

# **Fixing The Hole in My Cat**

A Hollywood Memoir

by  
Tracy McArdle

[tracy@tracymcardle.net](mailto:tracy@tracymcardle.net)

© Tracy McArdle.

*Fixing the Hole in My Cat* began as a way of dealing with the aftermath of a devastating breakup, which coincided with the ongoing bizarre health problems of my cat. This essay inspired the novel, *Confessions of a Nervous Shiksa*, which will be published in August 2005 by Simon & Schuster's Downtown Press.

*Confessions of a Nervous Shiksa* is also available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [barnes&noble.com](http://barnes&noble.com)

## Day 1

It started out innocently enough. A sick cat. A simple trip to the vet. A quiet ailment no more threatening than the standard kitty tummy ache. How was I to know the feline fiasco it would become, cruel payback from the relationship pet god?

“Little,” the cat I had rescued two years ago, had stopped eating and drinking. I became alarmed when she stopped moving. At first Riley (my dog) and I thought it was cute and catlike that she slept for eighteen hours straight, but finally we realized that something was really wrong with her. The absence of her petite paws tracking Tidy Cat across the hardwood floor, and the cessation of her tiny tongue lapping from the toilet was disturbing.

Days stretched into weeks and there she lay, in one drool-soaked spot, until finally the guilt of being too cheap to take her to the vet overwhelmed me. That, and the fact that a huge hump had sprouted from her back literally overnight. It was time to take action.

## Day 2

Other things in my life hadn't been going so well. I had just gotten un-engaged (although in retrospect, “disengaged” is probably the more appropriate word). Among other disagreements (religion, money, careers, children, location) was the argument over how much money and aggravation David was willing to spend on his dog Harve's cancer. According to the vet it was severe enough to warrant \$8,000 in treatment thus far but was not visible in the dog (except for the occasional dime sized tumor that he was only too willing to carve out for a few hundred bucks).

In my opinion, the dog had suffered enough and should be free to live out his days naturally. In his opinion, the dog was to ingest as many drugs as possible and be regularly operated on, while we remained unable to purchase a new living room set. Harve looked like a patchwork quilt gone awry and suffered bouts of random and unpredictable aggression as a result of the steroids he was taking. Twice I caught him threatening the refrigerator.

## Day 4

David and Harve moved out with much fanfare, in the middle of the rainiest two weeks in LA's history. With such a value on this dog you'd think it would be insane of David to let Harve roam freely in the yard and street as he was packing his things and moving his life out of mine. You'd think it even more unbelievable that Harve actually got hit by a car as David was wresting his futon from the front door. But David was in a rush to escape me, and that is what happened. And the move was delayed and the dog was hospitalized.

## Day 6

Enter my sister Robin, also freshly un-betrothed, who left San Francisco and moved in with me to start her life over but had no job, no money, no car and no contacts in Los Angeles. At least she could take Little to the vet, even if it was with my car. I had lost a fiancé but perhaps gained a personal assistant. Maybe it wasn't so bad.

As if in response to my general and all encompassing bad karma, three of my car windows were malfunctioning. One I had just repaired for \$500. One was jammed closed with a not-unseen two-by-four wedged into the door panel. One was stuck open, and the fourth had been locked shut for months. The open one was particularly inconvenient when it was raining - which it never does in LA except for the last two weeks, when it had rained ten days out of thirteen.

The rainiest day of all was the day I flew up to San Francisco to meet Robin, pickup the U-Haul truck and move all of her stuff out of the apartment she shared with her ex-fiancee.

They however, were still speaking, still feeling tenderly toward one another and actually guiding each other through the emotional chaos and devastation of the breakup. He paid for the gas, carried all the heavy stuff, and made sure we knew how to drive the truck that was far too large for either of us to be driving, particularly on the Interstate, for five hours. They were actually seeming very compatible and in love during the whole ordeal, down to the dividing of the houseplants, and I was in the awkward and unfortunate position of being jealous of my little sister's breakup.

As we lumber up the ramp to Route 280, we both burst into tears, and have to spend a few careful moments in the aptly named breakdown lane. We almost get into an argument about who is more emotionally unstable. The rain gushed tears for us both.

We arrive in LA and it is not only raining, it is pouring and dark. We decide to wait until the next morning to unload the truck, thinking foolishly that it will be dry and we'll round up some preferably male help. But this is LA, where friends don't let friends guilt them into showing up on moving day. The rain insulted us in sheets, and the animals - Riley, Harve and Little, watched from the window knowing no good could come from this.

### Day 7

Ironically, the day Little first went to the vet was also my first day in therapy. And in a sick comic twist, our appointments were closely scheduled. The plan was for Robin and Little to take me to work (with my car), kill time sitting in traffic until my shrink appointment at 11:30, pick me up at the office, drop me at the shrink and Little at her doctor, and pick me up at the end of my appointment. I'd go back to work and hopefully Little and I would both be fully cured.

Robin had only just arrived and already had an entire day's activity being my wife. She was grateful for the distraction, I knew. I asked her if she minded picking up the dry cleaning and watering the plants. Maybe she'd even have a fresh martini waiting and be wearing suggestive lingerie for me when I got home.

The vet deduced that Little was dehydrated (Duh. She hadn't eaten or drunk anything in weeks) and needed fluids and a blood test.

I didn't fare as well at my appointment. Though cheaper, my office visit resulted in a much vaguer diagnosis. I wept for the entire hour and didn't learn anything new. "You need to ask yourself, *Do I want to be with this person now, knowing who he is (an struggling actor with big dreams and two first names) and what I need (someone with a steady job who'll move to a small town in New England)?*"

"But we love each other," I said, explaining everything. She gently prodded, "The deal is, you have to do some work. What time is good for you next week?"

I emerged a sobbing, angry, hungry mess. It was my lunch hour and it was pouring and she hadn't cured me. I was single for the first time in years, over thirty and I was *in L.A.* And my sister, car and cat were not on the corner they were supposed to be. I began to wonder if there was a map in the car on this, my sister's first day in the city.

Robin, understandably unfamiliar with the wailing protests of a confined cat, thought she was being helpful when she pressed the window button to give the cat some fresh air. Presto, the window that had been stuck shut for months was now jammed open, in exactly the same manner as the front window that I'd just fixed had been, and at a fully complementary angle to the other open window. The rain simply continued.

Now two windows were stuck in some partially open position and a third was held by a two by four. Little continued caterwauling at such a pitch that my sister, again trying to be helpful, released her from the kitty carrier. She promptly urinated on the car upholstery.

Robin appeared with my car, which now had two windows permanently open, no gas and smelled of wet clutch and fresh cat pee. She dropped me back at the office and went to fetch Little from the clinic. Then I got the call.

