

*Cat Haikus...
and Cat Tales
Too!*



For Regina Gamache

A tribute to my mother's cats over the years.

Cat Haikus and Cat Tales, Too!

by Trevor Gamache, Samantha Hayes, and Steven Fisher

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and Cat Tales,
Too!**

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Steven Fisher

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For Regina Gamache!

Content

PART 1 - <i>CAT HAIKUS!</i>	1
SUKI	3
CLEOPATRA	4
TITI	5
PANDORA	6
WACKY	7
ARES	8
ZEUS.....	9
HERCULES.....	10
CIRCE	11
RUFUS.....	12
DUFUS.....	13
ATHENA	14
SMELLY CAT	15
KIWI.....	16
LLAMA	17
GATO.....	18
MERLIN, LANCELOT, GALAHAD	19

Reggie Gamache

PART 2 - <i>AND CAT TALES TOO!</i>	21
A CALL TO NICE ARMS	23
REGGIE AND THE CHRISTMAS UNICORNUCOPIA!.....	47
THE FIONA EFFECT	68
THE RECALCITRANT CHRISTMAS CAT	82
REGGIE'S MONSTER BIRTHDAY PARTY	97
THE TWELVE MAYHEMS (AND MORE) OF CHRISTMAS.....	123
MERLIN GETS SERVED	141
REGGIE REACHES SEVENTY	167

Reggie's Monster Birthday Party

For once I couldn't blame Merlin.

The white red tail Siamese is responsible for 90% of the odd things that happen around here, but he's an inside cat, and it all happened in our backyard.

It started a week before Reggie's birthday.

I was sitting on our deck when the damned thing formed at the top of the wire pole bean tower I'd erected early in our raised garden.

Initially, it made no noise. In fact, I didn't even notice its presence until Cammie and Custer started a frantic barking. I looked up from the party invitations I was preparing to address and saw this...wormhole? black hole? rip in the space-time continuum? I only knew one thing for sure...it was an anomaly, and it sure as hell didn't belong in our

backyard. Because it had no name, my brain's wiring was beginning to fray, so I named it the "Anomaly" to keep that wiring from shorting out completely.

The Anomaly swirled, eddied and twisted in such an insane fashion that it hurt my eyes when I tried to focus on it. Then, from its depths, a whine began. It sounded like a cosmic vacuum cleaner. Dirt and leaves whirled up toward the Anomaly's maw. The party invitations flew off the deck and disappeared into its depths. My irritation at the loss of the invitations turned into panic when the Miniature Schnauzer and Shih-tzu lifted into the air, their legs paddling as if they were trying to swim against a strong ocean current. I leapt out of my chair and grabbed them by their collars. Then, the suction jerked me hard against the deck railing.

I woke up on my back still on the deck with Cammie and Custer licking frantically at my face. Rolling over, I stared out at the garden.

The Anomaly was gone.

The only evidence it had ever been there was the fact that the yard was remarkably clean of leaves.

I didn't tell Reggie about what happened because I wasn't even sure it had taken place. I thought I might have taken a tumble on the deck, hit my head in the process, and experienced hallucinations.

So, I pushed the whole thing to the back of my mind, found new invitations, addressed them, and put them in the mailbox.

Reggie's birthday arrived as a good April day should arrive - bright, sunny, and calm with the scent of pine and the chirp of robins on the air. Again, I sat on the deck drowsing in the late morning sun with the dogs while she prepared food for the party, despite my offer to have it catered. She never could stand to have anyone else in her kitchen.

Custer's low growl and Cammie's simultaneous whine snapped my closed eyes open. I was getting ready to reprimand them for barking at the neighbors when I saw it again.

The Anomaly spun above the wire frame of the pole bean tower.

I grabbed the dogs and held them tight.

But this time, there was no sucking of anything into the hole hovering over our backyard.

Instead, air blew hard out of the Anomaly and brought something with it.

Not something.

Someone.

Three someones.

