Strange that things should have happened to Per Drosselkvist the way they did. That he of all people, a man who throughout his life had been so sensible and well balanced, should be destined to battle with circumstances to such an extent, was something most people had not expected. And yet, on second thoughts, one realizes that most happenings have quite a natural explanation.

Originally, Per Drosselkvist had been a painter. Not an artist, no, just a sensible, earth-bound artisan who painted railings and house fronts and whitewashed ceilings.

So far so good; he would undoubtedly have been able to live in comfort and security with his wife and children till the end of his days and would have obtained a posthumous reputation in no way different from that of all other inoffensive people. True, he and his wife are reconciled, but nevertheless . . . . Well, I'd better tell the story.

As I said, Per Drosselkvist was all right. But there was, I'm sorry to say, a "but." He had a vein. Not a savage, turbulent vein of the kind that produces men of genius or lunatics, but an honest and modest little vein which enabled him to write short stories such as people usually like to read.

At first, only small and unimportant newspapers accepted his harmless products, and he didn't make a fortune by his writing—oh no! But things improved, he acquired routine, and eventually things went so well that he put away his paint pots, bought himself a canary-yellow pullover, let his beard grow, and became what is called a writer of short stories. Not among the elect was he, but one of the honest and unpretentious ones who, through industry and perseverance and an effectively economical mode of living, can maintain a tolerable existence even if the coat is a bit worn and the Sunday dinner consists of hamburgers.

This was his position when he gave birth to the short story "Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat."

Wife and children thrived, the rent was paid when due, taxes were in order,
no pawn tickets in his wallet. He himself sat at his desk composing short stories to his and his readers' hearts' content.

*Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat*—which, as a matter of fact, was only a whimsical impulse resulting from an evening when Per Drosselkvist had been to a birthday party at his brother-in-law's and which, as a mental product, ranked far above the level of his usual output—always returned from the newspapers he used to supply with short stories. When the postman rang the bell in the morning while the whole family was sitting around the well-spread breakfast table, Papa Drosselkvist would jestingly exclaim:

“There is that cat again! Miaow, Miaow!”

And the kids would roar with laughter, while Mother smiled gently and serenely; for she knew that, even if that cat story was a mistake, Papa's writings were not so bad on the whole. Thank Heaven, there was no need to worry . . . .

“Miaow, Miaow! Yes, indeed, it was the dear little cat coming back to us again,” joked Per Drosselkvist when he entered the room with a big yellow envelope in his hand, and they laughed again all around the table.

Then the children went off to school with their books and sandwiches, Mrs. Drosselkvist set about washing dishes, and Per threw himself into a brand-new short story, something about the Arctic, which promised to turn out a thrill, for Per had read several descriptions of the countries up there in the north and knew a lot about cold, hunger, polar bears, forestry, arctic storms, and all the other ingredients of daily life in those latitudes.

One day as the wandering cat—you know, Per Drosselkvist's ill-omened short story—had returned once more to its birthplace, Per said to his wife:

“Now the cat is going on an important visit, Mary.” She looked at him a little sourly:

“You and your pussycat! You had better stop all that waste of stamps. After all, it's plain that nobody wants it.” But he didn't let himself be talked out of it.

“This time it's going to the most distinguished magazine in the country!” And Per Drosselkvist mentioned the pretentious name with a slightly trembling voice.

“But you never sent them anything before,” Mrs. Drosselkvist objected, shaking her head.

“No, I've never dared climb that high before,” answered Per modestly. “But now, upon my word, they are going to have 'Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat'!”

No matter how much Per Drosselkvist miaowed while the postman rang the bell during the next few days—Pussy didn't come back. The kids stopped being amused at Papa playing cat, and Mrs. Drosselkvist fretted in annoyance.

“Now that about the cat isn't funny any more, Per!”

But one morning he came rushing into the living room completely out of his mind.

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“Now that about the cat isn't funny any more, Per!”

But one morning he came rushing into the living room completely out of his mind. The hair bristled on his head, and his eyes glazed as if he were seeing ghosts.

“They have accepted it!” he cried. “They've accepted 'Miaow, Miaow, Pussykat'! Here, have a look at what they write! It's unbelievable!”
And with trembling hands he placed a typewritten sheet before his wife and the children crowding around her. It read:

Mr. Per Drosselkvist,

Dear Sir,

Apologizing for not having replied earlier concerning your short story "Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat," we hereby have pleasure in informing you that we shall be delighted to accept your excellent work for publication. We should appreciate it if you could spare the time to pay us a visit at your earliest convenience, in order that we may discuss the possibilities for a closer collaboration.

Yours faithfully,

"Well!" asked Per Drosselkvist in supreme happiness, "perhaps you'll allow me to miaow now?"

* * *

The story proved a colossal, yes, quite incredible success. The very day after it had been published, it conquered the whole country. It fairly created a psychosis.

"Have you read 'Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat'?" people asked each other, and then they laughed until they were on the verge of swooning. Really, Per Drosselkvist was the hero of the day.

Incidentally, it wasn't just a fame of a few days and then finish. "The Pussy-cat" had nine times nine lives; it soon became quite a popular saying among jolly people. Variations of the theme of the story were made, and when Per Drosselkvist sauntered down the street, people would turn around and say: "Look, there's the man who wrote 'Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat,' the new Mark Twain!"