Little's bill was \$300. It would have been \$700 if she'd spent the night for "observation" which is what they recommended, but hell - I needed observation more than she did and if I wasn't getting any then neither was she. Robin then unjustly incurred the guilt of the vet clinic attendant who responded with an incensed "*Nothing!? You're going to do nothing for her?!*" when she informed them Little would be returning home for the evening instead.

A full blood work test for Little was the "absolute *minimum*" they felt comfortable with. At \$150 it didn't seem like a minimum of any kind but I let them do it so they wouldn't think I was secretly trying to kill her.

Later that night she seemed fine and I wondered if sometimes, like people, cats just need to be left alone for a few days.

That's when the hump appeared.

#### Day 10

I can no longer pretend the hump is just the shape of Little's fur after she slept on it.

I saw them again today, the elderly (and I mean *old* so why can't I just say it? Why?) Asian couple who walk together on my block in the mornings. Usually I am restraining Riley from doing something stupid and embarrassing, like seizing the goldfish in the koi pond in the park, and dare not make eye contact with them. I usually turn to see their backsides, shuffling together in a rhythm only they understand, step by step, not touching, not speaking, not looking at each other but just being...together, as they must have been for decades, I imagine. For all I know they met last month at Bingo but they have the distinct unspoken familiarity of long time lovers and best friends. They never see me. But I watch them. And I never see where they go or where they live.

#### Day 11

It was a good weekend generally, only seven breakdowns. My ex was still working nights and trusted no one but me to watch Harve while he was at work; leaving him alone was out of the question as he was now cancer stricken and run over, but very much alive. He couldn't walk right - he sort of swayed and dragged his toes and he was so thin that he was full of wrinkles like an oversized, underweight, very confused Sharpei. His ribs were showing and he wouldn't eat and was dehydrated, but since he was too weak to walk you had to bring the water to him. Then he would have to pee but couldn't wait because of the pain killers he was taking and so he would simply relieve himself on the rug and look confused when he stepped in it and tracked it through the house. At least my house and my car had consistent odors.

With Harve in my care it was not wise to go out to dinner and a party for the evening but I did. It was Saturday. It was pouring. I was single. My sister, humpbacked cat, healthy dog and Harve were left in the apartment. On the way to the party I called Robin to see how Harve was, only to find her close to panic over his condition. He was breathing heavily and complaining of a feeling that things were closing in on him.

The question: Should we call my ex at work, only to risk a) him coming over and me having to see him or b) him asking me to bring Harve to the animal emergency room and spend my first Single Saturday Night there. Not a bad place, but I had already been there twice that week. Both were equally unappealing options. But what if we didn't call him and Harve died in my care? The relationship pet god would never be finished with me.

I told Robin to call David and describe Harve's condition while I went in to the party. It was stupid, pouring, and women were dancing with each other and acting overly happy and affectionate like they were all on ecstasy and I instantly hated them. Harve was ok and my ex picked him up without incident after his shift ended at 2:30 a.m., crashing into my hard-earned moments of REM.

As his car drove away I began to sob, wondering if that was the last time I would hear the lull of that familiar engine. What had gone wrong and why? I didn't have much time to focus on it thankfully, though, because the Midnight Animal Antics were well underway.

It is infuriating having three animals in the house all on different schedules. As I'm eating dinner they are all sound asleep in my room but as soon as I doze off into my disturbing, demented dreams (last night I was stripping in front of Jane Fonda while my ex said the Kiddush) they begin bouncing off the walls. When one needs a walk, the second is hungry and the third has to pee, and the whole time I am trying to muffle their steps on the hardwood floor because I'm paranoid about the new neighbor downstairs who just moved in and has heard that there are "animal problems" on our floor.

If she only knew.

### Day 12

It rained again this morning, like all heaven was breaking water. Today I had to go to Las Vegas for the day for the annual Showest convention - an event where all the movie studios trot out their stars for the theater exhibitors to get them adequately excited about the year's movie lineup. Why you have to provide Mel Gibson in person to convince a ballroom full of multiplex owners that his summer movie will make them fistfuls of money seems a mystery, but that's how it is done, and I didn't mind riding on the corporate jet.

Hobnobbing on the plane was fun, and I sat next to Jason, a British actor who was a friend of my best friend in London and was on the plane because he was Mel's costar. I chose to sit with Jason because a) he was handsome and b) I didn't want to sit next to Salma Hayek, who was vexed with me because I had failed to inform her that she was the only representative of our movie here today.

The director and other star had dropped out at the last minute and when I finally got around to telling Salma and her publicist (after the plane doors were safely locked and we were moving down the runway) she had lacerated me with a glare and asked calmly, "I'm doing this by *myself*?"

"But you were the one they wanted," I replied meekly, huddling next to Jason, who then proceeded to tell me about his fabulous girlfriend of twelve years without whom life would be unlivable, whom he loved and respected more than anything but whom he would not marry because she refused to convert to his religion. I wanted to punch him.

I called Robin from the plane to check in on Little and she said she hadn't gotten up all day. "I'll deal with it when I get home," I told her. Matt Damon passed by me, drinking a MetRX and ignoring me while making his way toward Mena Suvari.

On the shuttle bus Salma continued her counter-attack, irritably lecturing me in front of the whole bus about how acting in our movie "was *not* like theater *at all* - I'm *sorry*" when I made a stab at including myself in the conversation about improv techniques. Jason nodded compassionately to Salma and crushed me with his eyebrows. I refrained from replying with a bit of damaging gossip I'd heard about her, tempting as it was to say, "Well, I heard you drink your own *pee*."

Seeing all the stars in the V.I.P. ballroom was fun - shoving Salma Hayek and Brooke Shields into the press line was not. All the press wanted to ask Brooke was how she felt about being stalked, and all they wanted to ask Salma was what it was like to sleep with Ed Norton. Try as I might, I was unable to control the questions coming out of the journalists' mouths.

I can't understand how actors cope with that, being herded and presented like animals - albeit good-looking, expensively turned out animals - and then asked utterly invasive and sometimes disturbing questions by perfect strangers and having to respond into a microphone or camera.

As a publicist it is my job to force them to do this, create a desirable image of them and the movie and then be hated for it. We build them up and then tear them down; it hardly seems fair, even if it does make us feel better about ourselves to be unfair to someone we hardly know who's thinner and better looking than we are. I felt sorry for Brooke and Salma, but still, they were actors and therefore the enemy.

On my taxi ride home from the airport I caught a glimpse of two of Charlie's Angels - Cameron Diaz and Lucy Liu - speeding along La Cienega in Cameron's Porsche. As I stared, I noticed something odd - no, *incredible*. They were scarfing down Carl's Jr. as fast as they were driving; Lucy a fistful of fries and Cameron a *white* bun of some sort. For some reason this made me cry. I hate actors.

I arrived home to find Little curled up in a ball, watching the Screen Actors Guild Awards. Pain, like joy, is in the details.

#### Day 14

The vet, a perky blond woman, takes one look at Little and her hump and decides that "this little girl is in trouble."

