

## **Spaghetti**

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PROSE, HONORABLE MENTION (Grades 7-9)

The place smelled of smoke, the air thick and dry. There she was, laying across the trashed sofa. The sofa had rips and tears, and some of the wood was showing with the padding starting to gather on the cold wood floor. The acrid smell of alcohol radiated off of her. Simon looked at her disappointed.

He entered the room, avoiding glass and kicking the bottles to the side. He crouched down by his gray backpack, once a bright blue, but now the only evidence of color was the navy blue inside. He peered into the front pocket and began taking out the clothes packed tightly enough to begin stretching the fabric, separating it from the rest of the pockets.

At last, the only thing lying in the pocket was a deep brown wallet. The sides were ripped, and the inside of the leather was beginning to show. Inside was \$20--just enough for a one-way trip a few cities out. A driver's license sat on the other side of the wallet, showing the man's figure proudly once, but the man was gone, crossed over with black sharply. In the dim cold house it looked as if it was an endless void, sucking up every ounce of light and transforming it into its own cave of darkness.

He packed back the clothes, hiding the wallet under the clothes, every inch of the leather wallet looking untouched and worn down by age. He grabbed the bag by its less than convenient thin ripped straps and tied the two ends of the strap together. He wiggled the door handle and pulled on the door. The door handle flew out with Simon, and he slammed on the floor, and the door cracked open. He laid the door handle down and opened the door.

The city was big, tall buildings. The world was asleep while the city was full of people, cars and lights. As he was walking about the sidewalk, a little calico cat popped out of a nearby alleyway. The cat stared at him and began to rub against his leg. The cat was so close Simon nearly tripped on the brown and white cat. He violently shoved the cat to the side. The cat began to look at the garbage bin expectantly.

“What do you want? I don't have anything! Go away, you dirty stray.”

He began to walk away but stopped. He walked up to the trash and looked into it. A dead mouse lay there deceased, its tail nearly falling off, and was surrounded by flies ripping off the bloody flesh and matted fur. He picked up the mouse and began to dangle it in front of the cat. The cat started to claw and jump up at the mouse, but Simon darted it out of the way just in the nick of time. The cat began to look at him unpleased with its deep brown eyes. He tossed the mouse on the ground and continued walking.

The grocery store was big and looked like a house on the outside with a green stripe going along the outside. A sign was posted in grand letters: Garry's Grocery Market. Simon walked along the back until he reached the big sliding doors. He walked in and looked up and down the aisles and grabbed some chicken soup and a big loaf of bread and began to walk to the door when he saw something. A small kid, maybe seven years of age, shopping with his mom. The kid was trying on a striped t-shirt with a blue stripe along its green sleeves. The kid turned around and shot his hands in the air with a "ta-da!" The mother clapped and walked up to the kid laughing. The kid walked back into the dressing room, and the mom sat there waiting.

A tear fell from his eye, the salty water drying into his dry skin making his cheek sting. He walked up to the clothing, grabbed one of the green striped shirts. He popped the garment onto his head and guided his neck into the neck hole. It fit largely over his frail body, his ribs sticking out--an elephant under a rug. He walked away, trying not to stare back at the mother waiting outside the changing room.

He stuck to the side away from the cash register and booked it out the door. A cashier noticed him and began to run after him. The alarm next to the door began to beep, and now there were at least two cashiers and a cop running after him. He sprinted across the street trying to dodge cars as they honked at him furiously. The cashiers stopped, and the police officer halted the cars and began to run after him.

Simon turned the corner and booked it into an alleyway and into a dumpster next to an Italian restaurant. The cop ran by him, and Simon stayed quiet as a mouse. He set the items down and got comfortable. When he heard the back door of the restaurant open, he stopped and stayed low. A light meow echoed across the dark alleyway. An employee shoved the cat aside and threw a trash bag of pasta into the dumpster just far enough away to not see Simon.

The door closed and a calico cat jumped up onto the dumpster and rubbed against him. The cat began to purr a soft melody and rubbed up against his brand-new shirt. He lifted his arm and guided the cat under his palm. The cat purred louder and began to stare at the bag and then back to him as if asking if he could have some. Simon ripped open the bag and found warm pasta mixed with a sizzling pasta sauce.

The cat began licking away the sauce and nibbling at the pasta. Simon took a handful and dangled it in his mouth. The pasta was soft and well-cooked, the sauce flavoring the pasta with a sweet tomato taste. The kitten's ribs were showing through his fur. His fur was matted, and he smelled of sewer water and mice.

“What's your name, bud?”

The cat meowed as if he was trying to respond.

“Let's see. Paws?”

The cat growled looking at the trash-filled floor.

"Let's see... Mittens?”

The cat jumped up on the edge of the dumpster. Simon hopped out and shook off the dirt and mud from his shoes. The calico cat jumped in a puddle gathered in a pothole, the water splashing on the cat's tail, before wiggling it off. His fur was sticking up everywhere until the cat affectionately rubbed against Simon's leg.

Simon began to walk up the street, but the calico stayed there.

“Come on. Don't worry, we'll find someplace warm.” Grabbing his backpack, “I'm not going back there.”

The sign of the restaurant shimmered in the light of the rising sun. People began coming in, and people were sitting down eating their pasta. He started up again walking. He knew he couldn't go back, not with the stray around. How long could he live like this anyways? He looked back at the sign and then back down to the calico cat.

“Come on, Spaghetti.”

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