

# Cat and Mouse

Adrenalin Run, Surviving a Blue Monday part II



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# 1 From the next shore

The old man sitting on the blistered, gray metal bench at the seaside port, is not looking at her. Instead, his eyes are focused on the horizon. His gaze travels past the screaming seagulls above them. He is ignoring their loud calls. Ignoring the big wings, which almost touch the water when the big white birds suddenly fall down to grab the bread that was thrown up in the air only seconds before.

Some of the birds are quick enough to catch their prize in midair. But, most of the crusts end up floating on the water. This only lasts for a minute, then they slowly start going down, because the bread's dry fibers immediately start soaking up the salty water. The gulls are quick enough to grab these soggy crusts with their long, yellow beaks. But, their skillful, acrobatic maneuvers don't interest the old man at all.

The old, sagging eyelids are covering the best part of his eyes. The left one a little more than the right one. The brown eyes underneath them are very lively though. There is not a sign of fatigue in them. They are still focusing on something in the distance.

The horizon seems to be altering somehow. A few moments ago, nothing was visible. But now, a dark line has disrupted the smooth one dividing the calm sea and the clear sky above it.

The endless sky is blue. There is not a cloud in the sky. The green water of the North Sea is as smooth as velvet. The old, brown eyes have noticed it too. Despite his eighty-eight summers, there is nothing wrong with them. He can still see well enough. On a sunny day then. He has been waiting for it all day. He has thought about this moment all week already.

His anticipation will be rewarded soon. The speck on the horizon is growing. The tiny spot has already become a thin line, and now it is taking shape. The old man knows nothing about time lapses, but in a way, he is witnessing one right now. Because every time he tries to find that particular spot again, after having looked away for just a few seconds, it has, somehow, moved forward quite a bit.

“I hope they brought us a souvenir!” The tall girl next to him on that same metal bench is looking up from her phone. There is an empty bag with only leftover crumbs sitting next to her on the bench. She had been texting a friend. It seemed the only thing to do, except for feeding the gulls, while they were waiting for the boat to arrive. Ten minutes later, the ferry is clearly visible. It is a big boat. The blue hull is making it seem smaller than it really is. But when it gets closer, they actually have to look up to see the wheelhouse. The boat is as big as an apartment building. Jessie can’t think of any other comparison. It is the biggest boat she has ever seen! Her mom and dad have been away for two weeks. They needed a break. A break after a near split-up. A break after all of the moving around they did.

All because of Roger. Roger, who so cunningly had managed to disappear. Roger, who was still hiding somewhere.

Tim, Timothy, the cousin, had done everything he could. He had wanted to enter them into a witness protection program. But, like so often, the judge in charge seemed to feel more sympathy for the villain than for the victims.

So, they had started up their own program. Mike and Monica, and Jessie also had thought up ingenious ways to stay out of Roger's path. They had moved from holiday park to holiday park.

They had kept that up for over ten months. With the help of Timothy and his friends, and with a lot of help from Rob, her old principal, she had been able to pass her exams. He had helped her with her books and with instruction videos made by the kids of the R and D department from her old school. Rob and one of his colleagues had given the tech-kids a special graduation assignment. They had to install cameras in all of the classrooms. The teachers and students knew this was happening. They had all given their consent. They had said, that it was a plan for improving instruction methods. Well, that was only part of it. It was also a means for students who, by no fault of their own, were unable to 'physically' attend classes. This way, they could 'virtually' take these classes anyway. A sort of long-distance-education had been re-invented.

It suited Jessie just fine. She was able to 'attend', without being noticed. She was very grateful that she could finish high school this way.

Timothy had helped them with some new identification. “Where there is a will, there is a way”, he had said. He and his friends had vowed to confess to their ‘covert operation’ as soon as Roger was apprehended.

But, ten months had passed, and nothing had happened. Roger could not be found!