"That hump wasn't there yesterday," I lie, and an attendant takes Little away.

"We'll call you when we know something," she says, and I weep.

Hours later, at work, I get a call from the vet, explaining "It was an abscess, and it was really bad. We drained about a cup of pus from your little cat," she explains, as I savor the visual. "Could she have been bitten or attacked?" she asks. "She wasn't on the Showest shuttle bus with Salma Hayek," I respond. The vet doesn't get it.

"Anyway, I think she'll be fine. I recommend making her an indoor cat from now on," she said, sternly, her tone indicating she expects me to obey.

I race out of the office to arrive at the vet by 6:30 and find Little shaved and dazed, with two rubber tubes protruding from the top and bottom of her back. She looks like a bizarre novelty hot water bottle and I begin to sob immediately. "Your total is \$550.62," the receptionist says cheerfully. I sob harder.

The vet hands me the X-rays, which she had felt were necessary but I suspect were just another way to make my bill higher. "I don't like this shadow, here, that leads me to believe there's a foreign body in her lung," she says. "That could be the cause of all of this."

Convinced that Little simply has to be cured now that she looks like a morbid beanie baby, I dismiss her opinion. "I don't see any shadow," I say authoritatively, snap the kitty carrier shut and flee the building.

We get home and my dog, upset by all the fuss over the pus-filled cat, has chewed a hole in the door. He's excited that she's back home and expresses this by tugging at her rubber tubes and licking her stitches as hard as he can. She is unable to defend herself because she is wearing the Elizabethan Poet Satellite collar and is heavily drugged. Periodically, bloody pus drips from her tubes (this I am told, is the purpose of them) and the dog follows her around, lapping up her fluids from the floor. As long as I keep her hole open and draining and force feed her two large antibiotics a day, she will improve.

I check the email - New Mail! - only to deflate when I realize it is a document from work that I sent myself. There is also a phone message! That red light blinking could mean anything, anyone... It is the maid service, confirming the appointment for tomorrow and adding that there will be an extra charge for the animal hair removal.

And I wonder, is this where I thought I'd be at 31? When I was a little girl catching bugs in the backyard and pretending to operate on my stuffed animals and telling everyone that I was going to be a vet when I grew up, could I have imagined this scenario? Am I being punished for not becoming a vet? Do vets hate publicists? Could I be a publicist for a vet? Do vets need publicists? Perhaps I should look into that as a possible alternative career.

At what point do our lives take on a direction of their own, willfully disobeying the neat and silent path we laid out for them in our minds?

#### Day 15

I now have to separate the dog and cat, because if permitted, he will prevent her wound from healing and she can not, under any circumstances, go outside. He is angry at being locked outside alone and begins the project of chewing a hole in the door from the outside. She howls from the confines of my bedroom and leaks bloody pus on my new comforter. My sister announces that she has found temporary work, will start tomorrow and won't be able to stay home with the animals. I whirl, dropping the kitty carrier on my toe. "You can't go to work yet! We haven't discussed the arrangements for the children!"

Our downstairs neighbor appears. "Is everything okay? We heard some meowing..."

The phone rings, it is my ex. "I need to come and get my bike, and you owe me for the gas bill."

#### Day 16

Work is busy with the planning of the release of our hip hop movie, our latest project. I am talking daily to the rappers who are the executive producers, and though we respect each other and get along well, we don't speak the same language or keep the same hours. It is not

unusual for me to receive three or four messages that came in at 3 or 4 in the morning, nor is it rare that I wake one of them up by calling at noon. He's never very pleased when this happens. When he is not happy with an article he says, "Trace, this shit ain't right and I'm takin' this shit personal." Then I have to call him back.

Little is improving, but still not eating. The hole is still open and draining a curious yellow liquid. Furious at being confined to the house, she has taken to pooping on the plants. Robin tells me for the fifth time that "if she keeps doing that, my plant will die," and I lash out, "Then tape her ass shut!"

My dog was able to make it through the entire work day without peeing. He did, however, remove one of Little's tubes, eat it and vomit it back up. This was my immediate deduction anyway, at the sight, though I can never be sure what really happened. No one at work understands why I have to leave the office by 6.

I try to force the tube back in to Little's hole and she attacks me with her hind feet, understandably confused at this additional method of torture.

Then I force feed her the pills, which are huge and chalky, and have to be shoved down her throat through the confines of the Poet Satellite collar. She gasps for air, pretends to swallow them and projectiles them across the floor the instant I release her head. The dog wastes no time in devouring them.

Little spends the night under my bed, testing every variation of "Meow" (and I have learned there are many) throughout the night.

Murl! Rowl! Rowl! Rowl!! (*Why are you doing this to me? WHY?*)

Reeeeeaooooooow.

Mau. (*I hate you! Get this goddamn thing off my head!*)

Maurlll! (*I'll call PETA!*)

I dream of high school. We are dissecting cats and watching the Academy Awards. My ex is a presenter, partnered with Cameron Diaz. They are eating Kentucky Fried Chicken and whispering about me. For some reason, we are in a rain forest that smells of poop.

The next morning there is an email from my ex. "Harve is fine, in case you care."

At this moment I realize that the Relationship Pet God is on to me in a big way.

### Day 17

I saw them again this morning. The Asian couple who take each step together, slowly, as carefully as the one before and the ones to follow. I catch them on different blocks all the time. They wear comfortable shoes for old people, the kind with the horizontal tongue that are usually grey or beige. He wears a hat and she is rarely outside without her kerchief. Step by step they make their way around the neighborhood and I wonder what they do when they get home. Do they have coffee, read the obituaries? Does she retire to her needlepoint, does he head off to the track? Do they have children? They disappear around the corner and Riley lunges after them now that their backs are turned.

At lunch during work I get the car window fixed. \$150. Have my taxes done - blam, I owe \$4,000 and another \$250 to the accountant who gave me that cheery news. I simply could not leave work early again and called the dogwalker to relieve Riley - poof, \$15. The money just goes and goes, it's a wonder I ever have any at all. I am depressed and decide I need a pair

of leather pants to cheer myself up. And why not throw in a belly chain while I'm at it? People wear those.

On the way home I come upon an accident. Two cars at a residential intersection. The front car is a maroon Chevy with a middle-aged African American woman in the driver's seat, sitting sideways with the door open, her feet hanging over the curb. She is crying. Tears are leaking down her cheeks and she is terribly shaken up. The other car is stopped and an Indian man is standing between it and her, holding a cell phone. A man who had been jogging is at the scene, also armed with a cell phone. Across the street a mother with a stroller stopped on the sidewalk. The infant had a cell phone. I stopped my car in the middle of the intersection, rolled down my window and yelled out "Are you ok?"

