

## Miss P. and the Turkey

*To a cat, "No" means "Not while I'm looking."*

*~Author Unknown*

I remember that Thanksgiving as though it was yesterday, even though it happened years ago. The china sparkled under the dining room chandelier. The handprinted dinner menu was proudly displayed on an easel. All my best serving dishes and Rosenthal china were strategically placed on a beautiful gold-threaded tablecloth. I believed even Martha Stewart would have approved.

This was the first holiday of my marriage and the first event for his family that I would be hosting in our home. Everything had to be perfect. My lofty and probably unattainable goal was to receive the approval of my extremely critical mother-in-law. She was a proper Southern lady, interested primarily in how things looked. As I put the finishing touches on the table scape, I turned to my curious cat, Miss P., who sat on one of the dining room chairs. She stared at my handiwork, carrying out her duties as feline snoopervisor. As she sat primly, with her silver-and-white tail wrapped around her feet and bright blue eyes blinking at me, I discussed my expectations for her.

"Okay, all I need for you to do is to stay out of trouble. Not everyone coming is a cat lover. Please don't jump on things. Stay off the fireplace mantel. And, for heaven's sake, don't jump into the fridge or freezer when someone opens the door."

She stared at me for a moment. I could almost see her brows knitting together, pushing the "Tabby M" a bit lower on her face. She then slow-blinked twice, stood up, and gracefully jumped down from the chair, tail high and waving as she left the room.

When you receive a slow blink from a relaxed, happy cat, it's a sure sign of affection. I was praying that this slow blink was also her way of saying, "I love you, and because I love you I agree to behave."

My optimism restored, I returned to the Thanksgiving chores at hand. I could hear the sound of the football game coming from the TV in the living room. No help would be forthcoming from my husband, but that wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

The thirty-pound turkey was ready for its place of honor on the antique platter. I checked my watch. The guests would be arriving soon, and I needed to finish the side dishes and arrange the food on the table. We didn't have enough space to seat everyone, so we would be eating buffet-style. I added cream and butter to the homemade mashed potatoes, and then I put sea salt, olive oil and pepper on the Brussels sprouts and slid the baking sheet under the broiler.

Getting the food on the table in time and making everything look elegant would be a delicate balance. I didn't see Miss P. anywhere and sighed in relief. Some of the tension left my body as I concluded the final preparations. I removed the vegetables from the broiler and reset the temperature for warming the other dishes.

I wrestled the turkey onto the serving platter, sliced some of the white and dark meat, and then carried it into the dining room, placing it in its prominent spot on the table.

I returned to the kitchen. While I was pouring the fresh cranberries from the pan into a bowl, my ears picked up the sound of slurping and smacking. Dread washed over me as I ran into the dining room. The sight that greeted me almost made my heart stop.

Miss P. reclined across the table, stretched to her full length, with a piece of the sliced turkey between her paws. She gnawed on the meat, leaving stains on the glittering table cover. In

order to create a more comfortable attack on the bird, she'd "removed" a few things. A beautiful, antique bowl (given to me by my mother-in-law) lay in pieces on the floor with some other serving dishes. I saw all my dreams to be the acceptable daughter-in-law disappear as fast as those turkey slices.

The cat was so engrossed in her meal that she hadn't heard me walk in the room. Before I could grab her and begin to repair the damage she'd done, the loud "ding dong" of the doorbell startled both of us.

Miss P. believed that doorbells were invented for the sole purpose of torturing cats. She sprang up and started to jump off the table in terror but was stopped when she caught her claw in the tablecloth. I grabbed her around the middle, attempting to extricate her claw from the fabric. I shoved my hip against the edge of the table to stop the entire set-up from being pulled down onto the floor and deal with the now-squirming, howling feline. My husband walked into the room. While I grappled with Miss P., I yelled, "Stall and keep everyone in the living room!" He assessed the situation quickly, nodded and headed toward the door.

Fortunately, I was able to detach the claw from the fabric, and as soon as she was released, Miss P. made a beeline for the back of the house.

While my husband greeted his family, pouring wine and initiating small talk, I removed the tooth-marked turkey slices to the garbage, sliced more meat and rearranged everything on the platter. I reset the dishes on the table, strategically placing a bowl to cover the turkey stain, swept up the glass shards of the antique bowl, and quickly rolled the sticky pet-hair remover across the tablecloth.

I breathed deeply as I took one last look at the table. Deciding all was in place, I smoothed my hair, checked for any stains on my clothing, and went into the living room to greet the guests and calm my nerves with a glass of wine.

Dinner was a success. The family appreciated the homemade dishes and loved the turkey that now showed no signs of being previously mangled. My mother-in-law congratulated me on the beauty of the table. I relaxed in the knowledge that the table fiasco had gone unnoticed.

As we were enjoying our coffee and pumpkin pie, Miss P. sauntered into the living room to see what was going on.

"Oh, what a beautiful cat! She's so sweet!" The more compliments she heard, the more Miss P. played to her audience. Granted, she was beautiful. The blue-eyed "Applehead" (part tabby, part Siamese) with her silver-and-white coloring was gorgeous. When on her best behavior, Miss P.'s presence elicited much admiration. I decided not to mention how she'd earned the name "The Slasher" at our veterinary clinic.

I watched her as she moved from person to person receiving the petting and chin scratching she felt was her due. She saved me for last, purring and wrapping herself through my legs. When she jumped up onto my lap, my anger dissipated, and my sense of humor returned.

Over the years, whenever my mother-in-law found my attempts to be an acceptable daughter-in-law lacking and my social skills wanting, I would close my eyes, remember the near disaster on that Thanksgiving, and think, *Oh, if you only knew!*

—Anita Aurit—