Two men and one woman.

Standing in our freshly rototilled garden, they all looked as confused as I was until a short, bearded man with a cigar clenched in his teeth took charge. He wore peculiar antique clothing - a top hat, a large dark sack jacket, a wide winged tie, striped shirt, vest, baggy pants, and black brogans. After he'd spoken briefly to each member of his group, he walked across the lawn and up onto the deck, tipped his hat to me and asked, "Is this the home of one Regina Gamache?"

He pronounced it as "Gah -mah-shay" instead of "Ga-maash" but I didn't correct his pronunciation because I was shocked that I recognized the man. He had blue eyes, wavy brown hair and thin lips.

I stood and said, "General - er - President Grant?"

He nodded. "And you are?"

"I'm Steve, Reggie's husband," I managed to answer.

He smiled and shook my hand with long, slim fingers that had a surprisingly strong grip. "A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gamache."

I glanced at him and the others waiting in the garden and then made the understatement of my life. "This is...unanticipated."

"We share your surprise," Ulysses S. Grant said as he pulled a card from the inside of his coat pocket. "I received this invitation to your wife's birthday party. As did the others, of course"

I took it from him and stared at the familiar lettering. "So, that's where they all went."

"Before I came up onto your most unusual porch," the president said, "you may have seen me having a discussion with the others in my party."

"I did."

"Through that conversation, we discovered a commonality that may partially explain our arrival upon your property."

"And that commonality is?"

"We all have the same birth date as your wife. April 27."

"So, you're all really from the past?"

"What year is it, sir?"

"2014."

"Then, yes, we're all from the past."

The fact that he had landed over a 100 years into the future didn't seem to faze the man.

"Uhh...do you have any idea of how you got here?" I asked.

"None, whatsoever. However, my many battles with the secessionist forces taught me to make the best of whatever the day brought, so that's what I plan to do. May I bring my companions up here and introduce them?"

"Yes, of course."

While he walked back to the garden to fetch them, I yelled to Reggie, "Honey, we've got company!"

"Already?" she shouted back from inside the house. There was a barely suppressed tone of annoyance in her response. "The party's not until five."

"Unexpected guests," I said and muttered to myself, "Really unexpected."

"Well, make them feel at home while I take orders for drinks and appetizers."

She came out of the sunroom door at the same time as Grant and his companions stepped up onto the deck.

Reggie stopped dead, blinked at their presence, blinked again and then glared at me and whispered. "You didn't say anything to me about a costume party!"

"There is no costume party," I assured her.

"Then why are they dressed that way? And who are they?"

I spoke to Grant. "You have me at a disadvantage, Mr. President. I don't know your companions. Would you introduce them to me and my wife, please?"

Grant nodded and said, "With pleasure."

Reggie mouthed to me, "President? Of what?"

The man doffed his hat, gave a slight bow and said, "Mrs. Gamache, I am Ulysses S. Grant."

"Sure you are," Reggie said. "And my name is pronounced "Gah-maash."

"My apologies," the president said with another bow. "May I introduce the lady of our party, Mrs. Mary Shelley?"

The woman had a long worried face highlighted by eyes of extreme intelligence. She wore a dark bodice with a pointed waist and a bell-shaped skirt.

When I thought Reggie didn't immediately recognize the name, I explained, "The author of Frankenstein."

"I know who wrote Frankenstein," she snapped at me. "What I don't know is why you brought these impersonators to my birthday party."

"We are not impersonators, madam," the other man said. He had long white hair and a flowing moustache and beard. His suit, similar in style to Grant's, held several medals pinned to the dark wool fabric.

"And who are you supposed to be?" Reggie demanded.

"I am and always have been Samuel F.B. Morse."

"The inventor of the telegraph?"

He nodded.

Mary Shelley spoke for the first time. She had a light soprano voice, precise diction, and an imperious but not unfriendly manner. "Mrs. Gamache, if I may interrupt, could we find a chair for President Grant? He seems to be in some distress."