The black haired woman, they still didn’t know who she was, had remained incarcerated, because she had killed an officer. But, they couldn’t charge her, because they didn’t know who she was. And she, in turn, wasn’t talking. Her cold eyes only flickered briefly when they mentioned Roger. It was not an angry reaction, however. She seemed genuinely scared! It puzzled the policemen in charge of the case. It worried Mike and Monica even more.

If that woman, that killer was afraid of Roger, then he must be a very dangerous person! They felt that they had all been very lucky. They vowed to guard their daughter’s life as best they could.

So, they had altered their appearance. They didn’t look like the people from a year ago. Mike and Monica had colored their hair. Mike had grown a beard. They seemed older somehow. This was not only the result of the hair dye. The worries, the moving around, the financial hardship, everything had contributed to their aging faces. Mike’s back was not as straight as it used to be. He was forced to leave his old job. While he was job hunting for a permanent position, he was moving from odd job to odd job. Monica was working at a supermarket. In her spare time she painted.

And Jessie? She had started college. Teacher's college. Not because it was her wish to become a teacher. Not because she loved teaching. It was simply something to do.

Right now, she has no clue what to do next. Their frequent moves have stirred a certain unrest in her. They have moved already twelve times. And every time they move to a new location, she feels more like a stranger in her own country. Every time they move, she tries less hard to make an effort to settle into a new neighborhood.

Because it all seems so useless. They will be moving again. Someday. Some night or some weekend.

Teacher's college is keeping her busy though. She is actually starting to enjoy the teaching assignments. But she doesn't like the group assignments. Most students seem more outgoing than she is, but she likes to do the quiet things. So, she finds it hard to connect with these people. They like to make noise and they laugh a lot. Jessie is the opposite, she is more serious. She likes to think and solve problems. The art classes aren't what she expected them to be either. Of course, they teach the students how to teach children. The art fits the children's level. It is not Jessie's level. Of course, it is childish, that isn't it. It is all so 'prefab'. The activities seem to be lacking inspiration, lacking true creativity, lacking a true identity. She used to love art classes. But now she feels that they are lessons in pure torture. She doesn't agree with the given concept, but her objections and suggestions are falling on deaf ears.

So, she is coping. She is enduring. Until a solution will present itself.

In the meantime, the ferry is docking already. Jessie and the old man slowly start walking towards the parking lot. Two weeks ago, they had agreed to meet up with Monica and Mike there. Mike had brought his own car. He and Monica had taken it on the ferry when they visited Scotland. Jessie and the old man had arrived by train. This way they can all travel back together.

Half an hour later they are off. The drive will take an hour and a half. Mike and Monica are talking about their trip. They sound happy. They don't interrupt each other and they seem to agree on everything.

Jessie is amazed. They seem so different from before! No bickering, no angry words or angry looks. There is harmony and happiness!

The trip worked out well for them. The weather was fine, and the people they met on the way, were friendly.

Jessie is happy too. Things are turning back to normal it seems. She tries to ignore the nervous butterfly-feeling in her stomach. She is telling it to 'shut up', for she desperately needs things to be 'good' again. She needs to be able to relax, and she can only do that if the people around her are relaxed too.

But, she can't suppress the deep sigh that has managed to escape from her mouth though. It is an involuntary contraction happening somewhere deep inside of her. It seems as if a valve has been opened to let out steam. The high-pressure burst of air is not only releasing just

that, air, no, it is also helping her to relax. As if she has just dumped a toxin, something bad. It has been replaced by happy feelings and a silent hope that things are going to be normal again.

The old man is staring into nothingness. It appears that he is not aware of what is happening. But, he has noticed the sighing though. And it worries him. He likes the girl who is sitting next to him. But, he also senses her tension, her stress. He wishes that he could help her, help release her from her torments. He doesn't know what secret these people carry with them. And, he is not sure if he wants to know. He won't pressure them though. They'll tell him when they are ready to do so. And when they are, he will be there for them. Perhaps, he will even be able to help them.

