

A CAT'S TALE 4: Human Cat Toys



Helena woke up feeling her age. When you're as old as she was, it's not that unexpected, but still isn't fun. Everything was especially creaky, which made dealing with the cast on her leg that much harder. Must be a storm coming.

She drug herself up out of bed, and washed up. One glimmer of excitement today was that today was the day that the confounded cast would finally be coming off. The doctor told her there would probably be a soft cast or boot she would still have to wear, but at least it would be removable, so she could actually bathe, submersed in water instead of taking what she liked to refer to as a "bird bath." Taking an actual, physical bath, submerged in water was going to feel luxurious. Yes, she would require

Marianne's help, but she wanted it badly enough she didn't care that Marianne might see her jiggy bits. Nobody ever talks about the fact that casts smell bad. All Helena wanted was a good bath, and her cast off. Her appointment with the doctor was set for 3 pm, and her nephew Charlie was going to take her.

What's that old line? 'Plans are what we make as life happens?' Around 1:30, Helena and the two women working with her at her shop that day, Hope and Chrissie, all looked up when the lights flickered. Moments later, they flickered again, and went out briefly. They were relieved when they came back on, but the relief didn't last long, as moments later, they flickered, went out - and stayed out.

The normal procedure at Treasure Trove when a power outage occurred was to verify that all the customers (at least the ones not personally known to them) were out of the store, and to lock the doors until the power came back on. That's what they did, as they stood around and sweated; except, the lights didn't come back on. Val did the same thing over in Cuppa Love, as they waited. At 2:15, her doctor's office called her to tell her that her appointment would need to be rescheduled. Damn. Still stuck with a smelly cast.

Helena was leaning against the counter, absent-mindedly rubbing Mischief when

her niece Marianne called. Marianne was walking home; Helena told her that the appointment was cancelled, and when Marianne offered to come over to keep her company, she told her just to go home and be safe. It wasn't her first time in a blackout. She told Hope and Chrissie they could go, and then went over to check on Val. Val let her folks go, too.

Helena went upstairs to her home, and opened all the windows, in a vain attempt to keep it from getting any hotter than it already was. Armed with a good book, she arranged herself in her big, blue comfy recliner, and proceeded to prop up her feet on the hassock end. Damn cast. Still, she enjoyed her book. In her living room, which was directly over Treasure Trove's stock room at the back of the building, years ago, she'd put in a bay window, plus she had put in skylights in her kitchen, which she'd enlarged. The bay window wasn't owing to any spectacular view; the reason she'd had both done was to bring in light. Helena needed real, honest to goodness sunlight, and without it, her home above her shop had felt like a dark tomb. It was in three panes, with the center pane being the widest, and was quite tall. The two flanking panes had screens, so she could open them. Today she needed that. When she came upstairs initially, the sun had been out. By dinnertime, the sky had been overtaken by clouds. There would be a storm later tonight.

Normally, Helena went to bed around 9 pm, but hot as it was, sleep would be long coming, and a hot, sticky affair. The heat was making her leg in the cast itch horribly in places inside that she couldn't reach to scratch. She had a chopstick she'd been using to weasel inside it to scratch when she needed to, but the heat was making the cast more miserable than it already was. She had no illusions about good sleep tonight.

Despite the heat; despite her discomfort with her cast...Helena did finally fall asleep - not in her bed, as she'd hoped, but in her blue comfy chair.

Helena dreamed, and it was...unsettling; disconcerting. She was standing in the middle of nowhere, in a setting that reminded her of the moors in Yorkshire. It was striking, and the sky looked dark and imposing, and a storm was on its way. Lightning crackled and spread across the sky off in the distance, like a veiled threat. Ground fog began drifting in and over the hills, and it felt wrong somehow to her. She saw a figure moving in her direction, but the figure couldn't see her. Others began to walk through, too until there were masses of people in waves, none aware of the others, or her. She knew none of the people she saw, and they were random - male, female, younger, older.

