

Cat-Shaped Hole

By Holly Lisle



Spenser

On Friday, February 13, 2009, at about 4:30pm, our cat Spenser died.

We named Spenser not after the poet, but after Robert B. Parker's best character, the detective Spenser. And he lived up to the name, and gave it an honor all his own.

Spenser spent 13+ years of his life as a lean, energetic, charming, friendly, trusting and faithful friend.

He was the galloping anti-gravity cat who loved to charge through the house at top speed, leap to the back of a couch or chair, hover there briefly, and then gallop off.

He was the loud alarm clock yowling through the door on weekend mornings that it was time we got UP.

He was the loudly-purring buddy who sat on the back of my chair and pulled at my hair or nibbled at my left earlobe or just stood with his front paws on my shoulder, watching the computer screen while I typed, keeping me company through every book from **Glenraven** through **The Silver Door**.

He was the cat who sat on our kid's lap while he did his school work, who would occasionally bat at his pen while he was writing, but who mostly just kept the kid company through

years of math and science and history and grammar.

He was the cherry thief, leaping away from the bowl full of cherries with a stem and cherry dangling from his mouth, delighted that he'd found a new, bright red toy, determined to hang onto it and his dignity while we laughed.

He was the stalker of string, the comforter of crying people, the sharer of naps, the endlessly annoying starter of mock-fights with our other cats because he wanted to play and they were lazy.

He was the guy who never scratched, never hissed, never bit, never had a bad day.

He loved life, and his exuberance was boundless and infectious.

He had the most vibrant personality of any cat I have ever known; he was the only larger-than-life character I have known in catdom. Knowing him was a privilege, and his personality imbued The Cat in both **The Ruby Key** and **The Silver Door** with the truth that has made The Cat the strong front-runner for favorite character in most of the fan mail I've received from those two books.

On January 25th, while my older son was home over the weekend from the Air Force, he was roughhousing with Spenser, and Spenser suddenly hissed at him. We were shocked, but I told my son the cat had been a little out of sorts for the past couple of days—that I'd palpated his abdomen for lumps or calcifications, that it hadn't been tender, that he'd been eating and drinking just fine, but that he'd been sleeping more than usual.

On the 26th, while he was sitting on my lap ignoring the yarn I was knitting up (for the past couple of years, he would sit on my lap intently NOT looking at the yarn—except for an occasional peek over his shoulder that would set his tail

twitching, because I got mad at him if he chewed on it or tried to steal it), I saw him glance at the yarn, then turn resolutely away...while his tail twitched. And I laughed, and petted him, and told him he was a good boy. And scratched under his chin.

That was when I found the lump on the left side of his jaw...a hard, round, nodular, non-mobile, non-palpable growth about the size of a large grape. Treatment would have been radiation and the removal of the left side of his jaw and much of his face, and treatment would not cure him. It would only buy him a few months, maybe a year, of living in an incomprehensible hell of pain and struggle. He would not have been able to understand that we had done that to save his life. He would only know that we had done it.

We decided our friend deserved better.

The progression of the tumor was brutal and swift. He managed to eat until Wednesday, February 11th, when he refused food. On Thursday, he refused water as well. I tried him on food mixed with water on Friday morning, but he refused again. By that time, he was bleeding from the mouth intermittently, he had lost a lot of weight, and the tumor filled the space under his tongue, making it hard for him to swallow. While he still purred when we pet him, and still hung out with us and climbed on our laps, it was time.

The kid and I said our goodbyes at the door. Matt took him the last mile alone. Spenser walked confidently out of the cat carrier onto the table, purred when the vet and the assistant met him, got his shot, and went to sleep.

His absence leaves a cat-shaped hole in our lives; he was unique in my experience with cats—and I've had at least one cat since I was twenty-one years old. There won't be any more cats to try to replace him. He was irreplaceable. Any other cat would simply be "not him."

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