## 2 Peter

Her feet, arms, and long legs are covered in thousands of tiny drops of gray mud. And, although it is about twenty degrees today, her feet, covered in rather wet socks, feel like ice cubes. The tiny drops of mud on her legs form a perfect line. Just below the knees, because she had been wearing boots. They are lying on the ground now, near the back door, on the clean stones of the patio.

And even though she has turned it off already, the loud humming sound of the machine is still ringing in her ears.

This morning she had decided, that this would be the perfect birthday present for her dad. He had been wanting to hose the patio down for a while now. But, a lot of other, more pressing chores had taken precedence. And today, it was Jessie's day off. It was May 5th, National Liberation Day in the Netherlands.

So, now Jessie looked like a muddy pig. But, a proud pig for that matter! She had never used the high-pressure hose washer before. But it had turned out to be much easier to do than she had initially thought.

It was a messy job though, and a cold one. After the first hour, she decided to take a break. A break in order to warm up, and to have the cup of coffee, which she had promised herself already at the start of the morning.

But, she had wanted to test the washer first. She needed to know if she could do it. But, after a hesitant burst of

noise, it had started running, and a strong spray of cold water had come out of the high-pressure hose.

It had removed the moss and grass that was growing between the stones. It had also wiped off the remnants of chicken dung and mud and sand that had been left over from the winter storms.

Her mom had complained about the filth on the stones for a while already. But, as usual, Monica had declined to get the machine from the shed, in order to clean the patio herself. It was not Monica's 'thing'. It ruined her hair, her clothes, and her nails.

Jessie couldn't care less about that. She liked being outdoors. She also liked having an excuse for not doing the homework she should be doing. Anything but that!

Monica had gone to work early at the supermarket today. Mike had gone job-hunting. He had left early as well, so Jessie was alone today.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon, when she has finally made some coffee, she sits down at the kitchen table. But, the coffee in the cup in front of her is not making her feel happy. Somehow, it doesn't taste right. Her toast with cheese doesn't do the trick either. Her taste seems to be a bit 'off' today. She doesn't know why. And, because her coffee doesn't taste the same as it usually does, she decides to empty the full cup in the sink.

The mocha colored liquid is making a big stain in the metal sink. Then the coffee slowly finds its way to the hole in the middle, and then it slowly disappears into the plumbing hidden underneath it.

With a deep sigh, Jessie places the cup on the counter. She won't put it in the dishwasher yet. Maybe she'll make some fresh coffee later. And maybe, it'll taste better then.

After she has checked her phone for messages, there are none, she opens the back door. Leaning against the wall of the house, she pulls the big black boots on again. They are covered in a thick layer of mud. Even before she gets started, her hands are filthy already. But, no one can see her, and even if they could, she really couldn't care!

The black bird that visits their garden every day, is already busy looking for food. It walks around the puddles, which have formed on the stones and the lawn next to it, hunting for worms who are being forced up to the surface, because of the water soaking the lawn.

Fritz, their pet rooster of nine weeks, is trying to chase the bird away. They had adopted Fritz a few months ago, when they visited a local farm, just after they had moved here. Fritz, being a tiny rooster instead of a hen, was going to be killed right away. The farmer had done so with the last batch of new born roosters, but Fritz had managed to stay undetected. The farmer noticed the chick a day after, and he was going to put it down. But Jessie and Monica had objected. They instantly liked the little chick with the fierce look in his eyes. So, they had taken him home. They had kept him in the living room because it was so cold then. And as he grew older, he had become cheekier.

When he was old enough, they had wanted to keep him in a tiny henhouse in the garden. But, he didn't seem to

understand. He wanted to be with them! He didn't think he was a chicken. So, every time they ate outside, because the weather had been good for the time of year, he would join them. He would sit on a lawn chair, watching them when they were eating. And sometimes, when one wasn't paying attention, he would help himself to the food one was about to eat.