It was obvious to Helena that she was here as an observer. The fog that was

growing, spreading and getting denser seemed to flow both in and through the people, and it stole bits of their energy - sapping just a little bit - small enough for them not to notice. Helena could see the effect it was having on them. As the fog around them grew and deepened, they moved ever slower, without realizing it. She watched the faces of the people who moved around her, and realized that as they slowed down, they weren't only moving slower, they were dealing with something internally. Some of the people as they moved across the tableaux were crying silent tears even as they marched onward, slower, still being sapped by the fog. Most were unaware of its effect on them; some may have been aware that something in or around them had changed, but none were able to fight it. As some of the people she saw reached their breaking point, they just - stopped. Unable to fight, unable to move forward, unable to recover. Those still capable of movement merely moved around those who were stopped, as if they were rocks in a stream.

Helena found herself getting upset at what she was seeing. She couldn't get their attention; she couldn't help them, yet she was helpless to stop watching them. As she stood there, getting more and more upset as she felt completely powerless to help those who needed it, she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder. She turned to look, and stood face to face with the Lady - the presence she'd seen and felt in a dream years and years earlier when she was in a bad place, who'd set her upon her current path. Over the

years, she'd either glimpsed her occasionally in dreams, or heard tales of her through others. In those times when she'd seen her, Helena described her as a tall, willowy woman, strikingly beautiful, and of what she could only describe as possibly Middle Eastern descent, though it was hard to say what her normal visage was: her face changed randomly, and continuously. She was always in dark bluish purple robes that sparkled like the stars in the sky. There was a reason her Lady was called the "Goddess of 10,000 faces" or "Goddess of 10,000 names" in various ancient religions. Helena's favorite names were Auset, or 'Isis Myrionymos,' but she could be any goddess. Helena saw her as "everywoman," and believed whatever face She chose to show someone was either the one they needed to see, or could relate to. That her Lady had chosen to show herself in this dream, particularly as upsetting as the dream was for her, spoke volumes - and told her that the dream held more significance than most.

"Let me reveal to you what is not seen." Lightning flashed close to Helena, close enough that she could feel the air around her crackle with enough energy that it made the little hairs on her arm stand up. As she saw the people coursing around her, she saw what she had not seen - and had been unable to see before. The fog reached out to them individually, and there was a thin gray tendril that reached inside them, to their hearts. Even as it sapped strength from them, it replaced it with an equal measure of fear; the fear took whatever name it needed to for each person. As many different

people there were, there was a different name for the fear that grew within them. Most were afraid of lack, hurt, embarrassment, or intimacy - but fear is especially individualized, as it both attaches to past or future events, and preys on insecurities.

Lightning flashed again, and the dark clouds that filled the sky seemed to be connected to the fog that connected to the people. It was feeding off the fear the people felt, and getting stronger. The stronger it got, the more power it wanted, and the weaker the people got, and the more afraid. It was a horrible feedback loop, made of fear, despair and disillusionment. It seemed almost sentient, and was definitely maleficent.

“My Lady, what IS this?” Helena whispered, almost holding her breath. She could feel their fear.

“Child, there’s a storm coming. An ancient foe is once again moving among us, as it has been far too many times in the past. It’s a...spirit...of sorts. Sadly, it cannot be destroyed; it can only be forced to change form, like any other energy. It’s called an egregore. Another name for it is a thought form. They can be created on purpose, as this one was, or without realizing it, as people do every day. This particular egregore is one of the oldest, and is extremely strong. It was originally created and given form in

ancient times by those who used both the magic at hand and weapons of war to subjugate and conquer others, as they plotted ways to gain power, influence, and wealth by any means necessary.

“We can create these?” Helena asked in horror. “I’ve heard of thought forms, but I didn’t know we could do THIS.” She shook her head in disbelief.

