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My old roommates at the St. Urbain Street apartment only managed to keep it for eight months. At least a dozen people lived there during that period, including this one junkie kid, Jake—“Jake the Junkie,” they called him—who was always borrowing money and eating their food. At the time, we were worried he was turning one of our roommates, Julian, onto junk as well. Julian was a young and impressionable punk kid whose dream, he once told me, was to marry a woman with fake tits.

He used to speak all cool-like about his teenage junkie friends, though at first he was alarmed at how skinny and pale they all were. I don't know for sure that he started using, but if he did, I hope he stopped after Viv, the one who used to bring us free donuts, found his friend Pascal all blue and dead in his apartment.

Even before Peter had a fistfight with him, the landlord hated us. He threatened to call the cops once, when Peter put a large wooden cross out on the balcony.

“Blasphemy, it's blasphemy!” he'd exclaimed.

What's wrong with a cross? I wondered. So what if it was full size?

The eviction worked in our favour because Liora and I needed a new roommate. Patrick was taking off out west, and wasn't sure when he'd be back. Kevin got evicted just

in time to take his place.

Not long after Kevin finished moving in, I went with him to take a last look at the St. Urbain pad. I salvaged more of my forgotten stuff, and then some. The apartment wasn't in such bad shape compared to how we'd left the Mont-Royal loft, at least. But just to piss off the landlord, Kevin had emptied his ferrets' litter boxes all over the place, so the whole apartment reeked pretty badly. In his room, he'd drawn a demon on the wall with a marker. A big fart cloud came out of him labelled "Landlord Breath." The landlord would enjoy scrubbing that off the wall, I thought.

We packed what we wanted to take before stepping out onto the balcony to watch the St. Urbain Street traffic one last time. My eye was drawn to the Disco Church, this crazily decorated Portuguese church with used-car-lot-style decorations hanging over its parking lot. A weather-vane rooster was perched on the roof, reaching higher up than the cross.

While we stood out there, Kevin noticed a yogurt container in the corner behind the balcony door. He knocked it open with his foot, and immediately an indescribable stench rose up.

"Ugh! Omigod!"

I'd caught a glance at its contents before turning away from the smell, and thought it was filled with old fish heads or something. We ran in, with Kevin yelling, "Omigod, did you see that? Holy shit, man, holy shit!"

"Well, it sure fuckin' stinks, that's for sure. Is it fish heads?" I asked.

"It's a fucking CAT'S HEAD, man, a FUCKING CAT'S HEAD!"

“You’re putting me on, man,” I replied. “No, really, you’re full of shit.”

“Honest, I swear,” he said, raising up his right hand. “I fucking swear there’s a dismembered cat’s head out there!”

“No way, I’m not believing that one,” I said. “Fish heads, I believe. But who the fuck would keep a cat head out there?”

I thought that Kevin, being a magician and a prankster and all, must have had something up his sleeve.

“Come out and see it again, man, I swear, it’s a cat’s head.” I still stood there with my eyebrows arched, still sceptical. “Come on,” he pleaded, “you’ve got to back me up on this one!”

We went back out to take another look, even though the smell was so awful. We inched onto the balcony while holding our noses and peered into the open container. Sure enough, in the slimy black surface that used to be fur, I could make out what were once eyeballs. They looked like big and badly shaped pearls under the yellow liquid they sat in. And, oh shit, did it ever smell! As soon as I was sure it was a cat’s head, I ran back in with Kevin and we whooped and yelled. It was probably the grossest thing I’d ever seen.

Who knew how it got there? The balcony was off Peter’s room, so we were going to ask Peter about it the next time we ran into him, that was for fucking sure. For now, we figured either the wind would blow the container over, landing the cat head on the sidewalk with a splat, or the landlord would find it and curse us to an ever higher heaven. We didn’t think he’d call the cops. Maybe the SPCA though. We wouldn’t have been surprised if he rented out the apartment again without even going out onto

the balcony. He'd told us not to use it when we'd moved in, explaining that he was waiting for it to fall off so he could board the door up. I could just imagine the new tenants going out there and taking in a lungful of that gooey Garfield, then calling the cops on the landlord.

I wished we could call Peter right away to ask him about it, but we didn't have his new number. Kevin wondered whether Pascal, the dead junkie, had anything to do with it because rumour had it that he'd killed a cat. Pascal had been dead quite awhile by then, though. I couldn't believe Kevin couldn't remember hearing about a cat head arriving at the apartment. It's not something I would have easily forgotten myself.

For a while, I couldn't stop mentioning it. Stuck with such a sick image in my mind, the one consolation was to tell everyone about it. Most people changed the subject pretty quickly when I started talking about the cat head, so eventually I stopped.

It was some months later that Peter dropped in after work, and he, Kevin, and I hung out smoking a joint in the living room. We talked for a while before I remembered about the cat's head.

"Hey, Peter," I asked him, "what the *fuck* was with that dead cat's head on the balcony?"

He looked blank for a second, and then said, "Holy fuck, I completely forgot about that." He began to smile, probably at the prospect of the landlord finding it.

"That is the most disgusting thing, man," said Kevin, with much conviction.

"Where the hell did it come from?" I asked.

“Pascal brought it over, man.”

Kevin and I looked at each other. So it *was* Pascal!

“He knew I’d taken pictures of roadkill and stuff like that before, and thought I’d like to have it for my photography. So he brought it by.”

“Did you end up taking pictures of it?” Kevin asked.