"It's nothing," Grant said, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "I've suffered from migraines

all my life. They come and go. But a seat would be appreciated until it passes."

"I'll give you credit," Reggie whispered to me. "These impersonators are really good with the details of their characters."

"They're real. Not impersonators," I insisted. "And the man is in obvious distress."

Reggie threw her hands up in exasperation. "Oh, all right, sit down, President Grant."

The president eyed one of our green-and-white Walmart lawn chairs. "A peculiar seat. I'm dubious of its strength. It looks flimsy to me."

"It works just fine," my wife said.

As he cautiously lowered his slight frame into the chair, Reggie pulled me aside and said, "I'll go along with this charade for now, but I don't think your joke is very funny. All these people had better be gone before our real guests arrive."

Before I could begin another protest, she turned back to our unexpected visitors and, ever the polite hostess no matter what the circumstances, said, "Please, all of you, be seated. What can I get you folks to drink with the appetizers I'll bring out?"

"A glass of white wine, please," Mary Shelley said.

"Apple cider, please," Samuel Morse said. "It would be most appreciated. Our travel to the future seems to have provoked considerable thirst."

"And you, Mr. President, what would you like?"

"A whiskey, please."

"I can get the drinks," I told Reggie.

She shook a finger at me and then whispered, "I'll get them. I don't want these people in my house. You brought them here. You entertain them and then get rid of them."

She marched back through the sunroom door, glaring over her shoulder at me as she went.

Mary Shelley sat on our deck's outdoor blue couch, running a hand over the cushions. There was an air of irritable nervousness about her, and when she spoke, it was as if she wanted the conversation to distract her from the source of worry.

"A most unusual fabric, sir. Obviously tough and presumably resistant to water if you keep this furniture out in the elements. What is it?"

"It's a form of plastic," I answered. "Derived from oil, I believe."

"Really?" she said. "How interesting. Is this 'plastic' a common material in your society?"

"Very common."

Sitting in a matching blue chair across the deck, Samuel Morse spoke. "I imagine there are a great many inventions in your time that we're not aware of. What has become of my telegraph?"

"I'm sorry to inform you that it's no longer used because it's been superseded by other inventions."

"Such as?"

I knew I couldn't explain computers and airplanes or other modern inventions, so I stuck to a device invented shortly after his death. "The telephone. Alexander Graham Bell built upon your work. He came up with a device that can transmit speech across great distances. Very great distances."

"Really? How wonderful!"

"You're not upset that your wonderful invention is obsolete?"

Morse shrugged. "It's the nature of science and progress. One can't stay stuck in the past."

He laughed as the absurdity of what he'd said struck him. "And here we three are - definitely not stuck in the past."

Grant chuckled while Mary Shelley managed a flicker of a smile.

I wasn't really in a laughing mood. I wanted an answer as to how all of these people from the past had managed to appear in our backyard. It would silence the klaxon horns of cognitive dissonance sounding in my head.

"May I ask where you all were before you arrived here?" I said.

"I was at my birthday party," Grant answered.

"I as well," Mary Shelley said.

Morse nodded. "The same. I can only imagine the consternation of the guests at our disappearances. Although I doubt it matches our bewilderment."

"So, what you and my wife have in common is not only the same birthday but the parties for those events as well."

"Not a coincidence, is that what you're suggesting, Mr. Gamache?" Grant said.

I didn't inform him that Reggie had not taken my name when we married. Given the Victorian morals of his time, I didn't think it would go over well.

"Obviously not," Samuel Morse said before I could answer the president. "Science dictates that there's always a commonality in events like this. We just have to find it, that's all."

"Whatever brought you here formed that Anomaly above my metal pole bean tower," I said. "Could that be the commonality we're seeking?"

Grant thought for a moment and then answered, "My party was being held near the garden at the back of my home in Galena. It did indeed have such a 'tower,' as you call it."