Fritz was already nine weeks old. He would start crowing in about three weeks. The neighbors wouldn't like that. Mike already didn't like it. So, Jessie had placed an ad on the internet. She was hoping that someone would soon come to offer Fritz a new home.

Mike had tried to warn them already. "I am not going to slaughter a rooster!", he had vowed. Jessie and Monica had been in shock. Slaughter Fritz?

"We aren't savages dad!", Jessie had responded.

"What do you think happens to the chicken meat you eat several times a week?", Mike had asked.

Jessie's first reaction was an emotional one. "I'll become a vegetarian!", she had promised.

This had lasted for exactly two days. The smell of the fried chicken her mom had prepared, had made her change her mind. Mike was right. Chickens get slaughtered all over the world, every day.

So, she tried hard to find a good place for Fritz. He was going to be a big rooster, she could tell. His big yellow legs and feet were a good indication as to his future size.

But, right now, he is waiting, standing next to a big puddle. He doesn't seem to be afraid of the noise that

the machine is making. And, he doesn't seem to worry about getting wet. He trusts her completely it seems.

It is making Jessie feel guilty. What if she won't be able to save his 'bacon' so to speak? What if they are going to have him slaughtered?

He is eying her with his beady, brown little eyes. He has tilted his head to one side as if he is trying to figure out what she is thinking.

She catches his look, and then she starts smiling. "Fritz, you are a funny chick!", she says out loud. "We'll figure something out for you!"

Two hours later, she finally turns off the machine, and then she walks back to the house. Fritz, who is still hanging out near the spot where she was working before, has already started to follow her. But, when she opens the back door, he suddenly halts, as if he is putting on some invisible brakes.

Weeks ago, when they kept him in the newly built henhouse at night, they would let him roam the yard during the day. But, at night, they wanted him in his own house, for his own protection. They didn't want him to get caught by a cat or a fox. Because there were many foxes this year, and they were all very hungry.

But it hadn't been easy to catch him at night, because he enjoyed his new found freedom. He could roam the yard, and as he grew older, he would run after the black birds and the cats, chasing them, until they climbed the fence in a hurry. The cats that is. The black birds would just fly away, and then they would sit down on the lawn again, just a few meters away, keeping a close eye on Fritz. And keeping him busy during the day.

In the end, Jessie and her parents had lured him into the house at night, and then they would quickly shut the door on him. That way he couldn't escape again.

One day, Mike had bought a bag of dried worms at the agriculture supply store. It turned out that Fritz simply loved the tiny, crispy worms! He could eat them forever, because he would never grow tired of them. But, after a few nights of being locked up in the house, and after having protested loudly against their sneaky way of catching him, Fritz had grown wiser. In the end, not even the delicious worms could tempt him to cross the threshold. So, one night, after having chased after him for forty-five minutes, they had officially given up. Mike had been totally out of breath, and in an angry tone of voice he had said: "I hope you get eaten by a fox tonight!". He had yelled at the frightened little rooster, who had been hiding underneath a bush in the back of the garden.

Mike didn't mean it of course. He couldn't hurt a fly for that matter, but it had startled Jessie. She hadn't known that her dad didn't like Fritz. She realized then, that she had given him another thing to worry about when they had brought Fritz home without having consulted with Mike first.

But, it seemed harmless enough. He was just a little chick when they got him. At night, he would sit with Jessie while she was watching tv. He would always sit on her right hand. She had to choose her tv programs wisely because Fritz would put his ever growing butt on her right hand. And then she didn't want to wake him up. So, she couldn't switch channels.

But, she didn't mind. Having to take care of another being, helped her to recover from her nasty adventures from last year, Fritz helped her to relax. And after all of the moving, he was a steady factor. They had been at their current house for a little over nine weeks already. Hence, the henhouse. They wouldn't have built one if they had believed that they were going to have to move soon. Of course, they wouldn't have built one either if they hadn't decided to adopt Fritz. But it happened and they would have to deal with it now.

