



"Meow"

Sara Messina

Lisa put her arms up against the eggshell colored sheets of her bed and marveled at how her skin was becoming paler than her bedspread. Her mother found her this way, seemingly spread flat up against her bed except for her head, curved up like a striking snake.

Her mother put the small plate of cookies and the glass of milk she was carrying on the shelves beside the door, perhaps a little too roughly. But then how many times did she have to tell Lisa? The full length mirror was at the foot of Lisa's bed again. Mother hated that mirror.

"I told you to leave this in the closet with the other old things."

Lisa opened her mouth to protest as her mother opened the closet door and began to drag the mirror inside. "And don't you go making up any stories or excuses. Just do as you're told. If it wasn't so late I would tell Aunt Kay not to bring Nicky over, but you're still being punished after they leave. You won't be going outside for the rest of the week."

Lisa merely nodded for a few seconds before reaching for her book and sketching pad and pencils.

"Don't stay up too late either. Your father or I will check in by nine."

Lisa nodded silently again as she flipped to an empty page in her pad. Other things were more important, or at least this is what was in her mind as her mother lectured her while bringing the cookies and milk over to the night table before going to leave. It was more important to read and as she read, record what she saw. Not in the book, but the mirror. She would have to get it out of the closet quietly after mother and father went to bed.

Lisa did not see herself in the mirror as her parents thought, for they had scolded her mistakenly for vanity. But, Lisa knew they were keeping something from her. Somehow, they knew her curiosity was not from vanity, though she doubted they knew all of the truth. She had her secrets and they had theirs.

The latter was all too apparent when she surveyed her room. Everything in it was somehow neutral and old. Any of her things could be owned by someone else, and probably had. Like the plain antique mirror or the simple stuffed bear sitting in

the straight back wooden chair. The only things that Lisa had that were not so bland were the pad, the pencils, the books, and the box. But the box wasn't technically hers as far as she and Nicky could figure out. Nicky, being the tallest, had found, while standing on that old wooden chair, a photo and two blue booties in the little box. They knew there were more treasures, but they didn't have the proper opportunity to examine the box thoroughly. So, they contented themselves with the photo and booties for the while.

The booties were small and a pale blue that may have been much brighter at some time. The yarn had become fuzzy and worn. The photo was an old Polaroid of a little boy, a few years older than Lisa was now. He was surrounded by cats. Three cats and each one seemed to playfully vie for the boy's affections as he smiled at the camera. It was a happy scene and a much better contrast to Lisa's blank existence.

This in itself was strange. Her parents only took one photo of her a year, on her birthday, as if to document her life and show some little bit of caring. But this boy's photo showed no particular event. Just a boy and his cats.

The cats were another oddity. Mother and father had always hated cats, or so they told Lisa. This couldn't be from her family. Nicky thought it was something left over from people who used to own the house, and Lisa thought it was a possibility. Father certainly did enough complaining about someone who used to disobey, like Lisa did, but then, he spoke more fondly of this mystery person.

When Nicky came over mother decided she would leave them home alone with the top floor door locked while her, father, and Aunt Kay went out. "But only until lunch" as the order always went. But lunch was long enough away. Nicky was removing his shoes and Lisa was pulling the wooden chair over to just below the closet shelf within seconds of the garage door opening. Nicky was careful not to spill the box over as he took it down. They would take care not to leave anything out of place.

The blue booties and photo were on top where they left them, but underneath was a piece of folded yellow paper. Lisa opened it up while Nicky read over her shoulder. It was mostly faded out but they could read.

NAME: Jason Mon-
DATE OF BIRTH: 6 79
MOTHER: nda Monson
FATHER: ck Mons

It was faded in strange places, as if someone had tried to damage it many times, but stopped just short of destroying it.

Nicky broke their silence first. "Well, it's obviously a birth certificate."

Lisa thought for a moment, "Maybe its our boy's papers."

"Could be."

"But, this would mean that you had an older brother."

Another little paper had a prayer on one side and a picture of hands folded in prayer on the other. Little words on the prayer side said:

Jason Monson Born 1970-1981

He had died ten years before Lisa was born.

"Yeah, I wonder what happened."

"When Tommy's little brother died in the car accident, people stopped talking about him for a while, right?"

"Yeah. And I bet mother and father are still upset."

"Well, if—"

Nicky was cut short by the sound of a car entering the driveway. They put the things back in the box and hurried to put it back in the closet. Lisa grabbed the bear and sat him in the chair against the closet door. Nicky and Lisa sat on the floor, making like they were in class and Mr. Bear had assigned letters. Mom thought she saw nothing a miss when she entered the room with their lunchtime sandwiches. They had been lucky.

After Nicky and Aunt Kay left, Lisa was sent to bed to start her punishment. Her mother left no treats this time, and they would be checking in at eight.

But Lisa didn't mind, she and Nicky had rigged the closet door and the mirror just so she could see a few inches from the rim of the glass.

She laid back feeling safe under the watchful and kind eyes of the pale boy in the mirror, as a gentle purring lulled her to sleep.