"My garden did as well," Morse said. "In fact, I'd constructed it myself out of copper wire left over from my early experiments with telegraphy. Copper is a most excellent conductor of electricity."

The three of us looked at Mary Shelley to see if she'd had a similar experience. She shifted on the couch, looking uncomfortable and reluctant to provide an answer.

"Madam?" Grant said. His tone said it wasn't a request, but a polite order. "Your hesitation speaks volumes."

There was a long silence interrupted only by Reggie bringing out drinks and appetizers - grapes, raspberries, cheese, crackers, and

liverwurst. When she'd passed everything out, she bent close to my ear and whispered, "What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything!"

"Then why is nobody talking?"

Despite the fact that she wanted my "guests" gone, Reggie firmly believed in being a good host and thought I was falling down on the job.

"Mrs. Gamache," Mary Shelley said. "I can assure you that the silence is not your husband's fault. It is mine. I was asked a question by President Grant that I was very hesitant to answer."

Reggie bent to my ear again. "These impersonators are really good. Did you get them from the University Theater Program?"

"For the last time, they're not actors! They're the real thing."

This remark got me a sarcastic, "Really? And they got here how?"

"I don't know. That's what we're trying to hash out right now!"

She rolled her eyes and went back inside, muttering, "The things that go on inside that man's head."

I turned my attention back to Mary Shelley. "I'm sorry you were interrupted, Please continue. Why were you hesitant to answer the question?"

She gazed down for a moment into her glass of wine, then looked at each of us in turn before saying, "We also had a pole bean support although it was more of a square with wires running around wooden poles than the tower you have in your garden, Mr. Gamache."

She sipped the wine again as if gathering courage from it for what she had to say next. "My husband had, as I imagine you well know, a very active imagination."

"Percy Shelley was one of the world's great poets, there is no doubt of it. I'm especially fond of Ozymandias," Morse said raising his glass in toast.

We all followed his lead.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Morse," she said. "But when I mentioned his active imagination, I was not referring to my husband's poetic abilities, but his scientific ones."

"I had no idea he had that deep an interest in science," I said.

"Oh, yes. When he was at university, he often experimented with galvanism."

"I've heard that those experiments with electricity were the basis of your most famous work," President Grant said.

Mary Shelley again shifted uncomfortably.

"More than you know, sir."

"Please explain."

"It is the reason for my hesitation. While writing his poetry, Percy continued his experiments with galvanism. In fact, he was actually more involved in science than the literary arts."

"It almost sounds like you're saying that Shelley used his poetry as a cover for his scientific endeavors," I said.

She looked at me in surprise. "An astute observation, sir. Most do not make that connection so quickly. I usually have to explain it to them."

"Most?" Morse asked. "You mean this has happened to you before?"

Mary Shelley nodded. "Numerous times, and I must tell you that it is quite distressing."

Grant took a deep gulp of his whiskey and said, "This most definitely calls for further explanation."

"Believe me, I wish I had a simple one, Mr. President. Here's what I can tell you. I said we had

a pole bean support similar to all of yours. On the occasion of my birthday, it was a rainy day with a thunderstorm in progress. There was also very frequent lightning in that storm. As I stated previously, Mr. Shelley was deeply interested in galvanism and, as well, in its efficacy in the animation of dead tissue. He also, at times, had a perverse sense of humor and that day joked, "Wouldn't it be wonderful, dear Mary, if we could harness and focus all that wild energy in the clouds?"

She sighed. "I made the mistake of telling him God would not take too kindly to us mere humans attempting to, as it were, assume powers that were in his purview alone."

"Why was this a mistake?" Grant asked.

"At the time, sir, Percy had atheistic leanings. He delighted in provoking people on the question of a Supreme Being."

"Let me guess," I said. "He ran out into the garden and grabbed hold of the wire in the bean tower daring God to strike him down...or something along those lines."

"Exactly," she said. "And, at that moment, lightning struck my poor husband."

