

MEAT BOX

A Buster Brown Misadventure

by Meredith Byrne

“He wasn’t
sorry. The
Trash still
respected
him.”



The kids were off to school and Meredith running errands. The house was too quiet. Buster lay curled in the warm sun patch at the end of the couch, staring dramatically into the middle distance like a dog in an indie film. His people were gone. His nose twitched.

The smell.

It was back.

The meat box.

But this house... this new house... it was built by fridge sadists. The cold paradise of leftovers was now perched too high for even his hopeful haunches, and the freezer - though at a reasonable altitude - was in a drawer. A drawer. Like socks. What kind of monster designed this?

Still, Buster was nothing if not resourceful. He rose slowly, with the groan of many years, and tap tapped to the kitchen. He regarded the fridge like a monk before a mountain.

He would need allies.

"Luna," he coughed softly. "I need your elegance. Your climb. Your opposable thumbs."



Luna, perched on the countertop, didn't move. She was deep into her third hour of modeling practice, neck elongated, paw curled just so. She shot him a glance. "You pass gas in your sleep. And you smell . . . unsanitary. I think not."

Fine. Her loss.

"Artemis," Buster croaked. A canvas grocery tote rustled, and out came the slinky stretch of the house's boy cat, tail flicking in vague enthusiasm. Artemis was always game - until he wasn't. Buster led him to the fridge and pawed at the bottom drawer.

"See this? We open this."

Artemis sniffed. "Cold."

"Yes. Cold meat."

That seemed to register. Artemis sat back, calculating.

Then - a chirp from the screened window.

Bird.

Artemis was gone mid-blink, leaping onto his viewing tower with a chirrup of his own.

"TRAITOR!" Buster barked.

He was alone.



With a theatrical sigh, the conniving canine turned back to the fridge and reared up. Pawed once, twice. Nothing. His claws slid off the smooth, stainless steel. He grumbled. The new house was clearly rigged against him.

But then -

sniff sniff.

His nose never failed him.

Trash.

The family had closed one door but left a lid ajar. It wasn't glamorous, but the scent was promising: something cheese-adjacent and possibly sticky.

He got to work.

The trash can, tucked in a cupboard, had fancied itself secure. But Buster had lived in many houses and cracked tougher defenses. With a strategic nasal nudge and a well-timed body lean, the cupboard jostled –then eased open.

Jackpot.

He rifled through the bag like an archaeologist of snacks past. A half-eaten sandwich, crusts only. The soggy remains of a mozzarella stick. A treasure trove of napkins kissed by something once cheesy. Sloppy seconds, sure, but they whispered of former glory. By the time the front door clicked open, the kitchen was an abstract installation of shame. A postmodern tribute to hunger and opportunism.

Buster froze mid-lick. A bit of paper towel clung to his lip flagging his guilt. Meredith stepped inside, paused, and stared. "Buster, what did you do?" From the hallway, Luna sashayed into view and rubbed her snowy self against Meredith's shin - a tattletale touch with centuries of feline superiority behind it. Artemis followed behind, distracted, meowing the tale of that wonderful bird. He scaled his tower, just in case it returned. Buster did not run. He did not hide. He lay in the wreckage, tail swept under his body in an arc of contrition. His eyes, huge and soulful, locked onto hers. He was sorry. He wasn't sorry. Because he hadn't cracked the fridge. But he mastered the trash. Oh yes. The trash still respected him.