That's when I saw how hard she was crying, the wracking sobs where you can't speak and can barely breathe, and you know that strangers are watching but you are powerless. It was very upsetting. I got out of my car and went to her. Then another car approached from the other direction and honked irritably -- I was still in the middle of the street, blocking everyone's way. In that moment she looked up at me and I knew that whatever was causing her tears went beyond the confines of this traffic accident. After all it was only a fender bender, and she was physically unharmed.

There was something else, something deeper, somewhere buried, that had been unleashed by the instant, tangible trauma of this car accident. It was like that time right after the breakup when I took a strenuous yoga class and suddenly during the "surrender" position I exploded into hot teary gasps of emotion, crying silently in the dark. It came out of nowhere from within and went out, like the opposite of an injection, and I could do nothing to stop it. You never know what minor situational event will open the cap on your emotions and let that thing out.

#### Day 18

The leather pants don't really fit but I do my best to defy them. Unfortunately the breakup diet has turned into the breakup binge. Food is a comfort and does not question or test me. With food, you always win.

My parents are in town, and so are the rappers, during the busiest week of the movie's release plan. My father doesn't understand why I have to be at the taping of "Live From L.A." until 10:00 at night, and Mighty G doesn't understand why a friend he brought along to the taping can't also be on the stage. "Trace, why can't Twizzy get some love?" he purrs, and I explain that Twizzy is not in the movie and does not rap and so his presence on the stage and on the show may be confusing for viewers and upsetting for the producers, who have no idea who Twizzy is or why he might deserve a place on the stage. Mighty G makes that sad face that reflects disappointment in me, and I give in. Rappers are better actors than actors. Meanwhile, the actress has borrowed my leather jacket for her interview segment and now I can't leave until she does because if she takes the jacket off it will cause "continuity problems." I sit down in her dressing room to wait it out and there are lots of jellybeans, far too many to count, but I begin counting them anyway.

I get home at 1:00 a.m. and my father has left a note: "Maybe on our next visit you can spend more time with your aging father." He signs it, "Cats in the Cradle." I sob.

#### Day 19

At the vet again, for Little's drain removal. There's a couple sitting here, getting their seven month old (we're practicing for children together) bull mastiff checked up. She's blonde, pretty and has the perfect weekend going-to-the-vet outfit: loose-fitting grey pants, white

sneakers and a big platinum engagement ring. He hasn't shaved. They seem happy and I'm sure they're going someplace cute for brunch right after this. They never listen to Sarah McLachlan or Alanis Morissette.

That night I agree to meet my other single friend Linda at a party for the LA Independent Film Festival at a Moroccan-themed restaurant. I drag myself out of my sweats, put the animals in their quarters and drive to the restaurant where there are stewed figs, bowls of fruit, mint tea and belly dancers - but no Linda. She was tired and cancelled at the last minute, her gay friend Jimmy tells me. I force myself to stay a couple hours and talk to people. There was one cute guy who was being courted by several people while others waited in line to talk to him. I decided he must be the director of the film that had just shown.

He looked like my friend Kurt from New York, so much so that he caught me staring and confidently walked over and introduced himself. "I'm Christian," he offered. Well, that's a start, I think. "Oh, you look like a friend of mine in New York," I say stupidly.

"I'm an actor," he said, scanning the room. A long pause ensued and finally he said, "Um. Nice meeting you," and walked away.

I go home and in a burst of hope, try on the leather pants. As I hop up and down and shimmy into the first third, my sister enters.

"I don't think," she says, "you bought the right size." Clearly she has not been in L.A. very long.

"This," I reply defiantly, "is how people wear them." She thinks, then chooses silence and of course in doing so, wins.

### Day 23

Little's hole is healing and her stitches are out. But this afternoon I notice that the hump is coming back. Weird puffy swelling that she really prefers you not poke. I decide to keep an eye on it. Her appetite is almost back to normal, but she's still stewing over being an indoor cat.

We've effectively put the lid on her nocturnal sexual activities and we can hear her suitors calling up to the windows each night. Clearly the entire feline community is wondering where the hot little grey number has gone. It usually starts about midnight and progresses as follows:

Suitor: "Meaow."

Little (*from the bedroom*): "Murrlloww?"

Suitor (*encouraged*): "Rooaullllll..!"

(brief silence)

Little (*panicky*): "Murlow! Murlow? Mrroaauuuuuuuuuuollllll!!!"

That night I dream that Christopher Walken is my boyfriend and I am simultaneously proud (because he is a famous, successful actor) and repulsed (because, as everyone knows, he is Christopher Walken). Then I had to issue a press release that he was in fact, going to turn into Godzilla. "But how, how will you do that?" I kept asking him, and his stony silence told me everything I already knew about our relationship and why it would never work.

Dreams can be so clarifying.

### Day 25

An email from my friend Dan, who's having a CD release party for his first album. Robin and I are encouraged. An opportunity to go out. And do something. Where other people are. Another email from my ex, saying, "Where is the car insurance bill? TELL ME you didn't cancel mine..." and I find this rude and so does everyone else I tell.

### Day 26

Passover. I am oddly sad that I will not have a seder this year, and I am missing the stories and the matzos. So I decide to go to a Passover diner with some Jewish friends who aren't very Jewish - we go to Nate & Al's deli and order pastrami and cheese sandwiches.

My friend Sasha is into rap and is impressed that we are releasing the hip hop movie starring some famous rappers, Claudia Schiffer, Mike Tyson and a lot of other talent that is oddly intriguing grouped together.

Over dinner I learn that Steve's wife, Laura, is a practicing Catholic (Steve's Jewish) and they go to church together on Sundays but synagogue only on the high holy days. And when I ask them what their kids will be they gaze lovingly at each other and she says "Catholic" as he says "Jewish" at exactly the same time. Then they laugh and hold hands. I hate them.

I get home to find a new Coldwell Banker "FOR SALE" sign in front of our duplex.

### Day 27

Easter. We decide that going home to see our parents and happily married brother for Easter family togetherness would be unwise, and have a barbecue at our house instead. Everyone who comes says two things: "Your place is for sale?" and "What's wrong with your cat?"

The Easter Barbecue is a moderate success. Trying to get people to actually show up for something in L.A. is like trying to guess how many jellybeans are in the jar at the gynecologist's office. Impossible, and not worth the effort.

You always have too much food but are plagued by the suspicion that you won't have enough. People come late, leave early, are obliged to attend other engagements...it's depressing. Once again I find myself wondering where I belong. I've got to form some sort of goal other than getting through the week. It occurs to me that the first two letters of Lazy are LA.

I feel as though I came to LA four years ago armed with a ruthless ambition and a clear purpose - to conquer the entertainment industry. I thought I had escaped the clipboards and walkie talkies of P.R. forever and was off to creating and controlling what folks these days call content...being the person who makes something instead of the one who promotes something that someone else with talent made. But now I'm in P.R. again and I can't even manage to get our one movie mentioned in the summer preview of USA Today, and the photo editor of Entertainment Weekly is furious with me because thirteen people showed up for a photo shoot and none of them were Mike Tyson. I try to explain that Mike thought he looked fat in the last cover he did and is therefore refusing any future publicity requests. What happened?