"Oh my God!" Morse said. "That must have been terrible for you. But he obviously survived it. After all, he drowned off the coast of Italy in 1822."

"Would that that were true, sir."

President Grant straightened up in his chair, shocked at this remark. "You're saying that your husband did not die at that time?"

"I'm saying, sir, that he did not die at all."

If my head had been spinning before, now it threatened to unscrew itself completely from my body for I had an idea of where this conversation was heading and didn't like it at all.

"You're saying that Frankenstein's creature is quite real."

Again, Mrs. Shelley looked at me with surprise that I was capable of making deductions in such a manner. Her attitude was starting to annoy me, but I pressed on.

"And you're also saying that Percy Bysshe Shelley is actually the 'the Adam' of Victor Frankenstein's labors in your novel."

I got that look again. "You've read my book, sir."

I kept my temper and nodded.

"It is true," she said, taking a deeper sip of her wine as if it would give her the courage to

continue. "My husband is the creature in the book. All the rest is fiction, of course. I created it to mask the truth of that day when lightning struck Mr. Shelley."

"I remember how you described him in the book," I said. "'Watery dun-white eyes in sockets the same color. A shriveled complexion. Straight black lips.' Is that what the lightning did to Mr. Shelly?"

I shuddered at what the real-life Frankenstein would look like.

"Again, I almost wish that were true," she said.

Stunned by this statement, we said nothing until Grant spoke sternly. "You must explain that statement, Madam. It is quite...disturbing."

Mary Shelley stared at us for a moment, perplexed at our reaction, then said, "Oh, I see that I have given you the wrong idea. May I explain?"

"We definitely would like that," Morse said.

"You see, the lightning didn't turn my husband into some kind of hideous monster. Quite the opposite, in fact."

She paused for a moment and then asked, "Do you gentlemen have an idea of what Percy looked like before the lightning strike?"

"I've read that he was a mild-looking man," I answered.

"Yes, and he had a sweet and innocent face, almost feminine. Overall, he was a tall and yet very fragile and slight man. He had long curly brown hair. All of this caused him to be bullied while at school."

"I'm confused, Mrs. Shelly," I said. "If the lightning didn't turn your husband into a hideous monster, what did it do to him?"

She looked out at the garden. The Anomaly was above the bean tower again. In the intensity of the moment, I hadn't heard the rushing of air out of its maw. Or noticed the man who was materializing on the soil.

Instinctively, all three of us men on the deck stood up, prepared to protect Mary Shelley from whatever monster had come through the Anomaly. Grant, the hardened combat veteran, took a position in front of all of us.

"Gentlemen, please relax," Mrs. Shelly said. "It's just my husband."

Percy Shelley's form solidified into...a blonde, blue-eyed muscular man who, I estimated, stood at least six four. He wore a white sleeveless linen workman's shirt, tight tan breeches, and high black boots. His skin wasn't at all pale. It was so tanned as to be golden. And he looked anything but mild-mannered. Muscles bulged everywhere.

At that moment, Reggie came out with another tray of appetizers, looked in the direction of our gazes, and dropped the tray. She ignored its clatter and said, "Who's this? He has...very nice arms."

Shelley grinned, showing white even teeth. He winked at my wife, strode across the lawn, took her hand, and kissed it in a manner I didn't like at all.

"Madam," he said in a deep baritone, "you've dropped your tray. Let me pick it up for you. Hands so delicate should not need to deal with such minor domestic tragedies."

Reggie was speechless, but nodded.

I was at a loss for words as well. The guy oozed charm through every pore, and it was all aimed at my wife!

Before I could regain my composure, Shelley picked up the tray, offered his arm and

said, "Madam, may I also help you refill this tray and find drinks for your guests on your...ah...porch?"

This got him another nod, and he swept Reggie into the house.

We all turned to stare at Mary Shelley.

"I can see your disbelief, gentlemen," she said. "But I assure you that that man is indeed my husband."

I barely kept my voice from rising into a squeak. "The lightning changed Percy Shelley into that?"