The biggest newspapers made him offers, but Per decided to remain loyal to the magazine which had given him his great chance as well as the renown which, by the way, he bore very modestly.

He had already sent in his next short story and immediately, without even the Editor's perusal, been paid an ample check.

When one day—quite casually over a glass of port wine and a good cigar—he wrested a confidential critique of his new opus from the Editor, the latter said:

"Excellent! Really excellent! Of course! But . . . if you really want to know my innermost, personal opinion, Mr. Drosselkvist . . . well, then I'll have to admit that it isn't quite up to the standard of 'Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat.'"

Unfortunately, the readers seemed to be of the same opinion. The story sank into the empty spaces of oblivion without leaving a single trace. Nobody talked about it. But then the jokes about "Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat" were still going around, gradually becoming just as annoying as revue songs which you can't kill off.

As if inadvertently, the Editor forgot to pay for Per's next story, and a few days later the postman brought a large envelope containing the manuscript and a letter from the Editor saying that he wouldn't mind if Per Drosselkvist sold this short story—which was perfectly good, only quite different in style from the "Miaow Miaow" story—to another magazine. It would be best for both parties if the same style were maintained, etc., etc.

"Well, well, I must say," thought Per Drosselkvist, in pained surprise. "But that's all right, we'll pick out another paper."

The outcome of this next approach soon manifested itself.

It had been a pleasure to read his story, but unfortunately the Editor had so many short stories of the same type
on hand that he had enough material to last him far into the future. If, however, he would write something in keeping with the story "Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat," the Editor would be very pleased to . . .

And so it went on.

The cat pursued him. It turned into a gruesome, bloodthirsty beast lurking for him everywhere. R-r-r-r! There it was again! I'm sorry, Mr. Drosselkvist, but since you have been able to write a short story like "Miaow, Miaow, Pussycat," the peculiar product you've sent us is almost an offense . . .

"But why on earth don't you write the kind of stuff they want?" his wife complained. "Instead of cooking up something they won't even touch! But your success with that cat story has gone to your head, that's what's wrong with you."

"Shut up, Mary!" Per thundered in rage. "You're talking about things you don't know anything about."

"That's possible," Mrs. Drosselkvist retorted belligerently. "But there's one thing I do know, and that is that we can't live without money, and things can't go on like this."

"I must have peace!" Per shouted furiously. "Be quiet!"

But Mary didn't keep quiet. There were bills from the baker's and the butcher's, from the grocer's and the dairy, everything deteriorated, and if she didn't see some money in next to no time she would go to her mother and father and take the two children with her and no wife or mother had ever been forced to live such a life!

Per Drosselkvist moaned . . . and wrote until his head ached. It was no use. The cat followed him like a shadow and wouldn't let go of him.

His great victory had simultaneously become his great defeat. Unawares he had had a stroke of genius . . . and one mustn't have that when one is usually just an everyday, inoffensive little Per Drosselkvist.

It would lead too far to depict all the misery called down upon its paternal originator by the baleful cat. Quarrels and disputes and bitter words made their entry into the home, which soon afterwards dissolved.

Day and night, the terrible cat stared at Per Drosselkvist with its evil, venomous, green eyes. He tried to evade the monster by writing under a fictitious name, but it was no use. The cat seemed to have devoured all his abilities. Finally Per Drosselkvist gave up completely. It was the only thing to do.

It goes without saying that his hard fate had marked Per Drosselkvist. But it was characteristic of him that he still remained cool and kept his mental balance.

He found his old paint pots, got some work here and there, sufficient for him to exist, and gradually things went so well that he could ask his wife to come back with the kids, which she did.

Yes, things looked quite bright again for the future, and if he fared so well it was probably due to the fact that he was a modest, quiet, and complying soul to whom one couldn't help taking a liking.

Gradually he found for himself a speciality: he designed posters and signboards for the shops in his district. He hit upon several good ideas for advertising which won the applause of the customers.

At the moment, he was working on a big advertising sign for a shoeshop, and he was held out the prospect of 50 kroner cash if the design was deemed satisfactory.
The manager of the store arrived in Drosselkvist's studio. He stood silent for a long time examining the finished product while Per was awaiting judgment, feeling a bit uncomfortable, for he needed the money badly, and one could never know.

All of a sudden his customer burst out:

"Ingenious! Drosselkvist! Man alive! That's the best layout ever designed! We must work together! Come to my office and let's talk about it! You're going to be a famous man! You're ... ."

He didn't get any further. Per Drosselkvist had caught the design by one corner and torn it to pieces.

"Famous—me!" he cried, as if out of his senses. "That's what you think! Not me! Now that I'm doing fine, I should let myself be made famous once more? No thanks, Mister!"

Since that day, Per Drosselkvist has under no circumstances consented to do anything but paint railings and house fronts and whitewash ceilings and things like that befitting an ordinary skilled artisan.

If nothing better turns up, he paints perfectly ordinary price labels. It's not a particularly lucrative profession but, on the other hand, it doesn't carry with it the slightest danger of fame or its fatal consequences.