Back inside, Jessie turns on her computer. She is disappointed to see that no one has responded to the ad she placed on the internet last week. No one! She was going to have to think of another solution. The internet idea wasn't working.

In the meantime, the aroma of fresh coffee is filling the room. The big old mug, clenched in her hands, has seen as many places to live in, as she has. It is one of the few things she had taken from her old home. The home that was sold already to different people with different kids, who would probably be attending her old school by now.

Mike had found a rental property in the south of the Netherlands for them, near the border with Belgium. He had found it after having searched for a suitable house in bigger cities in the south. But, rental properties in big cities were difficult to find. The house they had finally moved into was a little smaller than the house they had owned in the Noordoostpolder.

But, it had three bedrooms and a big garden. Mike hoped to find a job across the border, in Belgium. And Monica had found a job as a cashier at the local supermarket. It was a big store. People from far and wide would visit their town, because of the supermarket.

There was a bus also. A bus that would take Jessie to the city, to her college. There was a library, a police station, two elementary schools and two churches. There also was a second-hand store and a soccer club.

Living in this small town had felt like being on holidays, at first. But now they had gotten used to the quiet of the town. In the morning, Jessie stood at the bus stop. She and another twenty students would wait for the bus that would take them to the city. There were high school students and college students. They would all carry backpacks, and they would almost all of them, carry a phone. That phone was important. They would play games, listen to music, or app with their friends. They would sometimes forget some school books, but no one would ever forget his phone!

Jessie is staring out of the living room window. The high-pressure washer is sitting on the patio. It is cloudy now. The sky has darkened. Her muddy boots are lying near the back door. Fritz is sitting on one of the lawn chairs. His gaze is fixed on the door. As if he is waiting for her, expecting her to open it any moment now. Fritz is a loyal bird. He is always waiting for her or looking for her when she's outside. When he sees her, he will often run to her. His neck stretched out in front of him, and

his gray wings pointing back. As if that will help him to run faster. He treats her like she is his mother.

“Right!”, Jessie is talking out loud now. She’ll have to come up with a plan. A plan that will keep Fritz out of the freezer. But first, she’ll have to finish cleaning the patio and the tiles in the back of the garden. So, with a deep sigh, she places the empty mug in the kitchen sink. Moments later, she has put her boots on again. The machine soon is doing what it is supposed to be doing. The strong spray cleans the tiles effortlessly.

An hour later, she is finally done. The patio is clean. The table and chairs have been cleaned too. Then she detaches the garden hose from the machine. She puts the garden hose nozzle back on the hose and then she hoses down the big patio windows. At least then the mud won’t stick to the windows. Because if she doesn’t take it off now, they’ll be harder to clean.

At four-thirty she is finally done. The windows are clean. The machine has been put back in the garage. And all she needs to do right now is to lock the back door and go upstairs to take a well-deserved shower.

She undresses in the laundry room. Then she puts her jeans, who are heavy with wet mud, and her filthy socks outside on a lawn chair. That way, the mud can dry and hopefully it’ll be easier to remove later. This will be better for the washing machine. Her T-shirt is in the same state. She places it on another chair. Fritz is eyeing her curiously. But, she has no time for him. She quickly runs back inside the house and then she locks the back door.

Seconds later, she is running up the stairs, then she slams the bathroom door shut behind her. Quickly she locks it. Moments later, the warm water of the shower hits her face.

When she is finally done, she notices the trail of muddy sand she made before. There is a trail from the bathroom door right into the shower. Jessie decides to let that dry up first. Then she'll vacuum it later.

They had all agreed, when they moved in, that they would run their household together. Because everyone was busy with work or school. It seemed only fair this way.

It is almost five o'clock now. Jessie's stomach is making all kinds of growling noises. She is positively starving!

The bathroom is a mess. Dirty clothes and wet towels are lying scattered on the floor, or on top of the hamper. No one has taken the time to do the laundry, so now it is just piling up.

