

## —GOLDEN EYES

*by Lisa Morton*

Megan was gazing out the kitchen window, thinking about how they needed to remind the gardener to trim back the bougainvillea, when she glimpsed the dead animal.

At first all she saw was a patch of fur, partially hidden in the thick sage and rosemary where the rear of their property, tamed and trained, seceded to the slope of the wild canyon wall. She moved from the kitchen to the sliding glass doors in the living room, and now she could make out paws, a pink snout, scattered patches of gray hide.

“Barker?” she called out, turning. She waited until her eighty-five-pound Labrador came bounding into the living room, tongue lolling, tail wagging. Stroking his head, she murmured, “Stay here.”

Megan slid carefully out the door, closing it behind her despite Barker’s insistent cries. She crossed the yard, moving around the pool and past the citrus trees (still fruiting in the Los Angeles winter) until she reached the small corpse. It’d been partially devoured, and she took a few seconds to identify it as a possum.

“What is it?”

She flinched as David poked his head out of the house, holding the anxious dog back with one hand.

“Dead possum.”

“A possum? Since when do we get possums around here?”

Megan shrugged and stood there, gazing down at the shredded remains until her husband joined her. “Do you think Barker did this?” he asked.

“Barker wouldn’t do this.” Megan had adopted the dog six months ago from an animal shelter that had warned her he might be untrainable. She hadn’t believed it, and when David had acquiesced she’d brought the animal home. In less than a month she’d had Barker heeling and performing tricks. The dog worshipped her. Even though she knew his canine ancestors had been hunters, she refused to accept now that Barker could have done this. It would be too much of a betrayal.

“Did you let him out during the night? I didn’t.”

David looked up into the canyon, squinting. “Coyotes, then, come down out of the hills.”

“Maybe we need to talk about that fence again,” Megan said, expecting another argument. For some reason David had always liked the notion that their property was somehow “borderless”.

To her surprise, he agreed. “Maybe.”

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Behind them, Barker pushed his nose up against the glass and howled.

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Megan was at work, peering at the Avid's screen, cutting the trailer for a new blockbuster action film, when she felt something brush her ankle. She looked down to see Flatbed, the office cat, rubbing silver sides against her legs.

"Hey, Flats," she said, picking the cat up, glad for a break from the tedium of cinematic explosions and gunshots. She set Flatbed down in her lap and stroked the cat's back, producing a deep, satisfied purr and wincing as claws dug into her thigh.

"You sure have a way with her. Hard to believe she was once the neighborhood feral terror."

Megan looked up to see Tommy, the editor from the next cubicle, lounging in the doorway, coffee cup in hand. Smiling, Megan hefted Flatbed up, giving her a playful shake. "She's still a fearsome predator. She's nice to me because she knows I respect her."

"Yeah, well, the treats don't exactly hurt, either."

Megan laughed and lowered the cat. "You give her treats, and she won't let you pick her up."

Tommy gazed down impassively as Flatbed nosed around the floor; Megan knew he was one of those people who were never really comfortable around pets. "You're right. I've said it before—you're in the wrong profession. You should be the cat whisperer or something, not trying to find gold in these pile-of-shit movies."

"Yeah, but the pay's good."

"That it is." Tommy toasted her with his cup, then jumped as Flatbed suddenly fixed on him, arched her back and hissed.

"Whoa...what the hell...okay, I'm going." Tommy held up his hands in a placating gesture and left. As soon as he did, Flatbed's posture dropped back down to normal, and she returned to winding around Megan's ankle.

The possibility that she really didn't understand the cat at all sent a small shiver through Megan.

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"Hey, did you see this?"

Megan was on the couch, trying to go over e-mail on a laptop despite Barker's weight on her lap, when David drew her attention to the television. The news was running a story about a mountain lion, complete with footage of the magnificent creature bounding along a busy urban street past astonished pedestrians and swerving cars.

"It just showed up in Beverly Hills today. Ran right down the middle of Rodeo, can you believe it?"

On the screen, cops and sheriffs with rifles were trying to block off the big cat's escape.

"Where'd it come from?"

Shrugging, David answered, "Nobody knows. The hills, I guess."

The video showed a sheriff taking aim and firing. Megan felt her stomach clench as the lion was hit; it staggered as crimson blossomed on its tawny pelt, and