“No, I only saw it that one time when he brought it by. I put it out on the balcony and that was it. I totally forgot about it until now.”

“Where in the hell did Pascal get it?” I asked him.

“Oh, I think the cat was sick or something, and they couldn’t afford to go to the SPCA. I think maybe they beat it and knocked it out, and then Pascal cut off its head. I don’t really know the details.”

I wondered how the hell someone could cut off a cat’s head like that. That’s just fucked up.

“Was that just water he put in the container?” I asked him.

“I think it was vinegar or something—vinegar and water.”

“Well, I doubt it was formaldehyde,” I said. “If Pascal had formaldehyde, he probably would’ve shot it up.”

Peter debated going over to get rid of it, as in “kick it off the balcony,” just in case we got hauled to court over the eviction. I told him that if he kicked it onto the sidewalk, he might start a plague. That kitty was severely rotten. Peter never did go back there, though. Kevin and I passed by a few days later and the container was still there, sitting out on the balcony. It probably just kept smelling worse and worse after sitting in the sun with the lid off.



Things definitely got crazier after Kevin moved in with us. On his first night in the apartment, he was playing a show down the street at the Jailhouse Rock Café. The street performer who taught Liora and me how to eat fire was also on the bill. He put on a good show, but got off to a shaky start when he accidentally threw a couple of fireballs at someone in the crowd. (“Oops!”) The flame balls he was using were interesting; they were made of gunpowder wrapped like candy in squares of special paper. He showed them to us when we were smoking a joint backstage before the show, and it took us a while to notice that we were passing the joint right over an open container of gunpowder.

Luckily, the person who got hit with the fireballs wasn’t hurt. The performer managed to win over the audience immediately afterwards by juggling flaming dragon sticks. He juggled them at top speed, and the resulting swirl of flames was very impressive.

After his set, Kevin came out, unusually drunk given that he was performing. He even announced himself as Kevin the Drunk Magician. His first tricks were flopping, but he’d insult the crowd every time they booed. One woman in particular was heckling him pretty badly. Kevin saved his choicest insults just for her, saying, “Now hold on a minute, we all came here expecting a good time had by all—and there she is!”

He managed to get the crowd on his side part of the way through, and ended his set with his trademark trick of making a beer bottle disappear, which went over really well. His continuing pranks backstage went over less well, however. He peed in an empty beer cup and kept handing it to people while saying, “Here, hold my beer for a

minute, okay?” After he handed one guy the cup, Kevin bumped into him, spilling pee everywhere. We had to restrain the guy to keep him from punching Kevin out.

After the show, we all met up at Loonies, the cheap corner bar of choice for panhandling punks. My old friend Helen was there with Rob, her roommate/ex-lover, and we chatted while I helped them empty their pitchers. Rob was somewhat of a role model for me as a teen—he was in charge of the local university radio station that I’d had a show on, and also published a long-running local free monthly, all while fronting one of the city’s longest-lasting punk bands. I told him about making out with Beatrice at a show of his the year before and joked that he probably never realized that his band played such romantic music.

Kevin came by our table and deftly stole Helen’s cigarette pack. (I made him give them back to her later and apologize.) Judging by how ridiculously drunk Kevin was, I assumed he’d made many more beers disappear since finishing his act. He began play-fighting with Peter and knocked over a couple of tables, causing quite a ruckus.

Peter and I decided to go to the loft party Liora had already left for, so we said our goodbyes. Helen thought I should take Kevin home first—he was slurring pretty badly and falling down a lot—but our place was only a block away.

“If he passes out in the street between here and there,” I assured her, “I’ll pick him up later on the way home.”

Peter and I made it to the party just in time to see one of my favourite local performers, Mortel.

Mortel is a huge fellow, just massive, and it’s hard to

describe his act. He performs sensitive, beautiful, and poetic little songs, but bellows them out so demonically that people have been known to bolt from his shows in fright. This time, he had all of his trademark horror-monster makeup on, as well as what we hoped was fake blood dribbling out of his mouth. He ended the show in his usual manner: He took a crappy old stereo system, most likely found in the alley, placed it carefully in front of him on the stage, and proceeded to completely destroy it. He wore huge hockey kneepads and would jump in the air and repeatedly land on the stereo, stopping only when it was smashed nearly flat.

Those of us with the intestinal fortitude to stay until the end of his set cheered wildly when he was done. The next act, a band called Sow of Violence, had a somewhat similar shtick, but this time the lead singer smashed computer screens with a baseball bat while the other band members played industrial music on some samplers.

Although it was perhaps a bit too similar to Mortel's performance, it was fascinating in its own way, and they didn't stop smashing until there was nothing left bigger than a quarter or thicker than a pancake. I told Peter that I often felt like doing exactly that during particularly boring days at work.

"I bet you your co-workers would cheer you on if you did," he said.

"Yeah," I replied, and thought some more. "Maybe it would finally start the revolution!"

By the time we began walking north, all the bars were closed. As I rounded the corner to my apartment, I had to avoid a huge puke puddle on the sidewalk.

Later, I found out that Kevin had come home, puked

all over the bathroom, cleaned it up, and gone to bed. When he had to puke again a short while later, he staggered over to his window and let fly straight onto St. Laurent. The next morning, he told me there'd been people walking by just then, and they'd started running when he began to puke. It was quite the puddle, let me tell you. Coming from two floors up, I guess there was a pretty big splash factor involved. The next day, our landlord was pissed off about the streaks of puke covering the downstairs hardware store's sign. I guess you can say Kevin sure knew how to break in a place.