I decide to blame my demise on my ex. Everything else is his fault.

### Day 29

The bump in Little's back is now a balloon and the hole is closed and it's Sunday, which means the only vet that's open is the emergency clinic and an automatic \$300 just to walk in the door.

After much ruminating on what to do, I conclude that a) there's pus in the balloon and b) it will have to come out, and c) I prefer that it not come out in an unanticipated explosion when I am at work. I make the decision to lance the balloon, but I have no lancet and decide that a needle is just as good if I sterilize it.

But the needle doesn't seem to really be designed for puncturing cat flesh, so I grab one of the Tools of the Trade knives that we almost never use.

Robin enters the kitchen as I am steaming the knife and covering it with rubbing alcohol. "What," she asks cautiously, "are you doing?"

"I'm draining the pus and I don't want your opinion about it. She's in pain because of the pressure," I add defensively.

"Pressure from what."

"The pus."

The knife goes in and Little hardly flinches. As I squeeze the balloon, and the horrible liquid oozes forth like water through a dam, she flinches and gets very, very angry.

"Rooowwwlllllll! RRRRRRRROOOOOOOWWWWWW!!!"

"This is for your own good! It has to come out!"

"I think," says Robin, "you're hurting her."

"Well, it hurts more having all that pressure in there. She can't walk around with all this horrible stuff inside her," I respond, having no idea, of course, whether or not this is true.

Now the hole is back, bigger than ever, and I have done it. The hole once again is oozing bloody pus and seems to be widening. Riley moves in to clean up the mess I've made.

### Day 30

"You again," the receptionist says as I walk into the vet clinic at 7 a.m. to explain, as apologetically as possible, that I have in fact stabbed my cat with a kitchen knife, but had only her best interests at heart in doing so.

"Maybe you could just write it down on this patient information sheet, so there's no, ah, confusion when the doctor sees her." So I do.

*Cat was healing until the pus balloon became too painful to bear; owner lanced the balloon in order to drain it (releasing substantial pressure and pus), resulting in current hole in cat. Appetite normal.*

*This seemed reasonable, better certainly than, stabbed cat with chicken knife, then forced icky gook to come out, resulting in cat screaming in pain for several minutes because was too cheap to have it done professionally.*

Later at work I get a phone call from Dr. Park, who speaks with a thick accent. "There is infection," he says gravely. "From the chicken knife?" I stammer.

"Infection from before. Like we said, foreign body that was visible on X-ray. That is why the hole does not heal."

"But it *was* healing," I protest.

"No. Only healed on the surface. Inside, deep infection. Must operate. Must get to the source of the infection," he added. "We must put her under anesthesia, and that is expensive."

"Does she really need it?"

He was very patient. "I am going to open the wound and flush the infected area, and cut away the dead tissue if necessary." I pause. He asks, "Would you want to be awake?"

"Fine. Whatever it costs..." I heard myself say.

Later that afternoon, after lunch, my phone sheet looks like this:

12:01 p.m.	Dr. Park	Per your request, quote for feline anesthesia is \$560.
12:02 p.m.	Laura (dog walker)	Riley won't come outside and she doesn't want to drag him - what should she do?
1:10	Mighty G	Reach out to him (call back?)
1:43 p.m.	Dr. Park	Little is resting comfortably; can go home at 6 p.m.; will have chest tube.
2:11 p.m.	Robin	How did Little do at the vet?
3:14 p.m.	Mom	How is the hole in your cat?
3:19 p.m.	Gabby / Montage Agency	Claudia Schiffer's makeup for the premiere is \$5,000.00; is there a budget?

When I picked her up that night she was shaven again, and looked more than ever like Mr. Bigglesworth. A fresh tube in either end of her back, more draining, and stitches. I wept with frustration. "Why does it keep coming back?" I wailed.

Dr. Park handed me a plastic container that held several pieces of what looked like brown, rotting...weeds.

"This," he said triumphantly, "was what I took out of her." He tapped the plastic bottle. "This, source of infection. Plant matter, foreign body. Should be no more problems, now."

"That will be \$670.98," smiled the receptionist.

### Day 27

There are several post-op instructions. She is still on two kinds of medication: two pills twice a day of the first and one and a half pills of the second, twice a day for the first week and

once a day the following week. The next week she gets a new pill - three times a day or a quarter pill every four hours.

And I am expected to “massage the afflicted area with hot compresses twice a day, to encourage draining.” “Moderate exercise is also recommended.” Soon I will have to quit my job. I feel like Renee Zellweger in *One True Thing*.

Little will now eat only wet food. This means that in addition to the pills, draining, litter box and bedwetting there is now the added responsibility of opening the canned cat food and placing it strategically so the dog will not seize it before the doped up cat can pathetically stumble toward it.

This is when I have to go on a business trip to the Cannes Film Festival for ten days (I know, poor me.) Actually, poor Robin. She’s staying home with the zoo.

The pet care instructions run three pages long, single-spaced.

#### Day 29

I get to fly business class for the first time. It is exciting hanging out in the British Air Executive Lounge, though I was unsure about Business class etiquette. So I sat down and tried to act like all the other business class travelers - calm, confident, full of purpose and like I had very little time to waste. (Got delivered orange juice in a real glass and a “washbag” - though I’m not sure what’s in it but decide it is probably best to wait until later to investigate so as not to tip off my fellow travelers to my inexperience).

I was unable to control my urge to have a drink in the middle of the afternoon. Then another. The snack bags of “crisps” are so delicious and British that I eat all three bags they gave me. I sleep.

#### Day 30

I call Robin from France and Little meows on command into the phone. She sounds better, but Riley is moping my absence and has taken to dismembering the front door one panel at a time.

I tell Robin to lock Little in my bedroom with her food, water, litter box and the first season of *Sex and the City*. Riley will be left outside, with the porch door open, so that he has the choice of being in the kitchen or the backyard, depending on his mood.

It is their world; we only live in it.

That night I’m feeling sexy and fun (I am in France, at the Cannes Film Festival after all) and I hit it off with a sexy and fun British producer at a party at a remote chateau overlooking the Mediterranean. I stupidly drink too much and even more stupidly, decide it’s a good idea to invite the bloke into my hotel with me. Desperately needing affection, I succumb. Then I grow bored. Quickly.

“You have to leave now,” I hear myself say.

“What...do you mean?”

“I don’t even know you and I can’t sleep with a stranger in my bed and I need to sleep, so you have to leave. Now.”

“But we just...”

“Please. Don’t make me feel guilty, just go. And don’t forget anything. Here’s your phone”

I walk to the other corner of the room. “And your keys. And I think I saw your wallet in the shower.”

