

Remote Control

Sue hit the button on the remote control and the TV jumped to life. A few more buttons and she and Roy could sit back and relax with a cold drink each. They sighed back into the couch and affectionately rubbed arms.

Not five minutes into the film, there was a plaintive 'meow' from Fex, the cat, needing to go out.

"That bloody cat. Why can't he let himself out?"

"If you wired the door, you could have it open when he meows," Sue responded.

"Not a bad idea," Roy said, as he grudgingly stood up to let Fex out.

Halfway through the film there was a loud scratching on the fly-wire door. This time Sue got up and swore at Fex as she let him in.

"The sooner you wire that door, the better," Sue said to Roy as she tried to settle back into watching the film. "And why don't you wire Fex while you're at it, so we can shut him up when we want to?"

Roy laughed.

The following weekend, Roy fitted the front door and fly-screen with electric openers, controlled by a microchip which was programmed to respond to a cat's meow. Fex was liberal with his meows as he struggled to get out of Sue's grip; the noises allowed Roy to make the necessary adjustments.

Eventually, the doors opened and closed repeatedly as Fex struggled loudly.

Sue let him go. Fex landed on the floor, shook himself, meowed and, with his tail and nose in the air, walked out through the open doors. They closed behind him with a hiss and a double click.

Sue and Roy smiled at each other and both gave a thumbs-up sign.

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"What's that bloody noise?"

Sue sat bolt upright in bed as Roy stirred and rubbed his eyes.

"What noise?" Roy asked.

"Sounds like all the cats from the neighbourhood are here," Sue answered.

They got up to investigate. The front door and fly-screen were opening and closing as about a dozen cats made their way in and out. Fex was there, too, with a constant meowing of his own.

Despite having been disturbed at 2 am and having a front hallway full of mouse chasers, they both laughed.

An hour later they had managed to clear all but one cat out of the house and Roy had disabled the mechanism. They shut Fex in the laundry and went back to bed.

Next day, Roy was back in his workshop. At the end of an hour he called Fex and, while Sue held him and stroked him, Roy carefully inserted a tiny microchip under the skin at the back of the cat's neck.

"I hope you've fixed it, Roy. I need an undisturbed night's sleep."

"It should. I've changed the door program so it will only open when Fex is right next to it and meows. This should stop the other cats getting in."

Of course, it didn't work exactly like that. If Fex was close to the front door and any cat meowed, the doors opened and any cat walked through. Several more refinements had it finally working perfectly.

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“Roy, I think you’ve gone too far. It’s not natural.”

Sue was angry. Roy was defensive.

“You’re the one who said weeks ago that it’d be a good idea to have a remote control for Fex.”

“I was joking.”

“Well, I’m not. I’m sick and tired of having my life controlled by that cat of yours.”

“Oh, I see. So it’s *my* cat now, is it?”

The argument went on until Fex’s loud meows got through to them. Roy pressed a button on a remote control. The meowing stopped, although the cat still made the facial movements of the sound. Roy pressed another button and Fex turned around and went to the laundry.

“It’s unnatural,” Sue yelled at Roy as she went out through the front door and stormed off down the road.

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Over the ensuing weeks, the arguing became worse and more bitter. Roy spent more and more time in his workshop and each time came out with more and more automation for the house and refinements in the cat’s behaviour. He permanently carried a large remote control and used it liberally. Sue asked for a duplicate one, but Roy told her it was “too complicated” for her to understand. This really made her angry; she couldn’t stand that sort of put-down. After all, she was as qualified as he in electronics.

Sue enlisted the help of her friend Amie, spending spare time at Amie’s lab at Miconix.

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“I’ve had enough of your negative comments about my automation of the house and your complaining about Fex. Just remember how much trouble he used to be.” Roy was red in the face as they sat at the breakfast table. He kept scratching the back of his neck — he had an itch there that wouldn’t go away.

“The way you’ve mucked about with Fex, we might as well just have a robot,” Sue countered. She was angry, but not excessively so. “This house is almost impossible to live in now. And you refuse to give me my own remote control.”

“Well, if you’re so fed up, why don’t you do something about it?” Roy taunted her.

“I have,” said Sue, with an even voice.

Out of her dressing gown pocket she brought what looked like a small car alarm remote control.

Roy saw it and started to laugh. “What do you expect to do with that?”

“This!” Sue pressed a button and Roy’s body disappeared. In its place was a snowy image, such as you might see on an un-tuned TV.

The kitchen was quiet, except for a slight hissing sound coming from where Roy had been sitting. Sue aimed her small remote control at the snowy image and pressed another button. The image disappeared and the hiss stopped. She dropped the control back into her pocket, let out a satisfied sigh and continued her breakfast.

This story received a commendation in the Gold Coast Writers Short Story Competition - August 2005

This story received a commendation in the Best of Times Short Story Competition - April 2008