

# CAT'S MEOW

By Carol Shenold

Louisa Canaday stared at the body littering her floor. She didn't see a man. She saw blood on her cream-colored carpet. Company was due to arrive in less than ten minutes.

She hadn't seen his face before she shot him. All she noticed was the silhouette in the open front door. After the early news had described an intruder who broke down front doors in her neighborhood, she'd taken the old Colt pistol out of the desk and loaded it. When her ex-husband burst through the front door, she naturally used the weapon before trying to identify the man.

What a mess. If only Carter had fallen out the door, not in. Shock and in-action gave way to adrenalin and Louisa ran to the guest bath.

*"No. That won't work. The girls would drink coffee and then use that one."*

Louisa flew to the master bathroom and ripped off the shower curtain. She spun around, raced back to the living room and spread the plastic on the floor next to Carter. She knelt down, easier to say than do in a short skirt and high heels. When she reached over his body to grab the arm farthest from her she let go just as quickly. The arm was warm and sticky with blood. Nausea flooded in.

*Deep breaths, Louisa, deep breaths. If you throw-up on the carpet, it will make everything worse, mix blood and vomit. She could hear her mother's voice, You can do this. You can do anything you have to. Smile. Appearances count.*

That had been her mother's litany when ever Louisa wanted to stop picking cotton, tassling corn, hauling hay or any of the other back breaking things she'd done as a child, to survive.

"Get away," she screamed at the two tabby cats sniffing and chirping around the body.

She took a deep breath. In spite of the wiry muscles hidden under her silk blouse, Louisa struggled to drag the 200 pound body into the coat closet, shove it in and mash the door shut.

She grabbed the welcome mat from the front porch and slammed it on the puddle of blood before she spritzed a couple of spots with carpet cleaner. A car door shut in front of the house and heels clicked on the front walk. Louisa glanced in the mirror to tuck in a stray wisp of red hair and smoothed her lace apron. By the time she opened the door, a large, almost sincere smile plastered her face.

"Mary Anne, darlin', how special to see you, and what a sweet little dress." Her best friend never failed to wear the most inappropriate clothing possible for morning coffee. Today it was a flowing caftan with spiky high heels.

Mary Anne pushed passed her, stopped and gasped. "Louisa, what are your cats doing? Why are they pulling on the closet door?"

Louisa whirled around. Before she could react, one cat worried at the bottom of the closet

door with its paw until the door burst open. The other animal darted in to grab the cuff of Carter's shirt. The fat tabby cat dragged out the bloody arm. Behind her Louisa heard more car doors slam and the tickety-tick of multiple high heels on the walk.

Roaring filled her ears, drowned out the voices. *I could just faint right now. No one would blame me.* But they would, she knew it. She'd broken the unspoken Southern rule, the one that says you keep family secrets hidden, no matter what. Appearances count.

The rest of the ladies chattered away as they hugged Louisa and Mary Anne on their way through the hall to the front parlor, sweeping Mary Anne before them.

Louisa thought maybe a miracle had happened, and no one noticed. Then, Annabelle Courtright stopped and came back.

"Louisa, call me later. I have this great rug cleaner that gets blood right out. It worked wonders when Chance bled all over the carpet. And I think Sue Ellen still has her commercial size meat grinder she used the last time she had to dispose of unwanted meat. Ground it right up. She used him . . . *it* for dog food, but from the looks of it, your cats are right fond of that kind of meat themselves."

I stood with my mouth open for a minute, composed myself and followed. I'd forgotten one of the most important things. We may be catty to each other, but when it comes to men, we Southern women stick together.

---

Carol Shenold is a freelance writer who does medical technical writing, has finished two novels, had three textbooks published and writes a monthly newspaper column. She teaches freelance writing and is the 2ndVP for her state writer's association. After becoming seriously warped by 50's horror comics as a child, she continues to read the genre and loves it. Even her children and grandchildren know how strange she is, neighbors haven't quite figured it out yet, after all, she doesn't really *look* like a witch.