Transports of Delight

by Entropy House (AnonEhouse)

Summary

Hundreds of years after Sir Francis Drake had his best friend unjustly beheaded, Frank and Thomas meet again.

They've both changed. Frank is 'captain' of his own semi-tractor trailer. And Thomas... well, he's as elegant as ever, and still wearing fur.

Notes

At the time I wrote it, the links went to the appropriate cat sound files. Alas, the net is euphemeral, and they are gone.

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Franz turned to Uship, as he normally did in his rest interval before starting out. He checked to see if anyone wanted a cat moved from point A to point B along his route. He liked cats as supercargo. Mostly they sat in their boxes and sulked while he drove and talked to them. It was company, of a sort, and the extra money was welcome.

Oh, there was one. Take a tomcat, imaginatively named Thomas, from Surrey North Dakota to Peru, Nebraska. As his route went from Regina, Canada to Topeka, Kansas it wouldn't be out of his way. It'd be about twelve hours. A little long for a cat to go without a toilet break— well, if it wasn't a raging maniac like that red-striped monster he'd delivered a month ago, he'd let it out on a leash.
The photo of this cat showed a graceful, seal brown animal with large, round, self-confident eyes. He wasn't sure what breed it was, but it had the sleek, self-assured look of a purebred.

He put in a bid, and won. He was mildly surprised, because two other shippers had offered slightly lower prices. Perhaps the owner felt that you get what you pay for. He was also surprised that Mr. Hatton paid him the full fee ahead of time. Usually people didn't trust you that much with their beloved kitty.

When he pulled up in the lot of the Hatton home, he was totally flabbergasted to find a cat-carrier sitting on the ground in front of the building. He got out. There was a computer printed note on it from Hatton giving him permission to take the cat and apologizing that 'press of business' had called him away.

Franz picked up the carrier and looked inside. Bright eyes gazed back at him, and the cat gave a polite, soft mew. Well, he had his money. He shrugged and took the carrier back to his truck and stowed it on the seat next to him, securely strapped in place, turned to face him. He liked to give his passengers a bit more of a view than the gas pedal. "I hope you're comfortable, kitty."

Franz was back on the main highway before the cat made another noise. "Raaw'. It was weird, not like any cat noise he'd heard before. "What's the matter? You sick?"

The cat said, No, no' Franz thought. He chuckled. "Oh, you just like to talk."

Thomas said, purr
Franz amused himself by talking to the cat as if it were human. Tommy always replied. After about six hours Franz felt it was time for a break. Tommy agreed.

They pulled into the rest stop. Franz took the leash from the top of Tommy's carrier, opened the wire door and clipped it to the gray velvet collar around his neck. Tommy didn't like it at all. He screeched and flattened his ears.

Franz slammed the door shut on him. "Well, stay there, then!" He left the truck, feeling irrationally betrayed. He thought the cat and he were friends. He went to the bathroom, then the café and felt a little calmer after he had a cup of coffee and a couple of burgers. It was only a cat, after all. He carried a few greasy scraps back to the truck.

"Here, maybe this will..." He opened the wire door, and stared in shock. When he'd slammed the door, somehow the leash got hung up on it, and the soft velvet collar twisted in the cat's fur. The body lay limp, a soft brown bundle accusing him of cruelty and carelessness. "Aww. Damn." He took the cat out of the carrier, trying to think what to do. Refund the money? Toss the cat away and pretend he never picked it up? He stroked the soft fur. It was still warm.

Maybe it wasn't quite dead? He got his knife out of his pocket and sliced the collar in two, and then he rubbed the cat's throat. Was it breathing? He couldn't tell. He hesitated and looked around. Hell, his windows were tinted, no one would see. He began breathing into the cat's mouth, short, gentle breaths, the way his CPR instructor had said to do for infants.

Just when he was about to give up, Thomas opened his eyes. He purred.

Franz laughed. "You had me scared." He started to put the cat back in the carrier, but it looked up at him and said Meow? so appealingly that he relented. He gave it the bits of burgers and considered whether it was safe to let it out or not. Finally he shrugged and picked up the cat. "Thomas, I'm going to give you a chance to be good and obey me. If you know what's good for you, you won't
give me any trouble." He took the cat out of the parking lot and over to a scruffily grassed area with a few scrubbly bushes and one trunk-scarred, leaning tree. He put the cat down.

Thomas stepped delicately through the weeds, and discreetly around the side of the tree. Franz heard him attending to business. A minute later, Thomas returned to him and scalloped around his ankles. "Good kitty."

Franz picked up Thomas and went back to the cab. Thomas looked at the carrier and then into Franz's face. Franz sighed. "All right, but you be good, or it's back to the cage." He put the carrier under the seat and deposited Thomas on it.

Thomas washed his face and paws, then curled up into a neat little ball and fell asleep.

By the time they'd reached Peru, Franz had grown quite fond of the cat, and was considering asking Mr. Hatton if he was going to breed him. He might like a kitten, if it was like Thomas. And if it wasn't too expensive.

He stopped and checked the map. This was the address all right, but it was a vacant lot. He got out and looked around. Nothing. What the hell was Hatton playing at? Oh, well... he'd take Tommy home with him and Hatton could damn well arrange for someone else to pick him up.

When he returned to the cab, Tommy was standing with his front feet on the dash. "Hatton dumped you." Tommy gave him one of his surprisingly intelligent looks and carried on a long, cat monologue.

Franz laughed and got back in. Tommy sat in his lap and purred. Franz smiled. "I hope Hatton never comes for you."

Tommy squinted his eyes shut and purred.

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