

NEGOTIATIONS by David Duffner

Synopsis - Female mouse tries to convince male cat to stop most of its hunting. It does not go well for either party.

Cast - **Lucifer the cat** (may be played by offstage voice);

Mouse - an older, mid-level executive mouse whose name is never given although she is referred to as Cinderella;

Darwin - an upper level executive mouse(Darwin has no lines and could be played by the first actress with a quick costume change.

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Two giant cat paws gently play with a mouse he has captured. The mouse should be dressed as a female office bureaucrat. The play gets a bit rougher and the mouse easily avoids the mouse's mauling. At last the cat gives up and rests its paws.

Cat (offstage) Every once in a while, I got an urge to hunt mice. The urge generally came in the late summer, and, most of the time, I just toyed with them, then bit through their neck, and left them neatly where my masters(their term, not mine) could find them. There is a small garden and also a field adjacent to the house, so catching a mouse was no trouble at all. Mice are an acquired taste. I have eaten them, but they don't measure up to the quality food I am served every day. Then one day I caught a mouse whose behavior was quite unusual. She went limp immediately, and when I lay down and dropped her between my front paws. I began to bat her gently, but, instead of trying to escape, she trotted to the end of the leg, turned around and rested her front two legs right on my claws. I tried to tear at her with my claws, but she deftly jumped from one side to the other with a minimum of effort. So I stopped and the mouse resumed resting on the paw.

Mouse - Well?

C - "I think I'm going to eat you."

M - "All in good time my good cat, all in good time. I'm sure you're aware that frightening me tenderizes my flesh, but I have been chosen for this task because I do not frighten easily."

C - "Chosen? I caught you."

M - "So you say. My good - would you mind telling me your name? I feel the need to communicate on a more intimate basis."

C - " Surely you can smell the saliva that will be the gravy for my entree. My name, my name is Lucifer!"

M - "Lucifer did you say? Lucifer!" Mouse collapses, rolling on her back laughing. Then, still chuckling, she again lay her mousey elbows on the cat's paw. "Lucifer, we know you! We put the kids to sleep telling stories about you! I learned those stories from my parents! How many

times have you fallen asleep on the bureau, and then rolled off to crash on the floor? Fought with your own reflection? Run into the sliding glass door? And we are thankful for your almost daily upchuck which provides us with a snack as we run about the house. I realize that now is not the time and place, but I would love to see that 'three steps and forget where you're going' routine. To have met you personally, well!"

C - "It's too bad you'll never get to tell your friends. Do you have a name?"

M - "Has any other mouse told you its name? Let me answer my own question - No. Mice do not, as a rule, reveal their own names outside the species. I work for another mouse, my sister, whom I fear more than I fear you. I'm authorized to tell you her name, it's Darwin. I am rather like Cinderella and she is like ... well, this is our position - Our nation has become unhappy with these annual festivals of gratuitous mouse-killing, and we want it to stop. We understand your need to hunt, my good cat, and, frankly, feeding you the occasional miscreant of our society has been a benefit to us. But this genocide in the Autumn will not continue."

C - "Cinderella, midnight is fast approaching."

M - "If you need to believe that, if it is crucial to your sense of self-esteem, fine. But I can tell you that I appear before you to renegotiate our deal. You will kill no more than four mice a year, and none during the months of August, September, and October."

C - "I will kill whenever I like. I will do whatever I like. Now I know I'm going to eat you!!"

M- "Harvest time is special for us." Then mouse paused for a moment. "You know, actions have consequences. For instance, you think you are being a good little kitty bringing mousey treasures to your soi-disant masters, but they are both disgusted by them. And we have heard your masters' almost unending complaints about the hair everywhere, your untidy litter box, and the need for regular, and futile, rug and furniture cleaning. We mice can sympathize with you, Lucifer. We too hate the smell of a clean rug, and furniture often contains the choicest crumbs. You are closer to a quick exit than you might think."

C - "Why haven't I heard these complaints?"

M - "Sleeping. And they know that you don't handle criticism well."

C - "That isn't true.

M - "Lucifer..."

C - "Do the male mice always send women to do their negotiating?"

The mouse takes in the insult.

M - "Lucifer, men do not make decisions of real importance in any species. As far as 'sending' is concerned how many times have you been sent off to procure mice for your female companion? It's over 20, I believe. And you have returned with three voles. Pantomimes of your failed hunting technique and subsequent chagrin are also part of the children's bedtime entertainment."

C - "Now, you're starting to make me feel bad."

M - "Lucifer. If I do not return, or if I return and you violate our terms, we are prepared to occupy your residence. You will not catch one of us, and the so-called masters will never be more than 10 minutes between sightings. Believe me, after three days, their imaginations will do most of the work for us. By the New Year they will put this house on the market, by Spring it will be sold, at a loss, and you, my good cat, will be returned to the shelter and, shortly after euthanized. You do know the meaning of the word?"

C - "I do. You're bluffing"

M - "Eat me now."

C - "Oh I intend to relish every morsel."

M - "But know that housecats are not loved, neither by dogs, nor by the wild animal community."

C - "Should we care?"

M - "Yes. If I do not return with your complete assent, a group of feral cats will drive your mother, the less-than-saintly Delilah, into the woods and make her their love slave. Your half-brothers and sisters will have humped backs and extra toes. Your brother Beelzabub will be driven into traffic by a pack of dogs, and your sister Roseanne's new kittens -you didn't know? - will have their eyes plucked out by crows. My sister did not choose, for obvious reasons, to share your fate with me. By all means eat me, because if I return without your assent, all these things will happen, and my personal torture will be far worse than a quick severing of the spine."

C - "And so I ate her." The mouse allows herself to be cuffed down and dragged, unstruggling, from the stage. During the speech, the two now bloodied paws reemerge. As the speech continues, the paws turn sideways. and twitch in pain. "The single kill did not assuage the anger or the insult, and I was driven to kill and consume a mouse daily. By the fourth day, I began to slow and feel pain. The poison contained within the mice had done its work. I crawled to a dark corner of the house to die, slowly and painfully alone. I fell on my side, my panting increased, and I could not move." A female mouse, Darwin, dressed in higher status than the first mouse, emerges from the wings and looks at the paws. The twitching stops." For the last few moments, I was kept company by a mouse who said nothing, but seemed well-satisfied with her work."