

PLAYTIME

by

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Published by SynergEbooks
<http://www.synergebooks.com>

THEY WERE PLAYING, a boy and his cat, both of them aware that this was just a preliminary of what was yet to come.

The cat was frantically trying to capture and dismantle a yellow ball of yarn that the boy, about thirteen years of age next month, kept pulling away when the cat got too close to it. It was frustrating the cat and the boy was enjoying it. Relishing it. The living room of the beautifully decorated, three-level house was filled with the boy's laughing and cat's meowing.

The cat was a rather attractive animal. It was a dark black, as black as night, on top and its underside was white with white streaks running down the length of its legs to its paws. Probably it's most striking feature were the creature's eyes, a light green that did not seem to quite belong in the eyes of such a simple animal, almost totally out of place. The eyes spoke of intelligence, of something else than just a simple house cat.

The boy finally let the ball of yarn go and the cat immediately pounced on it, attacking it and clawing it to pieces with what seemed like a savage fury. The boy started to stroke the cat's soft back, running his fingers through its fur, and he could feel the vibration of its body as it gently purred, like a car idling before takeoff. It stopped its destruction of the tattered ball of yarn and looked up at the boy that it knew so well, the young human with the blonde hair and blue eyes who fed him every day, who gave him the attention that he craved and he in turn. They looked at each other, regarded each other, and the boy slowly smiled revealing perfect, white teeth. A few seconds later, the cat seemed to smile too as its tail began to swish back and forth like a cobra mesmerizing its prey. Both of them knew it was almost time and they were both ready.

She was standing in front of the mirror hurriedly getting ready. Lipstick there, mascara here, eye-liner there, powder all over. God, it was such a time-consuming pain in the ass. As the years went by, it seemed it was harder and taking longer to keep up her appearance. She had a one o'clock hair appointment at the rather pricey beauty salon that she frequented and she did not want to be late.

Her name was Ramona. She was an attractive woman and she knew it. She was no longer a twenty-two year-old dancer with all sorts of men fawning over her like the dogs they were, but she was still attractive. She knew it because she was able to catch every pair of male eyes boring into her, especially her rather sizeable, man-made, store-bought chest, everywhere she went. She had been getting everything and anything she wanted for most of her adult life, so much unlike her hard youth, and she would never settle for anything but the best. Clothes, houses, cars, restaurants, all of it – The Best, nothing less. She had a date later tonight and she wanted to impress the man, that man being several years her junior. As she applied a new shade of lipstick that she had purchased yesterday at one of the finer stores in the mall, she was debating on sleeping with him or not. It would depend on how the evening went. If she did, it would not be the first time she slept with someone on the second date. She was pretty sure that she already had him hooked, the look of appreciation in his eyes whenever he marveled at her miraculous body quite evident. If she did sleep with him, she might allow herself to get pregnant. A couple of years ago, she had been keeping several condoms in her purse with small holes punctured into them in case the need ever arose. It would a shame to ruin her

figure (she went to aerobics class every day and did free weights three times a week), but she had to face facts, the money was running out and she was not getting any younger. When her rather comfortable (RICH!) husband had died in a car wreck five years ago, he had left everything to her and their son. But, due to her rather expensive wants and desires (which were quite large, but don't tell her that to her face or she'll scratch your eyes out), it was starting to run out. The house and the cars were all paid for, but there were still other things that needed to be taken care of. Clothes, traveling, jewelry, eating out almost every week, etc. If it wasn't for Tad, she could probably last for another six or seven years. Clothes, food school, it was all so expensive. Why did she ever allow it? Because of him and his desire to have a son, damn him to hell. That male ego thing of having to have a baby, a son, preferably, so the family name could live on. If it wasn't for Tad she could...she waved her hand and dismissed the thought from her mind, ashamed of herself for even thinking such thoughts. Still, they did pop up every now and then. Quite often, as a matter of fact. Every day to be totally honest about it. If she did not come into marriage soon, she may have to start looking for a job and the very thought of it disgusted her. She had not had a job since she was eighteen years-old (not counting her several years of experience with the pole) and she had not missed it. The very thought of having to work instead of spending her days and nights shopping and clubbing around the city with her friends and traveling sickened her. It even made a chill run through her, the very thought of it revolting.