“It happens every day, though not on this level. Most folks would recognize the egregores around them as the ‘culture’ or ‘spirit’ of the places they live or work, wherever groups of people are; it’s what gives a certain vibrance to an organization, a group or a church that acts like an umbrella, that’s separate and apart from it, if they even give it that much thought. That’s what they normally are. Most of them are benevolent. Humans have so much power. They don’t even realize that as they gather in groups, they create and power them. Your store even has its’ own egregore, whether you realize it or not. Yours is actively benevolent; it was created and fed over the years by the spirits of the people who work for you, and come to purchase from you. It’s also tied to the spirit following the lamp in the front window, as well as the underlying desire all of you have to aid others. This one?” The Lady sighed. “Those who created this one created it in ancient times, with the express purpose of doing harm; gaining power and wealth by whatever means necessary. They gave no thought or regard for

whether they would be able to control it...or, as is usually the case when something like this is created on purpose...never questioned if it would eventually control them. Since it can't be destroyed, it revives as people in groups either accidentally or purposefully invoke it with their fear and hatred, and by so doing, recreate it and give it strength. Their beliefs gave it form and power, reviving it, and their fear strengthened it, feeding it more power. Their numbers..." the Lady gestured in a sweeping motion at the number of people before them, "...can keep it powerful."

"In the past, it's been both nameless, and had many names and as many faces. Others deified it, and called it the "God of War." It's worn the name and face of every War God known to man, yet it's not truly *any* of them. Some have even called it "Satan," or "The Devil," yet it isn't really him, either. It's a spirit that's more than happy to accept whatever hatred and fear it's fed, whatever name people attach to it. It doesn't care what you call it, as long as it's fed. The last time it took a prominent place in your history, a man named Hitler allowed it to nearly possess him, he so wanted power - and his followers, whether they were actively believing, or merely acquiesced by their silence, kept it fed and powerful. The result was that millions of people died, as you know."

"How do we fight it? How CAN we fight it, if it can't be destroyed?" As Helena

had been listening, she was getting a feeling that it was a losing battle.

“Watch, and see.”

Helena did as she was asked, and continued to watch the scene that was spread before her. At first, she noticed no change, but then randomly, people began popping in that weren't connected to that fog. They emitted a faint but noticeable blue glow, and wherever they appeared, the hold loosened up on the sad people around them. As each new person popped in, they in turn began to glow, and it had a cumulative effect. For every new glowing person, the strength of the light emitted by all the glowing people got stronger and brighter, and the people around them began to be released from what held them in place.

“Who are they?” Helena whispered, watching.

“Those who defend. Whenever this evil manifests, a way to fight it rises up as well. They aren't from any particular belief system. Some are from organized religions, many have no religion at all. What they all have in common is that they're spiritual, and follow their intuition and hearts rather than dogma. They're independent and think for themselves instead of believing everything they're told. Because of these

traits, a high percentage of them are witches. That's why whenever times are bad, the number of witches among the populace seems to rise." She paused. "The other of critical piece of how to fight it is to focus not on the egregore, but instead - focus on joy. On laughter. On love. Think on those things; but don't merely think; DO. Engage others from that place as often as you can. Don't be afraid to reach out to others, and spark their laughter. Encourage their joy. Focus your glee, joy and love not at the egregore, but at humanity, ignoring the egregore. No attention paid to it lessens its power, and a laughing, joyful human condition reduces it to merely a nuisance. While the egregore can't be destroyed - it can be transmuted, letting all the wind out of its sails full of fear. Laughter and joy are the cure, and those of you who are independent and think for yourselves are the means of delivering that cure."

As more blue lights appeared, and the blue glow grew stronger and brighter, people began to move, and were released from the thin gray bonds that shackled them to the fog. Some of them also began to glow blue. Helena noticed something curious happening.

"Some of the people who were originally being attacked are now glowing blue... which is good. But why aren't some of them responding? Some of them are actually worse than they were before, and others appear to be turning into empty shells. Why

weren't they helped by the defenders?"

