

# MADDER THAN A WET CAT



When Eugene dropped by Fred's place, Fred was splitting wood, sweating heavily as he drove the splitting axe into a beech log. "Fred, it's a pretty hot day to be working at that stove wood, isn't it?" Eugene observed.

"Well", said Fred, "I admit that it is. Trouble is, if I go into the house or sit on the porch I'm close to Muriel. She's some spleeny today, and it's risky to be near her. And, you know, the annoying part is that she's mad at me because I'm a bit deaf. Not because I got into the rum. Not because I didn't wash the windows yet. Not because of a hundred things that I might have done, but because she thinks I'm not as deaf as I am."

"There has to be a story here, Fred, and if you'd spare a coffee, I'd be all ears."

"Coffee means going in to the kitchen, Eugene. I'd sooner poke a wolverine with a stick than do that. I have a couple of beers in shed here, if you want."

The beer bottles were dusty, with strings of cobwebs clinging to them, but they were cool and didn't taste skunky. "I'm doing you a favour, Fred. If you left these out here they'd freeze in the fall. You get the diarrhea in the worst way from drinking beer that's been froze."

"Don't congratulate yourself too much for drinking my beer. The way things are with Muriel, I may have to sleep out here. That beer you're sucking on might look pretty good around ten o'clock tonight.

"See, it started with that doggone wild cat Muriel was feeding last winter. It disappeared for a long while, but a few months ago it showed up again with four kittens. Muriel may be awful hard on me, but by Ned's, she's got a wicked soft spot for kittens. We caught the kittens, and I had to spend a bunch of change for Old Hurley, the Vet, to fix 'em.

Muriel found homes for three of them, but we had to keep one kitten."

"I like your beer Fred, but where's this going? I can't see that this has anything to do with your being deaf."

"I didn't know there was a fire. Just set the beer down and be on your way, Eugene. I wouldn't want to delay a busy man by telling the whole story. Jeez."

"Muriel's not the only one who's a little owly today. Settle down and go on with this story, if it's got an end."

"Well, OK, so Muriel's got this kitten and it's the living proof that curiosity killed the cat. That darn cat's into everything. I was upstairs watching the curling on TV when Muriel heard the cat crying in the basement. She went on down there, and that doggone cat had got into the cistern.

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