

The Cat and the Lonely House

By *DraVulMep*

He was a black cat named Lucky. It was meant to be ironic.

Of course, Lucky himself had no way of knowing that at the time.

This cat couldn't stop thinking about the first time he'd set foot in the house. The old woman had tried to make it as calming for him as possible. He may not have been very street-smart at the time, but Lucky could tell there had once been another cat there.

From what little he understood of humans, he tried to figure out what that cat's name had been from what the old lady told him from time to time.

There was "Perry," "Ollie," and "Louise." He never did figure out which of those names had belonged to the cat. Instead, he tried to figure out what each of them would've been like as a cat.

Ollie seemed lazy. If he were a cat, he'd probably have been the kind that hardly went outside. The old lady seemed to shake her head whenever Ollie came up; sometimes with a frown, sometimes with a smile.

Perry must have been warm and affectionate. The old lady *always* smiled whenever Perry was mentioned. Perry the cat would be the kind that always followed their human, jumping on the table to see what she was doing. He'd be near her, but he'd never get in her way. He must have still been clumsy though, for the old lady sometimes laughed when Perry was mentioned.

Louise must have been the exact opposite of Ollie, but the old lady talked about her as affectionately as Perry. She – Lucky assumed Louise was a she – continually ran all over the house. The old lady sometimes made funny noises and then laughed whenever bringing up Louise.

Whenever Ollie or Louise was brought up, she would enjoy herself for a bit, then this joy would fade. Sometimes she'd even cry. Lucky didn't know what to do then.

Lucky had always sensed something was wrong with the old lady, but what happened one day still took him by surprise.

At first he'd thought the old woman was sleeping in her chair – which wasn't unusual. It wasn't until he rubbed against the old woman's leg that he noticed how cold she'd become. He tried climbing up on her lap, tried clawing at her arm, tried licking her face. Nothing woke her.

He didn't accept she was dead – or rather, he later admitted, he *refused* to accept that she was dead. He tried knocking things off the mantle – which he would later regret to see if that stirred her. Long after she grew cold the first time, he always

nuzzled against her legs, as if expecting her to kneel down and pet him like she usually did. She eventually grew too rotten to sleep on, but he always nuzzled her legs.

He came to accept that she couldn't feed him anymore, so he tried eating what he could find from her cupboards. Over time though, he came to realize that he would run out of this food, so he started going out of the cat flap and teaching himself how to hunt.

He became pretty proud of his ability. He'd already had experience with the mice around the house. He gradually added birds to his list of prey.

This continued until one day when he came home to find humans crawling around his house.

WOMAN SAT DEAD IN ARMCHAIR FOR ONE-AND-A-HALF YEARS

Yesterday, the remains of an elderly woman were found in her home – eighteen months after she was last seen.

Residents near her Avery Heights home began complaining of the smell coming out of her house. Eventually, the police were called. When they came in, they found the body of Peggy Jones sitting in her armchair, having apparently died in her sleep.

Jones was last seen by neighbors one-and-a-half years ago, when she was 85 years old. Most of them had never thought to look for her after this.

"She was a quiet woman," said Fiona Whyte, who lived in an apartment building across the street, "I hardly ever saw her out of the house."

Pete Bartlett, a longtime resident of the area noted that the death of Jones' husband and daughter in a car crash might have been the start of her long seclusion. "She just went to pieces after they died. After she retired, she occasionally chatted with people when they passed her by, but the only people she was really sociable with were her cats."

The coroner concluded that Ms. Jones died of natural causes – most likely a heart failure.

Now, police and health officials can't help but wonder how she could have spent so long in that house dead without anyone noticing.

"You'd think someone would've noticed sooner," remarked Officer Terry Armstrong.

One possible reason for the failure of anyone to notice her absence was the fact that Jones had signed onto an experimental program that used a computer algorithm to automatically pay her bills using money from her pension fund. A police spokesperson stated that the people behind this program are being questioned.

One expert drew a comparison to the case of Hedviga Golik, a Croatian woman who was found in 2008 in her Zagreb apartment sitting in front of her TV, having been dead for 35 years.

Jones never remarried and left no immediate family.

The people had carried the old lady out. Lucky couldn't believe it. How could they just take her away?! Now, when he tried to enter the house, he found that his cat flap had been boarded up. When he looked in the window, all the furniture was covered in white sheets, including the armchair the old lady had died in.

All the cat could do now was keep on hunting. He got into scraps with other neighborhood cats. His fighting style was reckless, as if he had no qualms about dying himself.

Sometimes, he watched the behavior of the humans around him. He was surprised at how many of them were just... alone. They often had these blocky things with them. Sometimes they talked into them. Sometimes they just stared at them. Lucky couldn't help but wonder what made them so fascinating. How could they stand to be alone?! The old lady probably would have died long ago if he didn't have Lucky, or Ollie, or Perry, or Louise, or whoever the cat before him had been!

