What Lurks in the Kitchen Cabinet

By Janna Eerkens

Angelica's landlord had sent her a message the day prior—simple, to the point: *I'll be doing an inspection on the 24th of April at 2 p.m.* Angelica had panicked just the smallest, tiniest amount, which was to say, she had completely freaked out. See, Angelica had been a perfectionist and a goody-two-shoes her entire life. She had never gotten detention in high school, had a 4.0 GPA all throughout college and had thus far never been fired from a job. Her intention had *never* been to break the rules of her apartment building. It had just sort of happened.

A week ago, Angelica had been driving home after her work at the office. Driving down a residential street, her foot slammed on the brakes when a small black shadow darted out in front of her car and promptly sat down in the middle of the road. She had just barely remembered to turn on the hazard lights and put her car into park as she stepped out. Immediately, she was greeted by the tiniest meows she had ever heard. The little black cat stared at her as she approached it.

"Hi, sweetie," Angelica said, her voice pitching up. "Where do you live, hmm?"

"Meow," said the cat. It wandered closer to Angelica's outstretched hand. After sniffing her for a long time, it headbutted her. Angelica petted the poor thing that seemed more bone than flesh as she ran a hand down its small spine.

"Do you have a home?" Angelica asked softly. The cat purred in response. After a long debate with herself, Angelica picked the little thing up, bringing it with her back to her car. She carefully moved the car off the road and waited for another few hours to make sure no one was looking for the cat. Predictably, no one came.

What was Angelica supposed to do? *Not* take the poor cat in when the vet told her the cat was likely the runt of the litter and that he wasn't microchipped? Of course not. Angelica took the cat in. She bought him a litter box, a food dish, the brand of food the vet recommended (extra because the cat clearly needed it), and named him Herbert.

Really, the only problem with her plan was that pets were strictly forbidden in her apartment building; and despite having had Herbert for only a week, Angelica didn't think she could give him up. He was *her* cat; he had clearly chosen her. If her landlord didn't like that, he could deal with it.

Okay. On second thought, maybe not. Her landlord did control the place where she lived, after all.

No. Angelica would have to hide Herbert during the inspection. Working all night, Angelica barely slept. She vacuumed up Herbert's hair, briefly wishing the little guy had opposable thumbs so he could help rather than sit under the table and hiss at the vacuum cleaner. She hid his food in the pantry behind her own groceries. His scratching post was

dragged out of the apartment to Angelica's car in the dead of night—Angelica felt a little like a serial killer. His litter box would have to stay until the next morning right before the inspection. The only thing left was to make a spot out of the way for Herbert to hide. One of the cabinets by the floor made the perfect spot.

Angelica's chest tightened as she shut Herbert in the cabinet the next day at one in the afternoon. He would be okay, but Angelica would have rather he be allowed to roam the apartment freely.

The landlord knocked on the door the second the clock hit two. If Angelica had to give him one thing, it was that he was very prompt. She answered the door with a tight smile, welcoming him in.

"I'll start with the living room," the landlord said, straight to the point. He stepped into Angelica's clean and cozy apartment, invading the space.

Angelica waited nervously as he checked over the walls, painted an ugly gray she wasn't allowed to change or damage.

The landlord's mustache twitched in displeasure as he checked behind her posters at the Command Strips hanging them up. They hadn't damaged the walls, though, so he couldn't say anything about them. The landlord checked behind each piece of Angelica's carefully chosen furniture, bright pops of color against the dull room. When he found nothing amiss, the landlord moved on from the living room to the hallway and bedroom.

As he was inspecting the bedroom, Herbert decided that the inspection was far too peaceful and decided to yowl at the top of his lungs. Angelica's heart stopped so abruptly she was genuinely worried she might need an ER visit.

The landlord turned slowly to Angelica, one bushy eyebrow raising. "What was that?"

Angelica laughed, her voice high like a chipmunk's. "Oh, I must have left my phone's ringer on. My… um… my boyfriend likes to change my ringer to his cat's meows." Angelica did not have a boyfriend.

"Right." The landlord did not sound convinced, not one bit.

Angelica's heart, having picked back up, could give a metronome going at six hundred beats per minute a run for its money.

Herbert yowled again. "Um. I should. Go check that," Angelica stuttered out. "I'll be right back." Before the landlord could respond, she ran to the kitchen, pulling her phone from her pocket to make her excuse believable. She opened the cabinet, poking her head inside to where Herbert was sitting on the towel she had laid out for him. Herbert took one look at her and put his head down on his paw, falling asleep.

"You bastard," Angelica whispered to him.

"Who are you talking to?" the landlord asked, having somehow teleported behind Angelica.

“My phone!” Angelica shouted, lifting her phone, behind her to show the landlord, shutting the cabinet before he could peer inside. “I, uh, sometimes I leave it in the cabinet.” Angelica laughed again, sounding fake. “You know how it is.”

“I don’t.” The landlord squinted his eyes at her as if that would reveal to him what on earth she was thinking. He shook his head and continued the inspection. Angelica hoped and prayed that he wouldn’t look in the cabinets—he didn’t. Done with the kitchen, his inspection was done.

“You passed,” the landlord said, sounding disappointed that she had. “Be careful moving furniture and hanging stuff, though, I noticed some small scratches that will have to be fixed before the next tenant.”

“I will!” Angelica said, already planning out a day to train Herbert to solely use the scratching post that was stashed in her car’s trunk.

Herbert chose that moment to yowl again. The landlord stared at her. “Uh, I’ll check that in a minute.”

“Kids these days,” the landlord said under his breath. Angelica would have been offended—she was thirty after all—but he hadn’t found Herbert. Once he was out the door, she could breathe again. She and Herbert were safe for another four months.