

You know it's bad when you can't tell if that's a cat or a baby crying out there in the street. "No, seriously!" she sqawked. "Sometimes cats will intentionally imitate babies to attract people to them! They're tricky like that."

He found that hard to believe, because, "What would the human do when they rushed to the sound – the alley or trash pile or whatever – and found a cat? Did the cat want some sort of reward for pulling off a pitch-perfect mimicry of a human baby? WHAT ARE THE CAT'S EXPECTATIONS?"

"Well, milk, probably. That's what I'd want if I were a cat." She was still putting on her makeup and wasn't even looking his way.

"Wow, if that's actually a baby out there, we're spending wayyy too much time discussing a hypothetical cat's motivations for impersonating a human infant." He sort of snorted .

"You brought it up! And we still need to get wine, don't forget. Can you reach in my bag and hand me the small green thingie?"

"I didn't bring it up! YOU were the one who started talking about this incredibly insidious cat power to mimic an infant's cry so perfectly that it induces human mothers to give them milk. We wouldn't be arguing if it weren't for your bizarre knowledge of cat psychology. And if that's a real baby out there, one of us should have checked it out. Now we just look like assholes."

"*Who's* gonna think we're assholes?"

Eric had been drinking pretty steadily over the past two or three hours, at dinner and while Lauren got ready. A drop of whisky splashed on her purse as he rummaged through it. Play it cool. Couldn't help but notice her phone buzzing. Can't think about that, can't think about

anything else. “You’re blowing up,” he mumbled, handing her the phone, looking away. She grabbed it casually, never averting her eyes from the mirror. They needed to leave within the next ten minutes for sure.

And this was all knotted up in one big ... ah, what was it? Now he was having trouble remembering words that normally would have flown off his tongue. Gordian knot. Definitely a Gordian situation here. For months she’d been hammering away, trying to get him to adopt a cat. When her sister got one, a kitten, they’d held it in their palms as it batted around, helpless, requiring their full attention. The look in her eyes when she looked at that cat didn’t have a filter on it. It was more than she ever gave him.

There was a bit of jealousy there, sure.

“You could definitely get one, you know. You have the space here, it would be totally fine.”

She was in his head! What a talent she had, to penetrate his thoughts at the moment they’d reached their exploding point, the moment he was most inclined to lose his temper. The cat – or baby – combined with the booze, combined with the phone – who was that, anyway? – combined with his rambling thoughts, and the Gordian knot, and now this, this innocuous statement that, in his head, had become so laden with meaning, portents of some deeper revelation, all of them combined to create a combustible situation that reached the verge of exploding –

– then stopped. He could regain control of any situation if the tone of his voice remained even.

“Come on, you know I’d feel bad about leaving it here all day. And you wouldn’t even get to see it that often.”

“Oh yeah? Am I not going to be coming here very much?”

Eric's aunt used to have two cats, named Jeffrey and Simon, both rescued when they were kittens. They were decent, and warmed up to him, making an obvious lie of his repeated claims that he wasn't a cat person, he liked dogs. The truth was that there were few things more satisfying than having a previously hostile animal dig the side of its body into your leg, looking up expectantly as you reach down to begin stroking. He loved feeling the purrs through his hand.

That contrasted with, often at the same moment, his aunt hovering over them to show week old scratches across her arms and stomach, from when she had to take Jeffrey to the vet the week before. These animals, which lived a life of total hedonistic repose, so despised pain that they would fight their caregiver – probably to the death, if they could – to avoid the pain of what was merely (for a human) a visit to the doctor, no more or less painful than any other mundanely unpleasant errand.

There was still that cat outside screaming.

“That's not what I meant, you know that's not what I meant. Look, are you ready? Shouldn't we go soon?”

Yes, she was ready. “Yeah, let's go.”

As soon as the subway doors closed, Eric knew he had to pee. Horrific timing. He stared at her looking at her phone, punching away, corner of the mouth turned up, she sitting while he hovered, grabbing the bar and shifting his weight frantically. He blinked against the fluorescent light. “Do you know if there's a liquor store near this place?” she interrupted him.