"They're what you might term "die-hards." Some people dig in and entrench themselves in their beliefs." The blue lady stopped, and considered her words. "Some people...believe. These, if they find out they've believed something, and it's wrong, they simply stop believing it, and move on, learn and grow from the experience. Others, their ego and their whole identity become wrapped up together with their beliefs. Should you show them the truth...show them how what they believe has been tangled, twisted and mangled to suit a particular viewpoint that enables evil to prosper...they will ignore it because their ego needs the connection to what they believe. They were conduits; they used the fear they felt, and made others around them susceptible to it, feel it, be subject to it, too. And in turn, the egregore let them feel and have some of his power to play with. Now, as he's losing, they can't walk away without losing their ego or identity. Remember the line, "In for a penny, in for a pound?" Because of their fragile egos and self-esteem that found strength within evil, they will be with him to the end, because their soul found a fix in the wrong place."

Helena considered the Lady's words. "They can't be wrong, because if they are, it shakes them to their very foundations."

The Lady nodded, expression somber.

As the Lady and Helena watched the scene below them, Mischief padded up to them, joining them on the moor, gaining their attention by meowing loudly, then rubbing himself against the legs of both women. The large black cat then proceeded to flop down at the Lady's feet, purring loudly. Her expression softened at seeing him. Despite the seriousness of what they were viewing, she cracked a small smile.

"Hello, Mischief."

Helena looked down at her furry companion, who was currently exposing his belly to the Lady hoping (in vain) for belly rubs, and then looked back out to the scene. The fog was lifting, the storm was fading, for most. Those who couldn't admit they had been used as a tool for evil to prosper, whether it started innocently or not...the ordeal wasn't ending for them.

After a few moments of silently watching, Helena asked, "What happens to the remainder?"

Before the Lady could answer, Mischief jumped up, producing a human-shaped

cat toy, which he proceeded to maul. He used a claw to toss it up in the air, and as it landed, pounced on it. He maneuvered the toy under his back paw, and proceeded to stomp on it repeatedly, with gusto.

The Lady looked at Mischief, eyebrow arched. "Thank you, Mischief, for that... graphic...illustration." As Mischief proceeded to torture the cat toy, the Lady looked to Helena, and said, "It might be graphic, but Mischief is essentially correct. This particular egregore's presence is characterized by a lack of love and unity; it tries to separate you one from another and reassemble you into easily manipulatable groups. It tries to separate you from Source, and if it's successful, you can end up like human cat toys. That's fine while the cat's merely carrying you around and protecting you. Not so fine once it gets its claws into you, or mauls you, as you can see." She gestured to Mischief, still torturing the toy gleefully. "For those able to separate themselves from it, things will improve. For those who cannot, that remain under its hold...things only get worse." She looked to those on the moor who remained, who now seemed to be mere shells of what they once were, drained. She sighed, sadly, for those individuals. "Someday, they might find their way back to the Light, and to Love. There is always a way forward, if only their souls seek to find it. The right path is always close at hand. It's up to them to seek it, whether in this life, or the next. No matter what, it won't be easy."

The dream faded gradually, just as the fog on the moor had.

When Helena awoke, it was with a loud boom that startled her awake, and Mischief chose that moment to jump on her lap, which only served to startle her more. It took a moment to orient her mind. She was a puddle of sweat, and there was a strong storm raging outside. She shooed Mischief down, and struggled to get up. Much as she hated to shut the windows, the sheeting rain was streaming right through the open windows into her living room.

She closed the windows against the torrent, and as she watched the storm rage, she got a sense of power, flowing, surging. Some of it good, some of it not. Light and dark. Good and bad. The archetypes that fueled every story mankind had ever told itself, whether in the light of day, or by firelight; whether in ancient days or present day: they were alive and well this night, and seemed to ebb and flow in power and influence in this storm. Suddenly, she remembered her dream on the moor. She remembered the Lady's words. That particular storm had been fought numerous times before, but she couldn't help but think her dream wasn't a history lesson, but instead was a warning, as stark a one as the lightning as it flashed across the sky.

A storm is coming.

We've been warned.

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