envy that.

When I awoke, Hank was digging his teeth and claws into my left foot. This is why I awoke. At some point in the preceding moment, my foot, buried underneath the sheets of my bed, had somehow offended him, and he was setting things right.

Once, I went to a sleep disorder treatment clinic. They theorized that the reason why I'm always falling asleep is that I don't sleep very soundly, and the reason I don't sleep very soundly is because I have a case of apnea, and the reason that I have apnea is that I'm so overweight. Actually, I think they said "obese," but that's really getting off-topic.

To confirm their suspicions, they had me stay there for a night so they could observe me sleeping. I couldn't remember the last time I got such a good night's sleep. They told me that they saw no direct evidence of apnea, but being doctors, they clung to the diagnosis despite the total absence of supporting evidence because that's just what doctors do.

It wasn't until Hank had to spend the night at the vet's for some dental work that I realized why my sleep is so fitful.

When I awoke, when I realized that Hank had (again) set upon my foot, I screamed. When I screamed, my downstairs neighbor pounded on his ceiling (my floor) with what I presumed to be a broom handle. This was accompanied by some muffled monosyllabic slice of invective delivered with the same volume and cadence as it had been the last dozen times.

When I awoke, after I screamed, after the neighbor thumped and yelled, Hank sprang up off the bed - straight up - and shrieked his battle cry. Or whatever kind of cry it is. Hank has never been content with the typical mono- or bi-syllabic utterances common to others of his species. The noise he makes has the complexity and rhythm that's fairly similar to that of someone running into the room and breathlessly shouting "Your libidinous credenza is jealously defenestrating albino monkeys!" - and makes about as much sense. Hank spends his time in one of two states. He had just switched to the second, which involves engaging in madcap, hyperactive, furious, and entirely goal-avoiding activity.

When I awoke, after everyone had screamed, Hank ran out of the room as quickly as he could, which is very quickly indeed. Because I was in bed, I could not see what happened next, but I could hear it. I did not need to hear it, because I knew it by heart.

Hank raced out of the bedroom and into the bathroom, and without breaking pace, leapt into the bathtub. Hank spends the other half of his time in the bathtub. The fraction of his day that is spent neither in bed nor in the bathtub is spent running between the two at breakneck speeds, producing entirely nonsensical, but frenzied utterances.

Hank loves the bathtub. He loves his baths. As is my habit most evenings, I had run him a bath before going to bed. I assumed that there was still at least a half an inch of water in the tub. When Hank landed in the bathtub, he encountered a significantly reduced coefficient of friction, causing him to slide to the back of the tub, slide up the wall of the tub, and into the air, sort of like one of those skateboarders doing a trick. As was his custom, he pushed off from the wall, giving him just enough hang-time to shout his equivalent to "Cowabunga!" before re-establishing contact with the tub in a very loud splash.

I listened to Hank splash around in the tub for a few moments, making his contented cooing noises. I had almost fallen asleep before he jumped out of the tub, shouted something about cretinous melmac, and raced into the other room to his cat box.

Hank has never understood the relationship between taking baths and clumping cat litter, which probably explains why he spends so much time wearing concrete galoshes. After furious kicking and scratching, he managed to knock most of its contents out onto the floor, excepting for the bits that stuck to him.

He ran into my office, where he created a tremendous crashing noise. I've been a cat owner long enough to know better than to investigate these noises. I know that if I roll over and go back to sleep, that by morning, there will be no evidence of damage or any logical explanation for the crashing noise of the night before. I think this is because cats do actually destroy everything in their owners' houses every night. They just have clean-up crews that come in to put it all back right before morning. Dr. Seuss did not write fiction.

Hank came tearing back into the bedroom, but moving more slowly than usual. I peered over the edge of my bed in time to see him scoot by. He was pushing a legal sized manila envelope across the floor using his face. He had his head half into the envelope, which probably explained why it was that he hit the wall face first at a full trot.

His chores complete, he jumped back onto the foot of the bed and went back to sleep. I followed suit.

When I next awoke, Hank was off in the bathroom again, happily splashing around in his tub. I rolled over and just about went back to sleep before it registered. Very slowly, and quietly, I peered back over my shoulder. It was still there, and it hadn't noticed that I'd noticed.

She - I didn't know this yet, but I soon established that it was she - was sitting in the chair next to the bed. Another cat. This one was wearing a pair of glasses - wire frame with oval lenses, as is the fashion nowadays - as well as a lime green polyester pants suit. That wasn't what caught my eye. What caught my eye was that she wasn't masking her appearance. I mean, I've always known this about cats, but to actually see it for the first time is rather jarring. All eight legs, and thumbs on at least four of her paws. Holding a clipboard, a writing implement of some sort, and a coffee cup. She'd been focused on whatever notes she was taking, which is why she didn't see me see her at first. If you know what I mean.

When she finished writing, she looked over the top of her glasses at me and said, "Darn."

"S'ok. What's up."

She at least looked relieved that she didn't have to explain the legs and all that stuff. "Just checking up on you, that's all."

"Well, I'm screwed."

Hank, still happily splashing in the tub, made a trilling noise best described as yodeling.

The other cat - the one with the clipboard - rolled her eyes, scribbled something else and said, "Hardly."

I nodded. "That's a relief."

She kept scribbling. "Won't be much longer." She waved an unoccupied paw at me to signal me to go ahead and go back to sleep. Might have done, too, if Hank hadn't gone into a hacking and coughing fit. She looked at me expectantly, as if to ask why I wasn't doing anything about Hank's apparent distress.

