

A Sip...



A Torquere Press Short

Chew Toy
By Julia Talbot

"Here, kitty, kitty. I brought you a new chew toy!"

The man shoved Jack into a ten by ten cage like he was pushing meat into a badger's den. Shove and lock and run. He stumbled forward a few feet and landed on one knee, coming up nose to whiskers with a sleeping cat.

This was not your average house kitty, and it wasn't some half-tame ocelot or something else fairly small. Nope. Even in the gloom, Jack could see he was up against a full-sized white tiger.

Chew toy. God save him from former KGB agents who owned stock in some fly-by-night circus somewhere in the Ukraine. Man, he missed the days when people found out you were a CIA agent and just shot you. The Russians always had to be so creative.

Was being eaten by a hungry tiger better than being buried under two tons of concrete or being shredded in a wood-chipper?

The cat opened one eye and pondered him in the way of a very lazy predator. The tiger surveyed him thoroughly, then yawned, showing a set of teeth that made Jack recoil, his back pressing against the steel bars.

"Enjoy your last meal, Agent Calloway!"

Piotor ran after that, and Jack figured he was glad that the fat, perfumed uncle hadn't stayed around to watch. Shit, did that make him old, that he could remember why KGB agents were called that whole smelly and avuncular nickname? Maybe it just made him old-fashioned.

Jack kept a wary eye on the tiger, who didn't seem too interested, thankfully, and moved along the cage door, checking out the locking mechanism (automatic) and the hinges (just rusty enough to make it a problem).

Damn it.

"It won't work, you know. If I can't get out of here, neither can you."

He froze, completely unable to believe he'd forgotten he wasn't alone. Then it occurred to him that tigers couldn't talk, and that meant there had to be someone else in there with him.

"Who are you? Another meal?" Turning slowly, hands up, Jack stared. Hard. His mouth dropped open.

The tiger wasn't there anymore. Instead, there was a guy. He looked Eurasian, with Slavic cheekbones and slanted, almond-shaped eyes. The eyes were stunning, an amazing golden green. They looked... cat-like.

Which was the biggest steaming pile of horseshit a man could think at a time like this.

"No. I believe you are supposed to be my meal. Lucky for you, the youngest of the apprentice clowns has been slipping me red meat."

The accent put the man somewhere not big city and probably not somewhere Ukraine, but obviously from what used to be the Soviet Union. That could be a lot of places, but this guy sounded like he was from someplace... wild. Uncivilized, for all that he spoke good English.

"You some kind of magician? What did you do with the cat?"

There was no way that the man in front of him was... had been... Had vaguely striped skin. No way.

"I think you know." Rolling up to his knees, the guy stretched hugely. "They forget that this cage is big enough for a man. They think it is a torture to me."

"It would be for me." The back of his neck was starting to itch, the creeping warmth of panic starting to slide along his spine. "I don't like bars."

"You have spent time in prison." It wasn't a question. More like a casual observation, easily dismissed.

"In Afghanistan." Jesus. This was. Crazier than a crazy Ivan.

"Well, as I said. If I cannot get out, I cannot see how you could." The guy tilted his head. "You are welcome to try, if you have spy tricks."

"Spy..." Ah. So Pioter had set him up with this weirdo to see if he would give out any information. Figured. "Nope. I'm fresh out."

"Too bad. A small amount of explosive in your shoe would have been nice."

Jack stared. "That kind of thing only happens in the movies."

"Well, naturally. All I know of spies comes from the movies." The man waved one hand languidly, and Jack peered out the back of the cage where a small cart sat bearing a TV and DVD player. "If I eat you, I will be able to see the latest Bourne movie. Pioter likes those."

Nodding, Jack grinned. "I'm a Ludlum fan myself." Wait. What the hell was he doing? "You can't eat me."

"Why not? You would not be easy to overcome, but you cannot run."

"You're insane." His fingers scrabbled at the bars behind him, his back pressing against them again. Jack hadn't even realized he'd moved.

"That is distinctly possible. I have been in a cage many years." The man shrugged, muscles sliding easily under that weird skin. "That doesn't mean I don't need to eat."

"Sure. Sure. I get that." Humor the lunatic, Jack. He grinned, one hand out in a placating gesture. "Look, why not give me half an hour to try and get out of this cage. If I fail, you can eat me."

"I suppose I can do that. What is your first name, spy who is named Calloway?"

"Jack." He was back to fiddling with the cage door, searching for weaknesses he could explore, now that the threat of imminent attack was mitigated. Eat him, for god's sake. Wasn't gonna happen.

"Jack. This is what many American spies are called in movies. Why is that, do you think?"

"Nickname of John. Popular name for dead presidents, spies and insurance guys."

"Ah. My name is also a nickname."

He waited, finally turning to peer over his shoulder. "Which is?"

"Pasha. It is like um... your Paul, huh?"

"Right. From Pavel." He knew all about the weird convention of Russian names. He'd studied the language, culture, and political system in a total immersion school. Oh, sure, the cold war had been mostly over by the time he graduated college, but Russia had still been a huge concern.

"Yes! How very smart you are for an American."

