

Milo Gives Me the Finger

by Lee Holden

Milo leaned over my shoulder, nuzzled my ear, and broke my concentration. I pushed him away playfully. “Not now.”

Stifling a small smile, I forced my attention back to the computer screen. A few seconds later, Milo delicately brushed my thigh.

“Please, Baby,” I complained. “I’ve got to finish this report!”

Normally I am receptive to Milo’s urges but was having enough trouble keeping the facts straight. I forced my thoughts back to that morning.

Marylou McCarty came running out of her front door flagging me down as I returned from my morning run.

“Sam! Wait,” she yelled frantically.

Bouts of histrionics typified Marylou’s character. Five-foot nothing, stick thin and bright red hair flying, she ran knock-kneed down the driveway in a robe and fuzzy slippers, looking like the offspring of Carrot Top and Raggedy Ann.

Marylou and her daughter Felicity moved next-door a little over two years ago just after a bitter divorce. I was home recuperating, so we got to know each other pretty well. When she got a job at Manu’s Meats and I went back to work, our schedules conflicted and we no longer saw that much of each other. But we were friendly and joked about our occupations. I thought it was strange that she was a woman butcher, and she thought it was odd that I was a woman cop.

Sam—that's me, short for Samantha. Sergeant Sam Spade—my dad's little joke. He was a career policeman, so I always think he wished he had been named Sam instead of Bruce.

A sturdy 5'9" and 160 pounds, I took up running three miles a day to get back in shape and keep my weight in check after I got out of the hospital. I also quit smoking. Squinting into the sun, I wiped the sweat from my forehead and waited for Marylou to reach me.

"Felicity didn't come home after work last night! She hasn't called and her bed hasn't been slept in." Her eyes were red and puffy.

"Maybe she spent the night at a friend's house." Felicity looked and acted a lot like Marylou, but she threw in some teen rebellion by coloring her hair green, piercing her nose, and getting a barbwire tattoo on her arm.

"I've been calling all of her friends and nobody has seen her. Her boss at the Lone Star Steakhouse said she left right after her shift ended last night."

"Were you two getting along?" I knew the answer. We lived a block off of Central Street in small row-houses, almost as close together as apartments. You could hear loud noises from the neighbors pretty easily. Lately, there had been a lot of shouting.

She lowered her eyes and blushed.

"We've had some really bad arguments recently—you must have heard. Felicity is seventeen, thinks she knows everything. Lately she's been seeing Manu's son."

Marylou worked for Manu Lososopu. It was quite a sight to see them together. A former sumo wrestler, Manu weighed over 350 pounds. His twenty year old look-alike-son, Mako, had tried to play college football, but he'd dropped out after injuring a knee. Now he helped his father at the butcher shop.

"Mako seems nice enough, but I don't want her to get into trouble—like I did. And..." She hesitated.

"What?" I probed. I knew about Mako, but there was something else in her voice.

“Peter is out of prison and back at the saw mill. A couple of weeks ago, he called wanting to see Felicity.” She gave an involuntary shudder. I told him not to come near her. I have a restraining order and if he violates it, he’ll go back to jail.”

I knew that she had gotten pregnant and had a shotgun wedding to Peter McCarty when she was in high school. Peter had dropped out and taken a job at the saw mill. When the economy declined and they cut back his hours, things got tough. He blamed it on Marylou and took it out on her—sometimes physically.

“How did he take it?”

“He was calm... he usually is when he’s sober. But Felicity overheard and wanted to see him. She doesn’t know what happened—and when I said “no,” we had a major argument.” Marylou’s voice trembled.

“Have you talked to Mako?”

“No. I called Manu at home. Mako closed last night like he usually does on Saturdays, but he didn’t come home either. Manu checked to be sure things were locked up. But he wasn’t worried because Mako spends several nights away each week. Mako’s car was still there, so Manu assumed he just crashed at a friend’s place.” The agitation showed in the raised pitch of her voice.

“Look, it’s too soon to file a missing person report officially. She probably just stayed at a friend’s house and the friend is covering for her. I’ll re-check her friends—a call from the police might change the answers.”

I was also going to call the hospitals, morgue, and jail, but there was no point in telling Marylou. Putting that thought in her mind would probably be the last straw. I took her back inside and headed home to shower and change clothes.

When Milo wants me, he can be very persuasive. As I typed my notes recounting the day’s activities, he softly stroked my arm, nudging my hand out of position so that I typed the last sentence with all the wrong letters.

“All right!” I relented. “You want me, you got me.”

I looked into his glorious blue eyes and nuzzled his neck. He licked my cheek.

“Yuck! Your tongue is like sandpaper.”

Milo’s self-satisfied purr filled the room. He was quite proud of himself for getting my attention.

Milo is a seal point Siamese cat—although he prefers to think he’s human. He wandered into my life one night just after I got home from the hospital and has stayed ever since. We got acquainted by comparing scars. It reminded me of *Lethal Weapon* where Mel Gibson and Rene Russo got hot checking out each other’s battle wounds.