"He just snorted a nose full of water again. Does it at least three times a day."

She said, in a rather bored voice, "Right," and scribbled a bit more.

"What is it with him, anyway?"

She shot me an annoyed look, which coming from a cat, can be pretty darned annoyed looking, but I wasn't going to let it go.

"I mean, I get the part about you guys being pan-dimensional beings and all that . . ."

"Ok, who told you that?" She was clearly pissed.

"Not important. I just know, that's all."

"Go on."

"Yeah, so if you cats are all so smart, what's the deal with Hank? I mean, look at him. He's got the intellectual horsepower of . . ."

"A shoe tree?"

"I wasn't going to be that nice, but yeah."

She flicked a paw as if this were all a trifle. "Special ed."

"Eh?"

"Developmentally disabled. Three paws shy. Light's on in a vacuum. He's a retread."

"Huh. I didn't think you guys had those."

She shrugged, sort of. "Yeah, so what?"

I didn't really have a snappy answer to that. After a moment, "And you leave them under human supervision?"

There was a furious splashing noise from the bathroom, accompanied by a triumphant wail of "Adulterous lobotomy!"

She said, "Sure, why not? The rest of us got more important things to do."

"So, what're you?"

"Caseworker."

"His?"

"Yours."

"I don't get it."

"Of course not, you're human." She clipped her writing instrument to the top of her clipboard and continued. "All human cat servants get caseworkers."

"Oh. You guys don't . . . you know, kidnap people and do medical experiments on them, do you?"

"Naw, that's the chimpanzees. One heck of a sense of humor they got."

I mulled on that for a moment.

She added, "You know, you really were promising when you were younger."

"You mean Oblio?"

"Yeah. You were on the fast track to a five star rating, then you completely blew it."

I nodded, or tried to. I was still in bed, so my action had the effect of rubbing the side of my face in stale pillow drool.  
"You mean JFCL. I guess I really did treat her like crap."

"One of the worst cases of neglect on record. The only reason that we ever considered you for another placement was Oblio's going to bat for you."

"But he's been dead for decades."

She shook her head. "I keep forgetting how limiting three-dee must be. You know, stuff doesn't just happen in neat little boxes like that. He's always here."

It didn't seem worth arguing. "Well, if I was in trouble like that, I guess it's a good thing I didn't try adopting a cat for so long."

"See, you humans get your little three-dee causality all screwed up. You didn't decide that. We did."

"I'd rather not believe that."

"Of course not. Your brain would explode. Then where would Hank be?"

Thanks for nothing! But, what she said made a few pieces click into place. "So, Streak?"

"Yeah. Combination reviewer/instructor."

"Sure, thanks. Tear my guts out. I mean, send her in for less than a year, let me get all attached and everything, then tear her away, and I get to spend four months with a lump in my throat."

"Yes, that really impressed us. That's why you're approved for adoptions again . . . albeit with restrictions."

"Restrictions?"

"Well, you still owe a little penance for that whole JFCL fiasco."

"I see."

"So, your file is flagged. 'Special needs placements only.'"

I let that sink in. While I did, Hank set about drinking his bath. Once again, I didn't need to see this, because I could tell by hearing.

He crouches down on all fours, sticks his head way forward, and flattens his ears to the sides like stubby wings attached to his head. Each lap of his tongue reverberates through his hollow cranium, making a noise just like striking one of those woodblocks I remembered in high school band.

"Tock-tock-tock-tock-tock-tock . . ." he can, and does, go on like that for hours. Half his problem, I think, stems from the fact that his eyesight is lousy, and he can't really tell where the water is. Consequently, about 3/4 of his laps only scoop air. "Tock-tock-tock-tock-tock . . ."

She looked at the bathroom and buried her face in one of her paws.

I said, "So, I'm on this list, therefore I get. . ."

"Feline rutabaga, yes."

"Tock-tock-tock-tock-tock . . ."

I thought about it for a while longer, my thoughts synchronized to the vacuous metronome in the bathroom. "Hey, wait a minute! What about Ruby? I mean, yeah, she had no personality, but she's still smart . . ."

"Emergency foster placement."

"But she's normal, right?"

"Nope. Autistic savant."

"Huh. Shoulda had her do my taxes when I had the chance then."

"Yeah, she might have done it, too. She never has been good at following code."

"Why emergency placement?"

"Oh, we knew right up front that you wouldn't be able to stand her. Still, we had an emergency, and we had to find someplace for her and her kittens while we were looking for a permanent home. Believe it or not, you really did earn a lot of points on that one, all things considered. You could get your five star rating yet."

"But strictly for the drool crowd?"

"You catch on fast for a human."

She started cramming her stuff into a bag, making like she was about to leave. "Anyway, we've been watching. You really do love Hank, so it isn't all that bad, now is it?"

"Ambidextrous Balkan armoires reflexively disseminate injustice!" Hank came tearing through the room on his way to the kitchen.

"Yeah, I do. He's one sweet guy. Just wish he'd leave my darn foot alone."

She faded out of the room, her grin being her last visible feature. It lingered long enough to say, "Our little joke. We told him that it was your secret catnip stash." Then she was gone.

When I awoke, Hank was next to me on the bed, trying to wedge his head between my hand and the mattress. When he saw my eyes open, he greeted me: "Felicitous goulash reconsecration?"

I smiled at him and scratched his head.

He purred the purr of a Mack Truck, turned around, shoved his butt into my face, and fell back asleep.

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