Wasn't this *her* friend's party? Hadn't he spent an entire day sending body signals and passive-aggressive notes her way to indicate his displeasure at sacrificing his time, his weekend time, his

free time to a cause he neither supported nor enjoyed? Now, as though he knew the area, as though he were running the show, as though his knowledge and decision-making and inherent masculinity were valuable to her, she asked him for his expertise. Right. Like she even cared.

How to convey the fiery ball of confused, drunken anger in his head? How to cut straight through her inconsiderate blathering, which had been going on all day or all week or the entire time? She was still looking at her phone. She didn't even expect an answer, so how to give her one that would jar her out of her laser focus on whatever she was expecting at this party? Something that could be defended readily as an offhand comment, but one that let her know *he* had nothing to do with this shit. He was just a passenger who had to pee. Bad.

"I don't know the neighborhood. I've never been there."

Got it. Throw that back. Come on. Throw it right back. Christ, the highway from his bladder to the tip of his urethra was jam-packed with bumper-to-bumper traffic, real 18-wheeler stuff.

Looking out the window will help, if he just focused on the skyline. Think about buildings and how you know nothing at all about how they're constructed or the city's history and the thousands of smart, ambitious men who were consumed with a passion for urban development.

"What is your *problem*?"

Yes. Ok, get incredulous. What is she *talking* about? It's *true*. He doesn't know if there's a liquor store near this place because he's pretty sure he's never been to the neighborhood. Yes,

seriously! There are plenty of places he's never been in this city. It's huge. What is *her* problem?

Why was she getting angry at him for saying something that's objectively true? Well, she didn't ask him to look one up, she asked him if he knew of one off the top of his head, and he didn't.

And doesn't.

Meanwhile, the car they were on must have been collapsing directly onto Eric's bladder, compressing it and sending razor whips of pain up into his solar plexus and throughout his entire genital region.

This would not end well.

Fortunately, Lauren was so disinterested in him after his indignant, supremely satisfying reaction that she didn't care enough to fight. He would have been completely unable to defend himself. Now he had to apply the white-hot sum of all his energy to the task of keeping his urine inside him, even though it had other ideas. Think about anything else.

Think about the cities you'll never build. Think about why Lauren doesn't understand you and never will. Think about how few people understand you and never will. Think about the fact that all of your friends disagree with you and don't understand you. Think about cats and why they cry like babies.

There. Why would a cat cry like a baby? Can you determine the motivation of an animal besides the obvious food and water and survival? Are those really that different from human motivations? Of course they are, cats are animals. But then, can you really know an animal? Fucking cats cats crying cats piss cat piss crying.

Eric's legs had begun spontaneously jerking up and down, controlled by an evil, evil puppeteer in his bladder. Lauren, unmoved, asked, "Do you have to pee?"

"Yes! Really, really bad!" he laughed, and suddenly he wasn't angry, only found it completely absurd and hilarious that a body function gone awry could wipe out his rage, could bring him to uncertain epiphanies. Yes, he had to pee badly, and all the urine in his body would wash away

the unjustified resentment, the nitpicking, the focused – yet subtle – berating in response to a perceived slight. All Eric cared about now was releasing this poison from his body.

A lifetime passed in silence. Finally, the stop. “Where’s the place?” Eric was frantic now, ready to sprint in any direction; his sphincter had essentially given up, leaving dyke-plugging duties to whatever miniscule muscle is at the end of the urethra. As expected, it was taking millisecond-long breaks, leaving him on the brink of disaster as they passed stoop after stoop. “Call her now. Call her now.”

“I’m not sure exactly which one it is... hang on, I’ll call.”

She didn’t know exactly which one it was. How goddamn inconsiderate. Eric drilled imaginary holes in the back of her head as she repeated the address out loud, noted they were a few doors down while she quickened her pace. Someone would open the door soon, very soon. We’re almost there, he thought she was saying, but every one of his senses was dedicated to the battle at hand. He barely saw the steps they walked up, and couldn’t remember the address, but he did feel the first warm drops plunk onto his left shoe, followed by a gentle flood that left an entire pants leg soaked but unharmed, sticking to his leg in squishy relief while cats screamed in Eric’s head, and he burst through the door to search for the bathroom, sprinting past the dude who answered the door and hugged Lauren.