"Hello, my name is Ramona. May I help you?"

I don't think so.

"Hello, my name is Ramona, how may I be of service to you today?"

Not going to happen.

"Good afternoon! My name is Ramona, how may I help you today?"

Definitely not happening.

Yes, she would definitely have to sleep with him. Not to mention that fact that she still had to ease into the conversation that she had a son who was just entering his teenage years to the man of the moment and hope he did not leave skid marks when she told him. But first, she would have to check his bank accounts and make sure that everything was in order. He had never been married before so there was no alimony or child support to work out and he did not seem the gambling type, those were both pluses. No sense wasting her time if he couldn't supply her with her needs and wants like she deserved.

She finished up and checked herself in the mirror. Make-up in place (extra coats covering lines that nobody needed to know about), blonde hair teased to the top and falling down around her shoulders, eye-liner flattering her deep-blue eyes and a nice, black dress showing off her figure in all the right places.

She pulled out her checkbook from her genuine leather Prada bag and looked at the balance.

A frown came across her face.

Yes, she would definitely have to sleep with him and scream like God Himself was causing her to orgasm. At this point, she wasn't ready to go to the extreme and ruin her figure with the prospect of becoming pregnant again. It had been hard enough to lose the weight the first time. But, if push came to shove...

With one last look in the mirror, Ramona walked elegantly downstairs to the front door lost in thought. She was about to walk out the door when her head popped up as if she were in a cartoon and she had just remembered something.

Her son.

Sometimes he just slipped her mind completely. Wasn't this report card week? Maybe it was next week. Wasn't there something about a school project that needed to be worked on? Oh, who cares? She detoured into the living room and saw her son (it still seemed odd to be saying that, even after all these years) and the cat sitting on the couch, playing. What was it with that cat, she thought. Boys were supposed to like dogs. Cats were for girls. She almost thought that he might have been gay, but she found some Playboys under his bed last month when she had been in his room scrounging for hidden money...and there had been none to be found, much to her annoyance. She idly wondered how much she could get for the cat. All it did was suck up food and lie around and do nothing. It was a waste of money.

It did not cross her mind, or, if it did she did not care, that she was very much similar to her feline counterpart. Ramona walked over to the couch and announced her plans for the day.

"Tad, I'm going to the mall to get my hair done and then do some shopping. Did you need anything?"

She tensed as she asked the question. Why did I do that? Because it was the right thing to do? No, nothing as unimportant as that. It had just slipped out. She had a lot on her mind and was not thinking clearly. She did not resent her son as much as she used to. After he was born, it seemed like it took forever to get rid of the excess weight and reclaim her hard, toned body. Because she did not want sagging, deflated mother-breasts, she had breast fed a little as possible and relied on regular milk. Sometimes, if she could spare the time, she would even warm it for him. Sometimes.

She unknowingly held her breath as she watched her son think. What was going through that little mind? Cds? Books? Toys? Porno magazines? Who knows? Who cares? She hated spending money, unless it was on herself.

"Naw, I can't think of anything, Mom. You can pick me up a candy bar if you want."

She started breathing again. "All right, sweetheart," she said as she lightly kissed his cheek, being careful not to smear her lipstick. "I'll be back in two hours." She would say when she got back that she forgot to pick up the candy bar and that she would remember to do it next time.

They walked up the stairs that led to the front door together. The bottom level of the house was in the ground so that when you entered it, you would be on the second level. Ramona kissed her son again, this time on the forehead, and walked out the door.

When she was sitting in her silver Mercedes, she looked in the mirror and checked her hair and did some last minute make-up additions. When she was done, she stared at herself in the mirror and started to cry. Why had life been so cruel to her? She was a good person, she thought. All she wanted was to live like a decent person. Life was so difficult for a hard-working woman. She dabbed at the tears with a tissue until she looked like her regular, attractive self and then started the car and drove away.

He was standing at the window. When the car had vanished down the street, Tad turned around to face the cat. The cat faced him and rose to his feet, accepting the challenge.

