

The Penultimate Act of Frank the Cat by Dawson Moore (dawsonguy@juno.com)

CHARACTERS

Austin: Male. 48. The narrator. Wears pajamas appropriate for a six-year-old.

Frank: A grizzled old tabby tomcat. Represented by a puppet unless you have a really gifted feline.

SETTING

A feminine adult bedroom, a queen-size bed with a side table and lamp. At least some way to lie down.

TIME

48 years ago.

Lights rise. Austin enters carrying a paperback novel with the cover torn off.

AUSTIN

When I was a boy, one day I went up to my mother's attic bedroom. I liked it as a place to read... there were big windows, lots of sun. It was the highest place I could get to, something very important for an eight-year-old. We lived in this house with another family, and with her best friend, and ancient tabby named Frank.

Frank enters and stares at the audience, menacing them. Austin sits on the bed.

Frank and I had never gotten along... he'd been there longer than me, and had always been jealous of mother's attention. I had numerous memories of him hissing at me, swatting at me... I'm sure he thought I started it by hitting him and pulling his tail. There was no enmity between us... just an acceptance that we were stuck to each other. Which made it odd when he crawled up onto my lap...

...which he does.

Not looking at me...

...which he doesn't.

I probably said "Hi, Frank." I remember petting him, something odd for us. His fur was always matted, and, as often as not, covered with scabs from his run-ins with other fighting kitties in the neighborhood. He was as rough as always, but I was being less grossed out than usual. I went back to my book... It might have been *Watership Down*. Or *A Wrinkle in Time*. Or maybe I was really reading one of the fantasies that captured my boyhood imagination... pulp horror novels from earlier generations, *The Chronicles of Narnia*... I don't know how long I'd been reading...

Frank lowers his book... and pokes at Frank... again. Horror. He slowly puts his book aside and removes the dead cat from his lap. He pulls away and stares at Frank.

I stared at his lifeless little body. The revulsion passed after a few minutes, replaced by recognition of the finality of the moment. Anyone, even the boy who pulled his tail, was better company than dying alone, and in those final moments, I could actually appreciate his soft side.

Catchy dance music starts playing... and... Frank's dead cat body twitches. Austin stares as he rises, dancing, more and more enthusiastically. The music suddenly stops and the puppet collapses.

I made that last little bit up. Believe it or not, it's how I remember it... but I know it can't have happened. Kids elaborate, and then believe their fantasies, and their magical reality is usually better than our own. The real one... like the one where I just left his little corpse there until mom got home hours later... I hope that's not the real point of the story...

He stares at the puppet again... lights fade.