

Rescue Cat - Written By Will Snow

Chapter Twelve

When he returned home, Bill was too energetically drained to go into his office or to make food, so he just laid on the couch, looking up at the ceiling and considering the choices he had been making for the last couple of years.

There was no denying the truth of the information he received, regardless of the impossible way it was delivered. Here he was, living in a glorious space, surrounded by nature, nearly perfect weather, uphill from the best beaches in the world, with vibrant nightlife, art, music, and entertainment at his fingertips. However, he had chosen to close himself off to all of it. What would he do now? A different life seemed so close but frustratingly untouchable.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! Bill looked over to the patio doors overlooking the canyon and saw Cosmo ferociously lunging and pawing at the glass, trying to get to a bird hopping on the deck. Unfazed, the bird continued to hop around the feeder and was joined by another. Cosmo crouched down and sprung headfirst into the glass. Now, a third bird had joined the party, and Cosmo crouched and snarled. *"I am your death! Second cousin to*

Anubis! Feel my mighty presence and tremble!" Cosmo pounced again at the birds and once again was repelled. "Aargh! No sorcery will protect you! I will feast this day!" Cosmo rose on his haunches to his full height against the door, opened his mouth wide, and smacked his nose into the glass. At this point, the birds flew off, and Cosmo looked longingly at them flutter away.

Where he might have laughed at the cat's failed efforts before, Bill now felt a profound empathy for Cosmo's frustration and respect for his efforts. "I feel for you, Cosmo. There always seems to be something impenetrable getting in the way of our happiness." Hearing this, Cosmo turned from the patio doors, jumped on the couch, walked onto Bill's chest, looked straight into his face, and meowed. "*Just open the door, human.*"

As it was their last night together before Jodi returned from her trip, Bill had laid out a feast. He made a charcuterie board with slices of capocollo, prosciutto, and spicy salami. To this, he added Manchego, Brie, and blue cheese. He brought out three different types of crackers, making certain to have a gluten-free option because he wasn't entirely certain which might be proper for cats. He finished it all off with Greek

honey, apricot preserves, and spicy mustard. He pulled out his best bottle of Pinot Noir and set aside a dish of catnip for Cosmo.

With everything in place, he dimmed the lights, lit some candles, and turned on the latest episode of Naruto. He laid out a fluffy blanket and Cosmo sat down next to him. For the next hour, they sat together snacking on cured meats and cheeses, their eyes glazed over, totally engrossed in the epic displays of Jutsu. After a few glasses of wine and during one particularly excellent battle scene, Bill jumped out of his seat, shouting, and pumping his fist in the air. Cosmo followed suit, leaping off the couch into the middle of the table mewing and cavorting amongst the candles. *"Favorite son of Sekhmet, I am fire! I am fire! Wait, what? BASTET save me! I AM **ON** FIRE!!"* Bill heard Cosmo scream and his sinuses suddenly smarted from the sulfurous stench of burning fur. Cosmo's eyes were wide with panic, and he was spinning in circles on the table, the flaming tip of his shaggy tail whipping around. By reflex, Bill grabbed the blanket from the couch and threw it on Cosmo, then quickly pulled him off the table into his arms, wrapping Cosmo in its folds and dousing the flame.

Bill held the swaddled and piteously mewling cat in his arms like a baby. He held Cosmo tighter, rocking him, trying to wrap the terrified animal in a protective cocoon of energy to will away his fear and pain. Bill was suddenly flooded by memories he mistakenly thought he had sealed away forever in a deep and impregnable vault. Cosmo's soft cries of distress shredded through that iron wall like wet paper. He kept rocking him and endlessly repeating his mantra, "It's OK. You're OK, baby. Nothing is going to hurt you. Stay with me. I'm here. I'll keep you safe."

After a few minutes, Cosmo quieted, and Bill carried him upstairs to his room and set him on a pillow. He then carefully unwrapped the blanket to assess the situation. The fur on Cosmo's tail was singed but it didn't look like anything was permanently damaged. "That is enough adventure for the day, buddy. It's a good thing you have some extra lives to spare. You stay here, and I am going to clean up." As he turned to head downstairs to deal with the mess, Cosmo made a loud protesting mew. "OK, I will hang with you for a little bit." Bill lay beside him, and Cosmo scooted over to curl up on his chest. They rested quietly until they both eventually fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