I use to think about Siamese cats based on *The Lady and the Tramp*, prima donnas, primping and preening in luxury. Milo was anything but. He had fought his share of battles. However, I guess he’d won more than he’d lost—he was still here. Part of one ear was missing and his body was covered with assorted battle trophies.

My body had only two—two that counted anyway—two angry puckering craters. One marked the back of my right shoulder—a flesh wound, hardly worth mentioning. The other more serious injury, lower and to the left, had broken my shoulder blade and punctured my lung. Did I mention that I quit smoking?

I work days and Milo gallivants around all night, which suits both of us just fine. Right now he wanted attention. As I rubbed his downy fur, my mind drifted back to the morning.

Milo hadn’t returned from the night’s adventures when I got home after talking with Marylou. I showered, dressed, made myself reasonably presentable, and headed to the kitchen.

I was cramming down a piece of toast in between gulps of coffee when I heard Milo meow at the door.

“Where were you last night?” I opened the door and Milo slipped quickly through the gap and rubbed against my leg. I scratched behind his ear and was only a little surprised when my hand came back with specks of crusting blood.

It was obvious that Milo's already scarred body was somewhat the worse for wear. Not that this was a rare occurrence. What made this unusual was the human touch lodged under his collar.

"Oh, Milo! What have you gotten yourself into now?" I kneeled and inspected him more closely.

Splotches of clotted blood made a mess of his fur, but as near as I could tell it wasn't his. The finger appeared to be from a man's hand, thick with the nail chewed close to the quick. I dismissed the first thought that flashed across my mind—that somebody had grabbed Milo and the finger had been pulled off. Maybe that sounded reasonable for a tiger, but not for a domestic—well almost domestic—cat.

The finger had not been bitten off, either. The point at which it had been severed was clotting and crusty, but it looked like it had been a clean cut. It fit snugly under Milo's collar—too snugly. The collar had been pulled a notch tighter than its normal position. Somebody had deliberately placed the finger under the collar and tightened it to make sure it stayed.

I called the precinct and waited for the crew to arrive.

They bagged and tagged the finger and took Milo to the lab to test the blood residue. This should be an easy case. After all, we had finger prints—well, one print—blood type and DNA, way more than we normally had to identify a body and solve a crime. Of course, we didn't actually have a body—or a crime.

I knew it would be a while before any results came back from the lab, so I returned my attention to the missing Felicity McCarty. After checking the hospitals, morgue, jails and such, I contacted the friends from Marylou's list.

My first stop was the Lone Star Steak House to interview Felicity's supervisor and coworkers.

Jason Arguile, one of the cooks, was hacking away at a pile of onions with a butcher knife like a Benihana chef. He and Felicity use to be an item.

"I'm Sergeant Spade."

“Yeah?” Jason lowered his eyes and spoke quietly, but he kept chopping. He and Felicity apparently belonged to the same club, except the guys had purple hair so you could tell them apart. At least there were no visible tattoos or strange holes in his face.

“I’m looking for Felicity McCarty and I understand you used to date.”

“Tho? Lots of guys have dated Felithity. At least before blubber boy came along.”

I was wrong on the holes thing. Apparently, he’d jerked his head when they were drilling and got his tongue in the way. A piece of metal in your mouth plays hell with your enunciation.

“When did you see her last?”

“Thhee worked latht night.” He answered cautiously. “Ith thhee in trouble?”

“Why would you think she was in trouble?” I countered.

“I dunno... you’re a cop.” He avoided eye contact.

“Yes, but I’m also a friend of the family. She’s missing and her mother is worried sick. Did Felicity leave by herself?”

“Yes... I, uh, think thho.” He nodded more certain. “Yeah, thhee walked out alone—after Mako and some old dude got into an argument.”

“Did you know the other guy?” I softened my tone now that he was talking.

Jason shuffled his feet and stared at the floor as if trying to decide.

“Yeah, it wuth her old man. I remember him from when we were theeing each other.”

Jason was on his break when Peter McCarty showed up and started talking with Felicity. Mako arrived a few minutes later. The two men argued and Felicity pushed Mako out the door. Peter and Felicity talked for a minute. Then Peter walked out, pounding his fist on a table, obviously upset. Jason said he had gone back to work and didn’t notice when Felicity left.

His story was plausible. As I pushed through the swinging kitchen door I glanced back. He was still looking at me—still holding the knife.

Next on my list, Peter McCarty wasn't hard to find. His parole officer gave me his address. He was in the back yard sharpening an axe when I got there.

"I'm Sergeant Spade. I want to talk to you about Felicity."

He rose, still holding the axe.

"Ah ain't done nuttin," he said with a challenging glare.

"I understand you saw her last night." I glared right back. "Witnesses said there was an argument."

"Ah saw her, but we didn't have no argument. It was that fat boy that caused the trouble. Ah's just talkin' to her when he came in and started mouthin' off. We had a couple words and Felicity sent him away." He looked down at his shoes. "Then she sent me away, too. She don't want nuttin to do with her ol' man... gets that from her ma."

"What happened after that?"

"Nuttin. Ah jus' went home."

"And you didn't see either one of them after that?"

"No. What's this all about?"

"Felicity didn't come home last night. Any idea where she is?"