Jack resisted the urge to flip Pasha the bird, concentrating on the hinges instead. Man, all he needed as something metal with a flat edge.

"I don't suppose they ever give you real chew toys."

"Huh? No. I have a food bowl, but I believe it is some sort of silicone bakeware."

Damn. That figured. Jack scoured his pockets, hoping for even the cap off a ballpoint pen. They hadn't even left him his boots.

"When will the boy come and give you meat?"

"Not until tomorrow, at the earliest. He will not want to see the, erm, aftermath."

"Damn." This whole man who thought he was a cat illusionist thing was getting inconvenient. "Well, any time you're ready to do your kitty illusion again, I have an idea."

"Illusion?" A soft laugh sent shivers up and down Jack's spine. "Very well."

He didn't want to look. He really didn't. The soft sounds were too much for him, though, and Jack glanced back over his shoulder just in time to see the last of Pasha's features shimmer and disappear behind an impressive set of whiskers.

"Damn."

Pasha the cat stood up and stalked over to him, yawning and showing off just as impressive teeth. Without his permission, his hand reached out, his fingers touching one fuzzy ear, which was as real as anything Jack had ever touched.

"Some damned illusion," he muttered, right before his knees buckled, and he passed out.

Jack woke up feeling like someone was tickling his feet with a wet feather.

A very slobbery, solid feather.

He jerked, the sole of his foot connecting with something hard under a layer of fuzz. A low growl warned him that kicking again would be a very bad idea, and Jack opened his eyes to see a white tiger, ears flattened and teeth bared.

He flapped a hand. "Sorry, Pasha. You kinda scared me. Only my golden retriever licks my feet."

Somehow, the idea that he was talking to a tiger like it could understand him made a little piece of his mind curl up in the corner and jibber. What the hell was wrong with him? Maybe Pioter had hit his head and he was in LaLa Land or something. That was the only explanation. He didn't do drugs, and where was Pasha gonna hide a syringe on that naked body?

Pasha rubbed a soft, soft cheek against his legs, this puff-puff sound coming from the cat. What did they call it? Chuffing? Man, that was a Wild Kingdom memory from childhood.

Did that mean he was being laughed at?

"Will your feeder kid be nearby?" Jack asked, still feeling like he was losing it.

The big head nodded, just like it really was Pasha and he understood.

Jack rolled to a sitting position. "Act sick."

Pasha the cat lay down and rolled to his back, tongue lolling out of his mouth, paws bent to his chest.

"I said sick, not dorky."

Those gold-green eyes blinked at him, then Pasha rolled to one side, stretching out and looking pathetic.

"Oh, good deal." Jack stood, testing his muscles one by one to make sure they still worked. He had no idea how long he'd been laid out on the floor, and he needed to test the systems. "You just hang out like that."

Banging on the bars as much as he could with his bare hands, Jack started hollering his head off in Russian, which was a satisfying language to shout in, for sure. "Hey! Oy! I think your tiger is sick! He's not eating me! Pioter! Come on, you fucking coward! Face me like a man."

It took forever. Like maybe twenty minutes. Jack was about to give up, and Pasha had given over to paroxysm of kittenish leg kicking and chuffing. Then he heard boots ringing on concrete.

"Pipe down," he told Pasha. "Someone's coming."

Pasha immediately rolled back to his side, stretching out, somehow affecting a pained expression.

How a tiger could look pained when he really wasn't was beyond Jack, but then so was the idea that the damned cat understood a word he was saying.

"What have you done to my tiger?" A young man with white-blond hair and pale blue eyes appeared from a back hallway, and Jack almost felt sorry for him. This had to be the kid that took care of Pasha, and he was about to get screwed.

"He just fell over, man. I don't know what's wrong with him."

"Pasha? Pasha!" Keys jangled, and the kid unlocked the door, obviously ready to rush to the rescue.

Jack was about to clasp his hands together and whack the kid on the back of the neck as he rushed by, but a blur of movement from Pasha stopped him and the kid in their tracks. A high, thin scream came from the kid, and the thud when his back hit the floor sounded loud as all hell.

The scream cut off, leaving nothing but the sound of Jack's breathing and the scrape of the kid's fingers on the cage floor. Pasha bent and closed his huge teeth around the kid's throat, gentle as you please, then shook the kid the tiniest bit.

Even Jack got the message. Hush and thank you, and that little rubbing of Pasha's cheek on the kid's had to mean goodbye.

The kid smiled a little, and reached up to stroke Pasha's ears. "Good luck, my friend."

Pasha chuffed one more time, rubbing noses with the kid, then bounded to the cage door, looking at Jack expectantly.

Right. Time to hit the road. That had been way easier than he'd expected. Jack could only hope it wasn't a set up.

“You know, it’s gonna be tough to get through the border with no papers on you as a human, let alone a tiger.” Jack knew he might as well be talking to himself. Pasha had never made a move to change back to a human, and Jack had just about decided it wasn’t going to happen, that he’d hallucinated that part.

Pasha just padded along in front of him, tail held high, occasionally snapping up a mouse or whatever. They’d hid out not far from the circus compound until dark, and now Jack was depending on Pasha’s acute senses to keep them going in the right direction.