"Yes, it did," she answered. "And, as you all can see, I wasn't entirely truthful with you earlier. I said I created Frankenstein's creature in my book as a mask for my husband's transformation by a cruel universe. That much is true. But it was also my fictional revenge on him. As you've just seen, he's quite...beautiful. And libidinous. Somehow, the lightning charged his system with a virility worthy that of a bull. My formerly mild mannered husband now chases women at the drop of a hat. And they're quite willing to drop that hat. Throughout these episodes, I have had to put up with his constant philandering, and there's not much I can do about it. So, shortly after the

lightning created the new Percy Shelley, I created Frankenstein's creature and made it quite, quite ugly. Frankly, it's not Christian of me, but I wish Percy really was as physically hideous as my fictional invention. At least then I'd have him back."

"Understandable, Mrs. Shelley," President Grant said. "I infer from mention of 'episodes' that the events of this day repeat themselves?"

"Over and over again, sir." This remark was said with a deep weariness.

"It is the first time for me," Grant said. "Is it the same for you, Mr. Morse?"

"Yes, indeed, it is."

"You want an explanation as to why you two are here this time?" Mary Shelley said.

"Yes," both men answered.

"I'm afraid I can offer you none, gentlemen. I do not understand how or why we travel through time. I fear the mystery will never be solved."

"But you always return to your original time?" I asked.

I really wanted an answer to this question, because I had no idea of how to accommodate three - four now with the arrival of the poet - people in our house, not to mention the more

difficult task of explaining how they'd gotten there in the first place.

"You need not worry, Mr. Gamache nor you, President Grant and Mr. Morse," she said. "We always return. We merely need to wait for that -"

"Anomaly?" I suggested.

"A good word for it, Mr. Gamache. Thank you. We merely need to wait for the Anomaly to re-appear."

"And how long does that usually take?" I asked.

"It varies, sir. A few hours at a minimum. So far, three days at a maximum."

My relief at this information was short-lived as she amended what she'd just said. "However, I must warn you on two matters. First of all, my husband is, as you might expect, a bit of a loose cannon."

"Which means?" I asked.

"Which means he doesn't always go back immediately with me."

"Oh, great. What's the second matter?"

"That means there is time enough for my husband to create his unique brand of mischief. If I

were you, Mr. Gamache, I would attend to your wife. You do not want to leave her alone with him."

I bolted to my feet from the chair I'd been sitting in. "I'm going inside. Why don't all of you come in with me?"

"I do not think your wife wanted our presence in her house," Grant said. "We don't wish to intrude," Morse added.

"Percy Shelley has already intruded," I pointed out. "Besides, I don't want to be accused of not being a good host."

"How will you explain our presence?" Morse asked.

"My wife already thinks that you are impersonators of famous people from history, so simply be yourselves."

"These impersonators - there is such a paid profession in this time?" Grant asked.

"Yes, sir."

"A most peculiar age," the president said as he rose from the lawn chair. "However, we will join your company, act as ourselves, and celebrate your wife's birthday with good cheer until such time as we make the journey back to our own age."

Samuel Morse rose also, taking Mary Shelley's hand and helping her to her feet. "An excellent notion," he said. "Conversation should be most stimulating."

It was.

All of Reggie's guests were delighted at the surprise.

Grant, always susceptible to alcohol, got quite drunk.

Morse, a Calvinist at heart, disapproved heartily of the president's behavior but helped me and Mary Shelley get him outside to the Anomaly when it re-appeared above the bean tower. They waved goodbye to me as they faded from view and were sucked into the time portal.

Of course, Percy Shelley, the real Frankenstein's creature, was not with them.

He's still roaming the streets of Monroe at this very moment.

The women are ecstatic.

The men, not so much.

Me, I'm wondering where my wife is.

One thing's for sure.

When Shelley returns and disappears into the Anomaly, I'm tearing down that damned tower and never planting pole beans again.

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