"No, Ah swear. Ah came straight home, had a beer, and went to bed." He still had the axe in his hand, but there was fear in his eyes.

"Did anyone see you?"

"No... Ah don't think so. I live alone. Look, Ah'd never do anything to Felicity—I just wanted to talk to her." He gave me his most earnest look... but I am sure he has had a lot of practice lying.

"Okay, call me if you hear from her." I handed him my card and left.

Milo was happily purring away in my lap as I continued typing my report.

"Come on, Milo. Spill it. Where were you last night? How did you get that finger?"

Milo purred again—no help at all. The lab report wouldn't be back until tomorrow and I had a bad feeling. I reviewed the facts.

“Ok, Milo. Felicity is missing. Nobody has seen Mako. There is no love lost between Jason and Mako or Peter and Mako. Is the severed finger part of this?”

Milo scraped at the window pane with his paw.

“Pay attention, Milo. That is a window, not the door, and this is the second floor.”

Milo pawed again. I got up and walked over to him.

“You are weird. You never go out that window; it’s a two-story drop to the ground.”

As I scooped him up, glancing out the window at Marylou’s house, another thought crept into my mind. I had a severed finger, and Marylou made the third person who didn’t like Mako and was good with sharp instruments. But how did Felicity being missing fit into all of this?

I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders. I had no clue. Well, I had a lot of clues, but I couldn’t put them together. Milo leapt from my arms and headed downstairs. I followed.

When I let him out, he headed towards Marylou’s house. On impulse, I grabbed my purse and followed.

Milo went straight to her door and let out a plaintive “Mooorrrrh.”

Marylou opened the door.

“Hi, Milo. I see you’re on your nightly rounds.” She handed Milo a scrap which he greedily went to work on.

“Oh, Sam,” She exclaimed noticing me. “Did you find Felicity?”

“Not yet. Do you mind if I look around the house? Maybe Felicity left something around that would give us an idea of where she went,” I added quickly as Marylou looked up sharply.

“No, of course not. Come in.” She said, holding the door open for me.

My search didn’t turn up the body of a 350 pound guy or anything else of use. I slumped into an old wooden chair on the porch next to Marylou. Milo sat on the step giving himself a vigorous bath. Begging must be dirty work.

“I didn’t know that Milo came over here regularly. No wonder he never wants cat food. Does he come here every night?” I asked.

“I’m not here at this time during the week but I see him at the butcher shop. I imagine he has regular stops on his rounds, huh?”

An idea was trying to penetrate my brain.

“Was he here last night?”

“Yes, it was Saturday, so I was home, just like tonight. He stopped by for his treat and then headed off—just like now.”

I followed her gaze. Milo headed down the street.

“Marylou, grab your purse and come on!”

Milo wove back and forth, so we managed to keep up until he rounded a corner. As we turned into the alley, Milo was pawing at the back door of the butcher shop and mewing loudly.

“Come on!” I yelled at Marylou. “Unlock the door. I have feeling about this.”

As we entered the shop, a faint call of “Help!” escaped from the open door to the meat freezer.

It was quite a sight. There was tiny Felicity McCarty pinned to the floor under the inert body of 350 pound Mako Lososopu! Splotches of blood spotted the floor, though less than I expected. Wrapped in a cloth, Mako's right hand was sandwiched between what appeared to be two t-bone steaks.

His pulse was weak but he was still alive. It took both of us to roll Mako’s massive frame off of Felicity who was scared, tired and weak, but glad to be able breath deeply again. Waiting for the paramedics, Felicity unraveled the story.

Mako found her talking to her father at the Steakhouse. He knew something about the background and got into an argument trying to get Peter to leave. Felicity didn’t want them to get into a fight, so she asked Mako to leave. Then she told Peter that she couldn’t be around him, at least not now. It was hard because he had never mistreated her, but ultimately Felicity knew her mother was right.

After she finished her shift, Felicity went to the butcher shop to apologize to Mako. She found Milo at the door. When Mako let her in, Milo followed—the door shutting automatically and locking behind them. Mako had to finish slicing up a side of beef and asked Felicity to take the finished cuts into the freezer. As she stacked the meat on the shelves, Felicity heard Mako at the door behind her.

“Look what I did!” Mako’s right hand was hanging limp at his side dripping blood. He was staring blankly at the little finger of his right hand which he held out to her between the meaty thumb and forefinger of his left hand.

“Mako!” Felicity ran toward him arriving just as he fainted, hitting his head on a shelf and pinning her to the floor. Fortunately, he fell so she could breathe, but at five foot-nothing and 98 pounds, she couldn’t budge him. Mako remained unconscious from the combination of shock and blood loss. Felicity covered him with heavy coat and was able to tie a tourniquet around his arm. She took a couple of the frozen steaks that had tumbled to the floor, packing them around his hand using pieces of butcher paper.

Felicity couldn’t move but watching Milo curiously inspect the scene gave her an idea. She tucked Mako’s severed finger under Milo’s collar and she shoed him away. He escaped through an open window.

For a hair-brained kid, Felicity was remarkably calm under crisis. Mako made a full recovery. He and Felicity are still together... but she has put him on a strict diet.

Milo is still Milo.