Of course, Jack was getting so tired that he was stumbling. And he was rambling. A lot.

“What the hell am I talking to you for, anyway? You’re not even making an effort to keep me company.”

Pasha stopped and turned, eyes glowing bright in the sullen moonlight. Then he shimmered, just like a mirage or something, shrinking, becoming very human in his outline. “Is this better? I am naked this way. I did not think that would be acceptable.”

“Well, it is to me.” Striped skin or no, Jack could appreciate a naked guy who looked as hot as Pasha.

“I see.” That shaggy head tilted. “You are tired. We should stop for the night.”

“I can’t.” Jack looked around, feeling a little helpless. “Where?”

“There is a little free-standing building, just over the rise. Come. I forget how tiring it is to walk on two legs.” Pasha came back for him, looping an arm around his waist to help hold his weight.

It had been a long couple of days. That was his only excuse. Jack was asleep on his feet before they’d gone ten yards.

Hopefully there really was a building. Otherwise he was well and truly fucked.

When he woke up the next time, Jack felt rested and alert in ways he hadn’t in weeks. He’d had his first good night’s sleep since he’d started this damned assignment, and he was warm, curled up against a hard, male ass. Looked like he’d rewarded himself for his escape with a little companionship.

It wasn’t until he bedmate started gnawing on his neck that Jack remembered the whole crazy tiger thing.

“What are you doing?” he whispered, hoping to hell Pasha hadn’t decided to eat him after all.

“Just having a nibble of my chew toy,” Pasha murmured, licking just under Jack’s ear.

“Your ch... very funny.”

“Have I made a joke? You were given to me, and I helped you escape the man who wanted to hurt you. I think I have a right to stake a claim.” Pasha stared at him, those greenish-gold eyes serious as a heart attack.

“I. You. Whoa! Whoa, whoa, whoa. What are you doing?”

It was a stupid question, because it was perfectly obvious that Pasha was reaching down between Jack’s legs, feeling him up. Getting him up.

“I desire you. I feel very alive and wish to celebrate it. Is this bad?”

“N-no.” No. It wasn’t bad at all. Pasha’s hand moved up and down, stroking him, and Jack thought it was very good. Better than anything had been in a long time. Maybe since his first Russian, who has been a beautiful boy of twenty-two, all black hair and blue eyes.

“You are thinking too much.” Leaning in, Pasha kissed his mouth, and Jack’s first thought was ew, mouse breath, but all he tasted was mint. Mint? Huh. Then he wasn’t thinking, because if that touch on his cock was hot, Pasha’s kiss was like setting off an incendiary device.

Moaning Jack pushed into the kiss, his tongue thrusting into Pasha’s mouth. Hot, wet, the kiss pushed him to the very edge of control in no time. He started touching that smooth, beautiful skin, palms rubbing up and down Pasha’s back.

“Da. Yes. Touch me.” It was shocking, how warm Pasha was, how needy. Pasha’s thick cock rose against Jack’s belly, prodding him, and suddenly they were grappling, rolling back and forth, biting at each other, scratching and pulling.

Pasha was feral, leaving marks on his skin, making Jack grunt and push for more. Finally, Jack just fought to get turned and put his mouth over Pasha’s cock, his cock slapping Pasha’s chin.

His tiger got the message, licking at him, not using those sharp teeth here. They both got to sucking, got a rhythm going, and Jack couldn’t help but notice how luxurious those pubes were, how heavy Pasha’s balls felt under his fingers.

They rocked, both of them panting, both of them beginning to sweat despite the cool of the night. Jack felt the pull of every lick and tug in his balls, and when Pasha slid all the way down and swallowed, Jack came, his whole body shaking with it over and over.

Before he knew it, Pasha was filling his mouth with hot come, and Jack was swallowing, having the fleeting thought that he sure was glad Pasha’s anatomy was different as a man than it was as a cat.

He rested his head on Pasha's thigh, making a happy noise. Damn, if this was what it meant to be a chew toy, they could sign him up full time.

"Are you well, Jack?" Pasha stroked his hair, chuffing a little, just like he did as a cat.

"I am. Tell me something."

"Mmmhmm?"

"Why didn't you ever escape? I mean, the kid had a key."

"I did not know he did. He had never come into the cage before. I suppose it took you to be the catalyst."

"Cat-a-lyst. Get it?" Hooting, Jack pulled at the hair on Pasha's thigh.

"You are a very strange man."

"Uh-huh. So I guess I saved your life, too, huh?"

"I suppose you did." Now Pasha sounded amused. Squinting, Jack peered up at him.

"So you belong to me, too? Or does that cancel each other out?"

"I think we can safely say that it works both ways. It only cancels out if we want it to."

Was Pasha holding his breath? Jack kind of understood. The answer was oddly important to him, too. "We make a pretty good time. I guess I can stand to drag you along with me."

"Oh. Well, that is fine with me."

"Good." He grinned a little, patting the back of Pasha's neck. "Still don't know how I'm going to get you across the border."

Pasha just laughed, the sound rough as a cough, but full of fur and whiskers. "Well, you could start with finding me some clothes."

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Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Sips electronic edition / March 2009

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680