“I can’t believe you’re chucking me out!” he says incredulously, in his posh accent. “Let me just sleep! I have a breakfast meeting downstairs at this hotel in three hours!”

“Then you have just enough time to go home, shower and change clothes,” I say, tossing him his pants.

Later, I feel disgusted and hung over. And dirty inside. Like my soul is rotting, along with my morals. I miss my ex. Terribly.

#### Day 31

Spend most of the day dodging my new “boyfriend”, who has already taken to greeting me with, “Hi, it’s me” when he calls on my cell phone every few hours as I’m racing with press kits and promotional sweatshirts from one end of the Croisette (Canne’s main drag) to the other. “What are you doing?”

“I’m working.”

“Oh. What are you doing later?”

“I’m busy.”

My God, I have turned into a man.

#### Day 32

I decide to go for a drink on one of the boats docked at the other end of the beach. Collect my thoughts, decide what is missing in my life and determine why I feel so empty and if moving to the south of France to be a painter is a good idea. As I’m walking down the Croisette among five thousand people from all over the world, I hear someone say, “Tray, is that you?”

It is my ex’s sister, who is in medical school in Houston. Somehow, she is standing there on the French Riviera, waving to me not ten feet away. “What are you doing here?”

I can not believe my eyes and have to hold onto a French police horse to prevent myself from collapsing. “I’m...working, what are you doing here?”

“I just finished medical school and I’m traveling in Europe. It’s so weird to see you here...”

Yes, it was. I hadn’t seen her since before the beginning of the end and could only imagine the terrible things she thought of me since the breakup.

My cell phone rings. “Hi, it’s me. What are you doing?”

#### Day 34

On my way home. Business class again, this time I’m a pro.

It seems that I am now increasingly only occasionally depressed, which must be a good sign. Some of the earlier meaninglessness is gone. I felt strangely at home in Europe and considered how energizing it would feel to pack, pick up, move on and start over in a new place. But it wouldn't last. Because wherever you go, you take yourself with you, and newness is blissfully distracting for only so long.

The couple sitting next to me is returning from their honeymoon. They went on a cruise. They keep stroking each others' hands, exchanging small comments about the food service and wrinkling their noses conspiratorially when a stranger's fart fouls the business class air. Her diamond is the size and shape mine was. She is friendly to me.

*I had a diamond, I was going to get married, I want to tell her. I was normal.* Instead we talk about the books we are reading, then she retreats to write in her journal. I see the words "cannot express..." and "my marriage..."

Then that familiar stinging, the tightening acidity in my throat and eyes. *I chose this*, I internally yell at myself. This is my life, I'm living alone with my experiences, my sensations, my observations, my pathetic tears and farts.

We land. I refuse to look out the window, deny the smog and filth and brown vagueness that I live and breathe in. I think of landing on the damp green of London, the faraway heat of Nice, instead of a country where serotonin is the drug of choice. Tomorrow I'll be 32 and I'm so tired all I can think about is whether or not Robin will notice that I've gotten fat when I get off the plane.

#### Day 35

Home at last, and my birthday. Robin has arranged a cookout for some friends and our cousins. I am jetlagged and dazed but know that I have to be in form for my guests.

Little's drain has been removed (for the second time) and Robin has carefully saved it in wax paper in case I wanted to see it. In celebration I chop it up, mix with hot gravy and put it in Riley's food.

She seems much better and is meowing again, and can leap onto furniture in a single bound and poop in the plants unassisted. We decide she is well enough to go to Dan's CD release party the next night. We're all looking forward to an evening out.

That morning my friend Mark calls to tell me two things. One, he can't make it to my birthday because he and his girlfriend are buying a house together and are meeting the seller that afternoon and two, he played soccer with my ex and found out he is seeing someone.

"I wasn't sure if you wanted to know," he begins.

"I didn't."

"Oh. Well, I didn't want you to find out that I knew and didn't tell you. You know?"

"No."

"Oh. Sorry. Happy birthday."

At the birthday barbecue I recount the story to my friend Dan. "Yeah. I guess I sort of knew too," he says.

“How?” I ask, not really wanting the answer.

“He’s bringing her to my cd release party.”

“Dan, you’re MY friend!” I say, in a tone not unlike a four year-old’s.

“I’m not taking sides,” he says carefully.

“There are no sides. You’re MY friend. If he’s going to your show with his new *girlfriend* I’m not going!”

I storm up the stairs to open my presents and then turn, barbecue fork in my hand and say to my guests, “Everyone! I got laid in France!”

Upstairs, I cry. Unfortunately in my drama I leave the door open and Little escapes into the dark zone underneath the house, where the whole business of ingesting rotting weeds started. The BBQ turns into a search and rescue mission to find and apprehend Little before she can rip open her stitches or encounter some other terribly expensive misfortune.

The Asian couple passes by the house and our eyes meet. I feel that a certain spell has been broken now that they have noticed me, taken in my presence. They smile, as if they knew me all along, and I can not wonder about them with the same detachment any more.

#### Day 39

Relative calm at the homestead, Robin and I work all day, Riley is locked in the backyard.

Little is sequestered in the house, back in the Poet Satellite Collar, a bigger, more durable version this time, which she has trouble wearing. She can’t quite master the spatial geography involved. She first circles herself several times, looking for the end of the wall, then does an odd version of the Cat Chow dance and then continues backing up as if that will make the boundaries on either side of her head finally end. Because she has no peripheral vision, she cuts corners and crashes into door frames. Then terrified, she lunges for the safety underneath the bed but of course can’t clear that and ricochets backward off the bedframe.

And watching her eat was a pitiful sight. Luckily Riley would come to the rescue and clean off whatever food became lodged between her face and the collar, and they would fight over the morsels that fell to the floor.

It’s depressing and so I go to work.

We come home at 6:30, administer meds, food, fresh kitty litter and various attentions, eat dinner and go to bed.

And this is life.

#### Day 41

There is a message on the machine, from Bryce at Coldwell Banker. He has what I’d call an aggressively hospitable tone.

“HI! We have two potential buyers and we’ll be coming to show the unit (they refer to our home as a ‘unit’) tomorrow afternoon at 2:15. Thanks for your cooperation! It is very HELPFUL!”

This presents a problem. They can’t enter the house with Riley in the house, and I can’t leave Riley in the house anyway because he’ll eat Little’s wound. But I can’t leave him in the yard because then he’ll attack them when they go outside. It’s too late to call the dog walker, so I leave a rather tense message on Bryce’s voicemail, stating that tomorrow doesn’t work for me and I do not want him showing the ‘unit’ when I am not at home. Period.

#### Day 42

The next day at work, my call sheet looks like this.