It was time.

Tad let loose with an ear-splitting battle cry and hurled himself from the top of the stairs onto the couch where the cat was standing. He was literally airborne as he flew through the air

The cat was hiding again. Tad heard movement coming from somewhere in the huge room but could not tell from where. He shook his head to clear away some of his disorientation and concentrated. The noise sounded like something big was moving, very big. He turned around and looked up, his eyes popping open, his mouth forming an “O.”

The giant bookcase, at least seven feet tall and made of solid oak, was crashing down towards him. For a split second, he had a comical thought about him being Jack and about to be stepped on by the Giant and squashed like a bug. From his perspective, the bookcase looked like the Monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Tad darted out of the way just in time as it came lurching down with a thunderous impact on the wide screen television, completely obliterating it. Books, wood and electronic components flew everywhere. He looked wide eyed with shock at the destruction. At what had happened. At what could have happened to him.

“You son of a bitch! You bastard!” he yelled so furiously that his voice almost gave out. He realized how the cat had managed to push the giant bookcase down. It had leaped on top of it and had then used its legs to push it (those tiny legs?), and when it had started to move and it had enough room to squeeze in, the cat maneuvered behind it and used its own body weight and leverage to push it until it had come crashing down. Crashing down towards Tad.

“All right! That’s it! No more Mr. Nice Guy!” Tad yelled as he ran to the gun case and yanked open the glass doors. He pulled out a shotgun and loaded it, an insane grin on his sweaty, mangled face. He turned around and saw the cat just sitting on the floor beside the couch, its tail swishing back and forth, calm as could be.

“Get ready, asshole! Kiss it good-bye!” He cocked the gun, shouldered it and aimed it and the cat and fired.

BLAM!

The end of the couch was instantly blown to shreds and pieces of cloth and stuffing flew around the room. Tad put his left arm in front of his face to protect his eyes. When everything settled and the smoke had cleared, his jaw dropped and he almost screamed. The cat was still sitting there as if nothing had happened. It began to meow, but it sounded very much like laughter. Condescending laughter. The laughter said, “Is that the best you can do?”

“Auuuuuuuuuuuggggggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Tad began firing all around the living room trying to hit it, reloading with a speed that was almost a blur of motion. He missed the cat every time but succeeded in destroying the living room and everything in it, everything except the bookcase and the widescreen television, those had already been taken care of.

He lowered the smoking gun and looked around the room, what was left of it, with a sad and desperate look on his red face. The cat laughed. There was no mistaking it. Tad loaded up the gun again and sprinted after it. He fired at it as it streaked up the stairs, missing it completely but destroying the bottom part of the stairwell. He ignored it and ran up after the cat, a tight grip on the gun. He was near the top of the stairs when he saw it. The ladder leading to the attic had been taken down. The opening in the ceiling was waiting. Waiting for him.

“You little shit,” he muttered.

He knew that it was a trap but he had to answer it. And he did. Slowly, he climbed the steps, ears alert for any little movement. When he reached the top of the ladder, he let his eyes adjust to the darkness, but it was like looking into a can of black paint. Tad crouched down and started walking along one of the main beams, looking for the cat, hunting. When he reached the wall of the house, he wiped his drenched face with his shirtsleeves. It was boiling all

around him, no air at all. That's when he heard it, the sound of the ladder being folded up and the door slamming shut.

"You dirty rat!"

Tad tried to walk quickly back to where the door was but it was near impossible to see through the darkness, all he could do was walk along the beam and try to feel his way. He thought he was almost to the door when he lost his footing and slipped off the main support beam. He came crashing down through the ceiling with a yell and landed hard on his back in his room, his face instantly turning into a grimace of unbearable pain.

"Jesus! I think I broke my tail bone," he cried. "You bastard! You Goddamn bastard! I'll get you for this!" he screamed.

He looked up through teary eyes at his favorite poster. It was of a smiling Britney Spears and she was standing in a provocative pose and wearing hardly anything.

"Stop laughing at me, you slut!" Tad yelled at the Princess of Pop.