One infuriating time was when he noticed this human girl staring at her blocky thing holding a dog's leash. The dog had noticed Lucky and barked and tried to go after him, but he just hit the end of his leash. The girl acted like she didn't even notice. She just stared at her blocky thing and yanked the dog back.

One time, a fight with another cat left Lucky badly injured. He couldn't make it home in time. He wound up collapsing in an alley. It was a rainy night. He eventually became resigned to dying there. He saw a fox approaching him. He figured that the fox was going to wait until he was dead, and then eat his corpse. Lucky was too battered to resist. He just closed his eyes and awaited the inevitable.

However, when he woke up, he was feeling oddly all right. He looked around him and found that he was in some kind of makeshift shelter formed by putting some sort of debris across the gap between two dumpsters. Beside him lay the fox, head rested on some kind of bag. As he looked over himself, Lucky noticed that his injuries had healed.

He tried getting up, and then he realized something. His forepaws were different. They now had proper fingers and thumbs. They looked fit for grasping objects. That wasn't the only thing that had changed. He soon found that he could stand on his hindpaws. He was still the size of a regular cat, but this new body was beginning to freak him out.

Fortunately, he soon realized he could walk properly on four legs; an ability he now used as he edged away from the slumbering fox. He wasn't sure what else the fox would do!

It was still raining as he made his way back to his old house. Once he was on the porch, he gave himself a shake and leaned back against the side of the house, trying to comprehend what had happened to him.

“What does it mean?” he thought.

Just then, he noticed something approaching him. It was the fox from earlier. This time, he was in that half-human-shaped sort of body as well, and was carrying the bag he had been sleeping on earlier. It was then that Lucky noticed that the fox somehow had four tails. The cat leaned against the wall, unsure what the fox was going to do.

The fox stared at him a while before heading up onto the porch, eying the boarded up cat door. After another glance at Lucky, he placed a hand-paw on the door, and all of a sudden, the boards fell off. He then crawled through the flap into the house.

Lucky sat there dumbfounded for a short while, but then followed the fox in.

The inside of the house was warmer, but dustier than the outside. Lucky noticed that the furniture was still covered with white sheets. The fox was standing in the middle of the living room, looking around. Eventually, he laid down his bag, and began removing objects from it.

Lucky couldn't have cared less what the fox did now. Now, he dashed to the old lady's armchair and used his new hands to pull the sheet off of it. The sheet had done a good job of protecting it from the dust.

The sight of the old armchair caused everything to be turned upside-down in the black cat's mind. Now he suddenly comprehended everything the old lady had told the cat. The old lady was now “Peggy.” “Perry” had been her mate, “Louise” had been her daughter, and “Ollie” had been the cat that had lived in the house before Lucky. Perry had loved his jazz and his courtroom dramas. Louise was vivacious and wanted to take up the clarinet. The funny noises Peggy made were the funny voices she sometimes used when telling Louise bedtime stories. Ollie was fat and clumsy. Peggy and Perry had been driving Louise one night and they'd had an argument. It caused Perry to be distracted and the car crashed, killing Perry and Louise. Peggy had never stopped blaming herself for their deaths.

Lucky now knew why Peggy had picked him from the animal shelter. It was because Peggy knew that black cats were less likely to get adopted. Lucky now knew about the irony behind his name.

Lucky now remembered something Peggy had said when she noticed people walking by with their gazes trained on their “cell phones,” as he now knew those blocky things were called.

“People say I'm lonely, Lucky.” she had said, “But I've got you. Who have all these people got? A bunch of ‘Friends’ they've probably never met face to face? Sometimes, I wonder if they lie awake at night, noticing how empty they feel, having realized that there's an entire world out there, if they'd only look up once in a while.”

Peggy had sighed.

"Nobody deserves to be alone, Lucky..."

Now it was too much for Lucky. He started crying. He flung himself against the side of the armchair, claws digging into the fabric, tears flowing as he thought about the kindly old woman who had called upon him to fill that need for companionship, and had made sure she returned the favor.

Lucky's tears began to leave a stain in the armchair's fabric.

"I'll miss you..." he found himself groaning in a human language. That just made him wish he'd been able to speak that language years ago. There was so much now that he wanted to say to her! He could have asked her questions! He could have told her the crash wasn't her fault! He could have given the responses she was looking for! That way he could *really* be a companion for Peggy! Now she was gone, and there was no one for him.

He stayed there, leaning against the chair for a while before the fox laid a hand-paw on his shoulder; a comforting hand.

Lucky turned around. The fox looked at him with deep, pitying eyes, then pulled him into an embrace. Lucky began bawling as he returned the hug.

"It's gonna be okay..." the fox said, "I'm right here..."

"Th-thank you..."

The fox released him.

"My name's Fox. What's your name?"

"I'm... I'm Lucky..."