

WHATEVER LOLA WANTS

by

J.J. Murphy

When I was young, we were fed on demand. But recently they'd been neglecting us. I extended the claws of my right forepaw, slashing the bag of dry food. The crunchy brown pellets bounced across the floor, drumming like raindrops. Reveling in my success, I ate my fill and wandered off for a nap.

Home is a New York tenement where Little Italy blends into Chinatown. Four tiny rooms are filled with soft-cushioned furniture and the beds have soft pillows and quilts. Five of us live here; two humans maintain the place, three cats reap the benefits.

The humans are two women who keep the litter box clean, the water fresh and, we thought, the food plentiful. Harriet is tall and soft-spoken with a slight wheeze and a comfortable lap. Dorothy is short and constantly lecturing us. She has a shallow lap, but she's a terrific petter - her firm fingers massage deep.

My cat mates are Sharma, a sleek short-haired Tabby cat and T.S. Alleycat, a grey-and-white Holland cat who looks like a rat. Sharma is aloof - shy and sometimes snobby; T.S. Alleycat whines and begs for attention like a dog.

I'm Lola, a full-figured Maine Coon cat with long tortoise-shell fur. I've always seen myself as built for love, but I'm enjoying the emergence of my

hunter spirit.

I was in a deep, binge-induced sleep when Harriet and Dorothy discovered the spilled food. They started keeping the food bag in the refrigerator, making it clear that this was deliberate food deprivation. But why? Too bad I hadn't thought to stash some crunchy pellets.

Over the next several days Dorothy babbled about "health," "diets" and "fat" while petting us; even worse, Harriet joined in the lectures. This was a poor excuse for not feeding us. I rallied Sharma and T.S. Alleycat. Our plan was simple: every time either human went into the kitchen, we'd all dash to the fridge. Sometimes Dorothy would open the fridge door as we purred and rubbed her ankles. Then something would make her stop, shut the door and pet us. We needed a better plan.

I began examining the refrigerator. I was probing the narrow, squishy lining around the fridge door; it made a soft "pop" when I punctured it. I then stretched on my back legs and probed the recessed lining with my forepaws, claws extended. I slipped, vertically slicing the lining. I was inspired. Several well-placed strokes shredded the lining and the door popped open.

Beyond the crunchy pellets there was a whole world of sights and smells - fresh milk, sweet butter, fish. As I bit into a hard, salty chunk of Parmesan cheese, Sharma and T.S. Alleycat joined me for a terrific party. Hours later when we were all nestled in the bedding, my right ear twitched as I heard the

front door creek open, and the mournful duet "Oh my God."

I thought we'd settled this diet business, but I was mistaken. Harriet and Dorothy wrapped a huge bungee cord around the entire refrigerator. I was determined to keep my cool; no turds in their shoes. I'm a predator and the fridge holds my prey. Besides, with both women gone all day, I'd have lots of time to examine my quarry.

Sharma and T.S. Alleycat preferred sleeping to hunting. Sharma's attitude was that food would be available when she needed it. T.S. Alleycat came by occasionally to see if there was anything to cash in on. I was on my own.

The bungee cord was penetrable, but too thick to slash, slice or shred. I tried pulling. The cord was elastic - I could pull it down, but it would spring back into place. Harriet and Dorothy could unhook the ends and without that cord, the door swung open. I kept pulling and one day I got enough slack for the door to open slightly. The idea, I discovered, was to pull the cord out, not down. T.S. Alleycat was on patrol at that moment, so I showed him my discovery. Suddenly motivated, he began to poke his forepaw into the gap in an attempt to hook a piece of cheese. Eventually we were successful.

At first I pulled on the bungee cord and held it while T.S. Alleycat grabbed a forbidden treat. Eventually I hung on the cord from both forepaws, putting my full 15 lb. weight into it. T.S. Alleycat figured out how to open the fridge door

wider by stretching his back legs against the fridge and placing one forepaw against the fridge door. He used his free forepaw to scoop out the food. Best of all, after we got the goodies, the bungee cord sprung back, holding the door shut. It was perfect; peace reigned in our home.

Once Harriet noticed that a piece of Brie was missing. Dorothy swore she didn't eat it. It never occurred to me that they would suspect us, so T.S. Alleycat and I fearlessly continued to raid the fridge.

One day the unthinkable happened. We were caught. Hanging from the bungee cord, I looked up to see both women standing at one end of our long narrow kitchen. Dorothy's mouth opened and closed over and over. Her grotesque expression was somewhere between a laugh and a shriek.

Harriet paled and whispered "Take anything you want, just don't hurt us."

T.S. Alleycat and I had no choice but to abandon our mission. For once, T.S. Alleycat followed my lead, striding nonchalantly out of the kitchen, tails held high.

END