He heard a meow and he looked over and saw the cat sitting on top of his stereo system looking down at him pathetically and nodding its head back and forth. It seemed as though it were saying, "Tsk, tsk, tsk."

"Auuuuuuuuuuuuuggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Tad looked around him and grabbed his baseball bat. He got up and brought it down at the cat, missing it at the last instant before it jumped away but succeeding in destroying the eight hundred dollar stereo system that he had received for his last birthday. He looked at it with an "Oh crap," expression on his face, and then he began to whimper.

By now, Tad was obviously very upset and he let loose with a cry of anger and anguish and then started jumping up and down in a tantrum, his feet thumping on the floor. He picked up the shotgun that had journeyed down with him and ran downstairs, ignoring the pain in his ass and in pursuit of one that walked on four legs. He looked around the near destroyed house hunting for his enemy. He eventually found him in the kitchen lapping water out of its bowl. Tad cocked the gun and aimed it at the cat. The cat looked up at him and then sat on its haunches with its paws folded over its chest, as if it were saying, "All right, what do you want now? Haven't you had enough, yet?"

Tad was about to show him.

He smiled as he fired his weapon in triumph.

Click.

Enraged and yelling and cursing, Tad threw the gun at the cat and missed. However, he did succeed in putting a giant dent in the dishwasher. He picked up a steak knife from the knife holder on the counter and advanced on the cat. It darted between his legs as though he were not even there and Tad almost tripped turning around. He ran after it to the living room and saw it about to run behind a chair. He picked up a wooden book end from the floor and hurled it at the cat. It sailed through the air and came down hard on the cat's back, the impact of it sending the cat rolling across the room. The cat struggled to move and meowed in pain. It appeared to be somewhat paralyzed and helpless to move. Tad stood there, enjoying and savoring the moment, a big smile on his battle-scarred face. He had won and it was time to finish the game. He raised the knife above his head with both hands gripped on the handle and ran towards the cat. The cat looked at the boy with horror and struggled to move as he came running after him. The boy leaped at the cat and in the cat's eyes the boy was going in slow motion, flying through the air, coming for him like the Angel of Death. As the boy came down, the knife slammed down into the cat, just under the rib cage and it made an inhuman cry of pain, a cry of

pain that had absolutely no business coming from the mouth of a cat as it sounded like nothing that such a small animal would make. Tad came down so hard that the breath was knocked out of him but he did not care. He had done it. He had done it and he was glad. Oh, so very glad. His heart sang with joy at the pain the cat must be feeling at this moment. He pulled the long, red steak knife out slowly from the cat's body and was about to bring it down again into its chest when he threw it to the side instead. The cat looked up at him in astonishment.

"No," Tad said looking down at his opponent. "No, I'm going to do this right. I won this time and I'm going to make you suffer."

The severely injured cat looked on as the boy pulled some kite string from his jeans pocket and kneeled down and wrapped the string several times around its neck. This was better, Tad thought. It was more personal. He moved around until he was right up against the cat's face and then began to tighten the string with his hands, watching the cat's face bulge and swell up.

"Yes!" he yelled into the cat's face over and over again. "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

The cat began to gurgle and twitch when they each heard a noise and looked through the window. Ramona had steered into the driveway and was walking towards the door. Tad and the cat looked at each other and they both knew what it meant. Tad unwrapped the string from the cat's neck and discarded it and they crawled around on the floor until they were on their stomachs facing each other. They put their hands and paws on each other's temples, each staring intently into the other's eyes. A moment later, there was a blinding white flash that filled the entire house.

Ramona walked in and saw the two playmates lying on the floor enjoying themselves. Everything in the house was back to normal as though nothing had happened. There was not a sign that the house had been a battleground and was almost totally destroyed a few moments ago.

"Well, you two seem to be having fun," she said sarcastically.

"Sure, Mom. We always do," Tad said.

"Well, that's good," in a couldn't-care-less tone of voice. "I have a date tonight. Do you think that you two can behave yourselves while I'm gone?"

"Sure, Mom. We always behave ourselves."

The boy and the cat looked at each other, smiling.