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### A Cat's Life

One lovely summer evening as the sun was setting slowly and a light coastal breeze cooled the air to the perfect temperature, my brother and I were outside enjoying the last hours of daylight by climbing a tree in our backyard. Everything was as it should be. It was a normal day; that is, it was until my dad's cat sat down at the base of the tree. A mischievous glint appeared in my brother's eyes as he looked down on the furry creature. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" he asked slyly.

A short while later he returned from the house, having gone to retrieve a backpack. I sat sweet-talking the cat, slowly tightening my grip on him. The poor animal didn't have time to think before he was shoved into the bag and securely zipped inside. Laughing triumphantly, my brother handed me the sack. I should have listened to my conscience and freed the cat, but instead I began to climb the tree. It was slow going because of the weight and constant twitching of the imprisoned feline, but eventually I reached the top, some thirty feet off the ground.

"Jenny? Come down. I need to talk to you."

I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach and the blood freeze in my veins. My dad was standing on the ground below, beckoning me down. My brother was sitting on a lower branch, and when he heard my father's voice, his eyes dilated in fear.

Numbly I placed the cat-laden backpack across two branches and began my descent. It seemed hours before I reached the ground, shaking with trepidation the whole way.

“Jenny, I need you to . . . .”

I couldn't focus on my father's words. I was too busy praying that he wouldn't discover what I had done to his cat.

Then came the crashing. My pulse raced recklessly as I looked up to see the bag ricocheting from branch to branch, plummeting to the earth below. I watched as the sack morphed into different shapes, sloshing around like water in a glass. Then the air was split by a sharp howl.

Suddenly I realized that the pack was gaining speed. If perchance the helpless creature survived the beating caused by the fall, he would surely die when he hit the ground. My brain searched frantically for some way to save the life I had so foolishly endangered and found one logical solution: catch him. I held out my arms and watched in horror as the bag fell through the gap between them.

THUD! The backpack landed heavily and then was still. Nothing moved. The air was dry and tense like that of a funeral home. I stared at the sack in disbelief. Then a wave of panic hit me with the force of a freight train. I had just killed my dad's cat. The cat was dead.

I screamed. Like a broken mirror causing seven years bad luck, the mood shattered. The atmosphere began to hum, nervous but excited. The bag was moving, flopping about desperately. As I rushed to open the sack, I heard the voice of my father as if from a great distance, from across the boiling tundras of Hell, perhaps.

Fumbling with the zipper as the bag bounced around like a fish searching for water, I finally managed to open it a crack. The cat bolted from the pack, fuzzy black lightning streaking across the yard and over the neighbor's fence. Joyously I watched him go. Other than being terrified, he seemed fine.

“Jennifer Renee,” my father said as his voice shook with rage, “we need to talk.”

The cat has since forgotten the incident, and the story is tossed around in a joking manner as part of our family folklore. But to me, it will never be just a joke from my past. I learned that day of the feeble string by which life is held. Every life is significant; none should be toyed with, not even a cat's.