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## “Getting Back to Sleep”

by Susan Lee Hays Powers

I love sleeping but sometimes it's a difficult state for me to reach. Lately sleep has become like the mythical land of Shangri La in the story *Lost Horizons*. It's lovely to think about but hard to get to because my husband and I are temporarily stranded in the middle of moving from one home to another. We sold our old house very quickly so we crammed all of our stuff into a couple of over-sized storage units and my Mother's garage. Once we cleared the payment and paperwork we bought a manufactured house but it needed work done before we moved in, so we have been residing with relatives while the work goes on. After all it should only be a week at the most, we told ourselves. Well, of course, a few projects turned into a couple more projects that all needed to be finished before the first project could be done and then you may as well fix that other thing while you're at because it's just going to be harder to take care of down the road. This is how you wind up sharing a small room with four cats, a husband and no sleep for a month.

We sold the old house and moved out on May 23. It is now June 14<sup>th</sup>. Our relatives have been very gracious about our extended stay even after their septic system backed up and we had to coordinate bathroom visits or drive to 7-11. We're a bit crowded staying in the guest bedroom with our four cats and their cat boxes so sleep is a precious and precarious commodity. My husband John sleeps on the inflatable bed on the floor, I have the twin size day bed next to the window and the four cats sleep on our heads when they aren't bouncing off the inflatable bed like a trampoline circus act. If they hit the blow-up bed hard enough my husband's head bounces off the floor. When he tries to yell at them with his breathing mask on he sounds like Darth Vader yelling through a snorkel. This causes the cats to scatter off to the corners of the closet and under my bed where I'm pretty sure they are clutching themselves and laughing hysterically like small children. Then they wait until we fall asleep and do it again because they've been bored all day doing nothing.

The cats have no problem sleeping, they have a big west facing window in the guest room. If you have cats you know that any sunny window with a view of the birds and other outside activity is a prized cat nap spot so there is always a cat stretched out in front of the window. At night the extra fur bodies kick the heat index up ten degrees per cat for anyone trying to sleep on the cute little metal day bed against the window. That would be the same someone who is going through menopause and hot flashes all night. Murphy's Law further states that this is also the person who has to be up early to be at work every weekday. This, again, is the same person who wakes up at the slightest noise and of course has Zena the cat demanding to be let out of the room between 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. by clawing hard enough at the underside of the door to make it rattle in the frame.

Zena is the kitty voted most likely to murder all of us while we sleep because you looked at her wrong five years ago and she's been plotting her revenge ever since. This is the same cat who terrorizes all four of our relatives' cats as well as my relatives. She has now decided she wants to come and go whenever she feels like it so why is the darn bedroom door shut? She weighs about 13 pounds so she can really rattle that door. I was sure the entire neighborhood could hear it. If you've ever seen the really scary door shaking scene from the 1963 movie, "The Haunting" you know what I mean. I was reduced to sleeping with a bag of kitty treats to throw at the obnoxious cat so she would shut up and let me sleep. It was not a pretty sight. John is still wondering why he wakes up covered in kitty treats but he has learned not to ask silly questions regarding the cats.

The bed I supposedly sleep on has a separate cushion top that is loosely held on by a mattress cover. The cats like to wedge themselves between the bed frame and the edge of the mattress cover so the pad has a tendency to creep off the front edge of the bed every day. Normally I shove it back on before I climb in but by the middle of a night of tossing and turning it has slithered insidiously over the edge again. So around 3:00 a.m. in the morning when I hear a cat yodeling in Klingon and whacking the door, I lean over the side of the bed to fish around on the night stand for the bag of cat treats, in the dark, and the whole mattress launches off and plops me onto the floor. This flings a couple of cats off the foot of John's air mattress as it shimmy's back and forth like a giant bag of Jell-O. John makes a whuffling noise in his sleep and rolls over. I throw handfuls of kitty treats on his blanket for Zena and the other cats to fight over and drag the mattress back onto my bed. I close my eyes, determined to get a couple of hours of sleep before work. The cat yodeling starts back up as soon as the last kitty treat is crunched.

About the time I am stage whispering dire threats and whipping kitty treats throughout the dark room my darling husband pops up from the floor like a wind-up weasel and says with his eyes closed, "Is that Zena?" John mutters something unintelligible and falls back to sleep. The bedside clock's glowing green numbers blink, mocking me. It's 3:30 am. I'm sure there is kitty litter in my eyes and possibly some other places I don't want to think about. Zena has given up for the night, too full of kitty treats to move. I decide I can risk stealing another three hours of sleep if everyone quiets down. It's the best sleep I get all night... at least until the alarm goes off for work.