- 11:04 Dr. Park RE: Little’s stitches removal?
- 11:30 Gwen / Animal Physical Therapy Recommended by Dr. Park. Give her a call.
- 11:20 Bryce / Coldwell Banker There is a clause in your lease stating we may enter the unit at any time with 24 hrs notice. If you’d like me to call the landlord in Austria and have her call you to clarify directly I will do so.
- 11:30 Mighty G Has questions about information. Discuss “whatever, whatever.” Holler back at me (?)
- 12:20 Bryce / Coldwell Banker There is a dog in the yard.

We arrive home that evening to find a cheery message from Bryce that he and “Riley got along fine” and that he found the dog biscuits. (They are hidden in a bathroom cabinet). Bryce adds, “The appraisal is tomorrow and the inspection is Saturday from noon ‘til four so you should plan to be out of the house. Thanks!”

#### Day 45

I am on a plane to New York for the premiere of our movie. As I sit staring out the window watching space go by, “The Story of Us” plays on the multi-screens and Michelle Pfeiffer and Bruce Willis are going to make it after all.

Suddenly I am utterly overcome by such a vast feeling of emptiness, hopelessness and pointlessness that I almost press my flight attendant call button for help. It’s that verge-of-tears feeling from Vegas until well over Missouri, and it was so odd, like if someone looked at me with an ounce of compassion I would have collapsed sobbing into their arms, wailing, “What’s it all about? What is the point of my life? Please tell me.”

The movie ends and once again I am struck with the despair of having no goals. I feel cynical and oddly outdated, like everything I used to know and was good at is somehow irrelevant now, in the year 2000. I can’t keep up, I can’t slow down. I have no internet stocks and I don’t day trade. I know scads of people yet can’t seem to really talk to anyone. I long for the past and am terrified by the future. I miss my family but fear they no longer really know me. And worse, I no longer really know myself. I have friends but none of us have enough time for each other. We are all too busy trying to win.

I wonder if anyone else feels this way, or if perhaps I am just a self-pitying neurotic with a bunch of irrelevant first world problems. Yes.

Somewhere over Philadelphia, it passes.

#### Day 46

There are 650 RSVP's for the premiere party, which is at a club that holds 300 people. I get there early, after the movie starts and before an unpleasant encounter with Farrah Fawcett not getting her seat. The very first person I see when I enter the club is not the owner, the head bartender, or even Farrah Fawcett, but my ex's other sister, the older one, an aspiring director who lives in New York.

I am the head of publicity, I control the guest list and the invites, even the RSVP's and I can not fathom how her name escaped me. But there she is, ordering a Cosmopolitan. I turn and flee and wait for some of the 650 guests who did RSVP to come between us.

Later, at the crowded door, there is an incident with Mighty G's manager, Herb, who tells me, in that disappointed tone, "Trace, my people are out here on the street! They need to be inside! This shit ain't right!"

"I know Herb, I know, but there are 43 of them."

Mighty G then threatens that, if I don't let them in, they will "storm the door."

I retreat back inside, eager to face my ex's sister, but she is lost in the crowd. The police and fire departments show up, and so finally, does Ben Stiller, who I am angry with because I ordered a car for him to attend the screening - so he could work the press line and participate in the photo op - and he did not show up. He chose instead to just hit the party.

My boss Val approaches me at the party. "Hey, what are you doing?"

"I'm sending every annoying, pushy photographer and camera crew here to Ben Stiller's table to invade his privacy. You?"

#### Day 48

I return from New York and Robin has thoughtfully hung signs from everyone that say "Welcome Home" and has cleverly spattered Little's sign with fake blood.

Little is now through with all her medication and the Poet Satellite collar has been retired. Even her fur is beginning to grow back and she is eating like a pig. Other than a few more panels missing from the doorway, Riley too has behaved himself while I was away.

In a fit of normalcy and joy I decide Little should be able to go outside, unsupervised, and enjoy the privileges of regular cat behavior for a few minutes.

She disappears for twelve minutes and returns with a quarter sized hole in her back that you can see much too far into. When she moves, her glistening sinewy insides heave and squirm; it's like one of those Discovery Channel specials where they insert a tube-shaped camera into someone's uterus.

Incredibly, she seems not to notice or care and leaps onto my bed, purring.

#### Day 49

Convinced it must have come from an errant nail and not from the dreaded *within*, I figure that the hole will just need simple stitches this time, and I do my best to buck up as we drive

to the vet clinic. I will drop her off for the day and return at (I think) 6:30 with her stitched together, good as new. By now of course, Little knows where we are headed and seems hugely upset.

Rowww!

Meuuuu. Meuuuu. Meuuuu. MEEEEUUUUU!

She's really hollering now, and it's worse than on any of our other car rides.

Fearing she is in terrible pain I pull over, and am instantly rear-ended by a struggling actor. I know he is a struggling actor because he is wearing the uniform: Adidas pants, white wife-beater undershirt and Ray Bans. And he drives a ridiculously and unnecessarily huge truck.

He is a lawyer and we are meeting for drinks Friday at 7 p.m.

I am feeling pretty good now, Little will be stitched up and better in no time and I have a date with a wife-beater-wearing lawyer! I go to work and endure the weekly PR conference call, where the head of corporate PR for Company says things like "We need to be sure our ducks are in a row" and "We don't want to be blind-sided" and "Who's going to spear head that?" Then Dr. Park calls.

"Like I suspected, this is deep infection from a foreign body." And his tone terrifies me.

"But we - sorry, *you* - took out the foreign body - remember the weeds?"

"This is in chest probably lungs, like I saw on the X-ray before..." and I am wounded by his disappointment in me. "This will not go away until we have surgery."

"Ok, go ahead, whatever you think," I say, proud of myself.

"I can't do this. Complicated surgery! She must go to a specialist. I give you referral."

My cat is going to a specialist.

#### Day 50

"But can we get an appointment today?" I ask, wondering how I am going to leave work to pick her up at her general practitioner, get her over to the specialist for a "consult," take her home and then get back to work in time to go over the rappers' guest list for the special screening that we've arranged.

I ponder sending a messenger.

"And we're picking up...?" the dispatcher asks.

"A cat."

"Excuse me?"

"You're picking up a cat and then dropping her off. It's no big deal - she's in a box."

"We do not transport animals," she tells me.

And so I leave the office, telling my assistant that I am having a personal day.

“You mean you’re *taking* a personal day,” she says helpfully, smiling. Right.

#### Day 51

The surgeon is a disheveled-looking, calm woman who is clearly very smart. I mean, she’s a cat surgeon. Her picture is featured on the colorful and expensively produced brochure that profiles the doctors at the hospital (we’ve now upgraded from vet clinic to animal hospital). I note with alarm that there are animal oncologists and ophthalmologists. They even have someone who specializes in “seniors.”

She looks at the X-rays, reviews Little’s “chart” which is actually 47 pages long, and says, “I agree that surgery is the only option. There is an internal infection and we won’t know what it is or where it’s coming from until we open her up.”

It sounded absurd. She weighed 7 pounds, was happy and purring (although balding and scarred) and eating well and they were going to ‘open her up.’