Jessie takes the last clean towel out of the bathroom wardrobe. It is a big one. She wraps herself in the big blue cotton. Before she unlocks the bathroom door, she quickly glances in the foggy bathroom mirror. Her hair is a mess. Her eyebrows are big and bushy. She should take some tweezers and shape them, but she doesn't feel like it. The big, dark brows don't bother her. And she hasn't heard any complaints from the people she hangs out with. So, she'll just leave them for now.

Her blond hair has grown quite a bit since last year. It now touches her shoulders. But, she hasn't decided whether she is going to leave it long or not.

Because of that, she hasn't been to a hairdresser for at least six months.

She can't be bothered by it somehow. Besides, the foggy mirror is making it hard to inspect her face and hair properly anyway. In a slightly irritated manner, she turns around to unlock the door. It is making a loud, clicking sound because it is an old lock in an old door. Before she opens it, she pauses to listen. She always does that. Always, since her kidnap. She has become really careful. That's the reason why she locked the bathroom door in the first place. Even in a locked house, Jessie doesn't like to take chances.

It is quiet in the upstairs hallway. When her feet touch the carpet on the landing, she can hear the wooden boards underneath them creaking.

This is a wooden house. Before this one, they were living in a brick house. "A wooden house is always making sounds", the landlord had said. "One reason can be thermal expansion, and another reason can be that the house is settling, because of some shifting taking place due to the compacting ground underneath it. This is being caused by its own weight."

Jessie couldn't care less. She liked the house so far, but she had politely listened to the explanation the old man had given.

The old man had shown them around the house himself. He was the owner. He had lived in this house for nearly forty years. But, his wife had passed away and his children had emigrated to Australia. So, the house had been too big for him. And to supplement his income, he had decided to rent his house to other people. He had

bought a small apartment in town. It was big enough for a man living alone.

He could have sold his house, but he'd rather rent it out, because this way, he wouldn't have to say 'goodbye' to this old house. The old house with all of his memories. Memories of his beloved wife, and memories of his kids. So, he had asked Mike and Monica, if he could maintain the garden. And they had been happy with this idea, because none of them had the time, nor the skill and passion for gardening, which this old man obviously had.

Peter was his name. He had been a train conductor for forty years. He hailed from the north of the Netherlands. He still had relatives there, but he hardly ever spoke to them. His two sons had moved away years ago. They had emigrated to the Sydney area. Leaving him behind.

Peter missed his sons who were married now. They had children. He had visited them once. But, the long journey to Sydney had taken a lot of energy. He was getting old, and hopping on and off planes for over a day was too much for the old man. His children had been grateful though. They had promised to visit him soon. That was four years ago. But, they had been too busy. The children were too small, and the money was tight.

He understood. He knew very well how expensive air travel was these days. So they would phone. At first, they phoned every Sunday. Then they phoned every two weeks. And then it happened only once a month. The conversations had become shorter too. At a certain point, there was nothing left to talk about. Except for the weather of course, or if an acquaintance had passed

away. They would send him a postcard from time to time. The pictures on them were of beautiful places. The sun was always shining in them.

He had put them on the old fridge, keeping them on it with some old magnets. The cards gave him something to look at, something to think about.

He knew he would never visit Australia again. And lately he wondered, if he would ever see his children and grandchildren again, before it would be his turn to pass away.

But then he got to know Jessie. Jessie, who always had a sparkle in her eyes when she talked to him. Peter liked Jessie, but he never let on.

When they first met, someone said that Peter mumbled so badly, that it was hard to understand what he was saying. So when Jessie struck up a conversation with him, she noticed right away, that he was mumbling terribly.

“If you want me to understand what you are saying, then you will have to speak up!”, she had told him right away. And even though she was smiling, he knew, by the way her eyes locked onto his, that he better do what she told him!

They would spend time together in the garden. She would mow the lawn and he would trim the rose bushes. And together they would sit and have tea or coffee, depending on whether it was morning or afternoon. This happened on Jessie’s days off. He would also come by the house on Sunday morning.