“Then what?” I say, my eyes welling up, but not, this time, because of the potential expense.

“Well, we cut out and remove all the dead tissue and infected area, if we can, put her back on antibiotics and see how she does...”

“And what if you open the hole and find something....unfixable..” I ask.

“Then I would have to call you mid-surgery and tell you and we would, if necessary, put her down.”

Her chances were an uninspiring 50/50, she said, which seemed impossible since she was not ill or even protesting anymore. There was just an evil thing growing inside her that would not be stopped until it was confronted, once and for all, in the proper manner by someone with the proper authority - in this case, Dr. Maureen O’Brien, cat surgeon.

The estimate is \$2,000.

#### Day 51.

I agree to leave Little there and she will go into surgery the next day. She will be there for several days, I am told. I will be called during surgery if there are “complications.”

I hate myself for her having to endure this. Cut open again. Force-fed pills again. Suffering the indignities of Riley’s misguided affection and the degradation of the dreaded Elizabethan Poet Satellite Collar again.

But what can I do? The hole is not going to fix itself. And it is, after all, my fault that it has been a hole this long.

In the lobby I applied for the “credit program,” which is a method of dealing with unduly vet bills for people who have good credit. It takes twenty minutes. No down payment and no interest for one year. Like buying furniture, which I will now clearly never own.

Also in the lobby is a strapping older man with the skin and eyes of a sailor. Rugged, handsome, kind. His dog is an interesting fluffy blue number and I decide to ask him about her.

“This is China,” he begins, scratching her under the chin. “She’s a blue chow, very rare,” he says proudly, his blue eyes sparkling like the Old Man of the Sea.

“What happened to her?” I ask, patting her and genuinely interested in both him and the dog.

And with that he knelt down before China, cupped her gently on the muzzle and kissed her full on the mouth as his eyes welled up. “They’ve put her through hell, haven’t they girl?” he said, rubbing his forehead against her wet gooey nose.

I stood up. I like to think I didn’t actually recoil, but I can’t back that up.

“She had a blood disease and has been in and out of here since she was 8 months old,” he gulped. “Haven’t you girl!” And he cupped her little blue face and made out with her. This time the dog recoiled.

The receptionist rescued me. “Miss - ?” “Good news, you’re approved!” she beamed, and held up the contract and a pen.

### Day 53

The house is gloomy and Riley is depressed. He doesn’t understand where Little is. Today Little will actually go in for the surgery and the procedure should take four hours. The surgeon will call if anything goes wrong.

I sweat out the day, the press interview day for the director of our new movie, which means I am out of the office for most of it.

I return to the office and the phone sheet looks like this:

12:30 p.m.	Dr. O’Brien	Little is going in.
3:10 p.m.	Dr. O’Brien	Little is out of surgery and resting comfortably. Give her a call. Has a pain patch and valium drip.
3:10 p.m.	Robin	How is Little?
3:16 p.m. Salma Hayek	Entertainment Tonight	Need to interview about Improv techniques. On deadline / very imp.
3:17 p.m.	Mom	Any word on Little?
3:49 p.m.	US Weekly magazine	Really want to use the shot of Salma Hayek kissing Jeanne Tripplehorn; can you get it approved?
4:10 pm.	Dad	Heard your cat died? Very sorry; call him.

4:12 p.m.

Joanne (neighbor)

Riley jumped out the window?  
Is hurt and whimpering and  
refuses to come out of the  
bushes; call her. (I left it on  
the voicemail).

This last message is somewhat upsetting. I punch in my code to the voicemail and hear the following in a slight accent (Joanne, my neighbor is Korean) in that soft-spoken, vaguely questioning tone of someone who is very polite and doesn't want you to feel embarrassed by what she's about to say?

*“Hi, it's Joanne...I think Riley jumped out the window, because I heard some scratching? And I was in the driveway? And suddenly he was on the ground on the pavement and your uh, window screen fell out? And he yelped and the next thing I saw he was limping on the driveway and? He hid in the bush and won't come out?”*

I race home amidst visions of my mangled dog lying helpless in the bushes. I am in tears, picturing Little awakening from surgery, dazed as I hold her paw and tell her the news, “Riley's gone....”

“MAU MAU MAU...” she would stammer.

“He...jumped.....there are no easy answers...”

And we would comfort each other.

I pull in the driveway, open the gate and Riley trots up to me - if a little stiffly - and greets me with a big dog smile and tail wag. I glance up at our 2nd story window and indeed, the full size screen is twisted grotesquely, and is punctured with a distinct dog shape. It is like a cartoon.

Furious, I point to the window and ask him, “Did you DO THAT?” He cowers, instantly recognizing the universal Angry Master Tone that all dogs fear.

Joanne appears, “Is everything all right?”

That night when we both get home from work, Riley walks like he's eighty year old man with arthritis and a wooden leg and he has a huge fat lip, apparently from hitting the pavement at dog/window leap velocity. I give him the cold shoulder.

#### Day 54

Little comes home. We drive to the hospital to pick her up and notice they have a new huge neon sign out front which is like the Time Square billboard, only it's flashing messages about pet care and products they provide. “*Have your dog's teeth been cleaned lately?*” There is something wrong with this. They clearly make too much money.

The cashier says, “And your total is \$1,056.98.” I patiently explain that I'm on the credit plan. Other clients turn to look at me. The receptionist has to go check on this and they go to retrieve Little in the meantime.

We are told to be seated and brace ourselves, for we know that she is going to look worse than ever. And she does. She truly looks like a dazed, somewhat pissed off FrankenCat, with

two huge stitched up gashes on either side of her thorax, as her chart calls it, which is completely shaved. Only her head and legs have hair. She's groggy and smells vaguely of peanut butter, which is somewhat puzzling but we say nothing.

It must have been the medicine or simply the smell of the place because as soon as we got home (*Mau? Mau?*) she began frantically licking herself all over, meticulously self-cleansing as if she couldn't escape the aura of the place fast enough. I didn't have the heart to make things more difficult by administering the Poet collar. The wound was of course, oozing and Riley took up his post by her side, dutifully cleaning the floor wherever she leaked.

She peed twice, inhaled some "Tuna for Cats!" and fell asleep.

An hour later she woke up and wandered from room to room in an aloof manner, as if to make absolutely certain she were really home.

Dr. O'Brien assured me we were finally finished with the whole bloody mess, and there were no more foreign objects - like rotting weeds - in her body cavity.

She was clean.

#### Day 60

It's been weeks since I've cried or thought of my ex. Riley, however, is still wincing with each step.

"Aren't you going to take him to the vet?" asks Robin.

"For what? He's fine." I say.

He fell out a second story window and landed on pavement," she offers. "He seems really sore."

"He didn't fall, he jumped. Of course he's sore, the idiot." He's not going to the vet.

Or maybe, he is.