

RILEY
(A Purple Cats in Space Adventure)

By D. G. Speirs

“Riley!”

An advantage of sleeping in a micro-g cocoon is no sudden wake-ups to comically bang your head on a nearby shelf. Still, that shrill took me from sweet dreams to wide-eyed in rapid fashion. I blinked twice to boot up my heads-up.

Regina. I let out a sigh, mustered my best smile and muttered, “Vid on.” A little red globe floated in my peripheral viz to let me know I was transmitting. “Good morning, dear heart.”

“Don’t good morning me.”

“You appear miffed.” Miffed was not a good look on Regina. She tended toward pouty. “What’s the issue, love of my life?” I unzipped my cocoon and slipped into a jumpsuit.

“As if you didn’t know.”

Great. Guessing games. Her image floated along as I pushed off and headed to the microstation’s galley. “G, I’m still on my boot cycle – no coffee yet. Me man, me dumb.”

That mollified her for the moment. “True. So check your schedule, Romeo.”

Schedule? A quiver of panic rumbled in the lizard parts of my brain. “Hold, please.” I reached up and swept Regina’s image aside, then pulled down my calendar into the display. The one with the flashing red entry from a half-hour ago.

Crap.

I swept her image back and prepared to fall on my sword. “That’s today? I, uh, thought it was next week.”

“Nice try. I only get one vacation a year, and you’re already eating into that time.”

I looked around. Microstations were designed for minimal occupation, and I had the habit of being less than fastidious. Okay, I’m a slob. Living alone will do that. I mean, I love G, but she has this thing ‘bout gravity—

“Can you give me thirty to clean up? The station’s a mess—”

“Which is different from last time how exactly? Just TransMat me up. We’ll do it together. Only take a little while, and it’ll be fun. Like last time.”

I remembered last time. I grinned. “Fine. Set your beacon and standby. Luggage on your right.”

“I know the drill.” She smiled. “I have a surprise for you.”

As if I hadn’t had enough of those this morning. “Oh, you shouldn’t. Really.”

I floated over to the TransMat console. The concept was simple enough move something from here to there in an instant, keep it assembled, and don't kill it. Other than that? Your guess is as good as mine. I just follow directions. I powered it up, the unit located Regina's beacon, I set a radius to include her luggage and hit the activate button. A bright flash, a smell of ozone, and a loud buzz.

"Meooooooooooooow."

I blinked in surprise. No, she didn't.

"Yooooowwwwwwwllllll!!!"

Yep. She did.

"Regina, your luggage is making cat noises."

She floated over and hugged me. "That's why I love you, so quick and observant." She turned back and reached for the top bag. "This was my surprise for you. I have a new pet. Meet Charlotte."

Charlotte was cowering inside the pet carrier, a pair of green reflective eyes in the shadows. She hissed at me. "Gee. She seems... friendly."

"She just needs to get to know you." Regina started to unzip the top of the carrier. "Come on out, baby. Time to meet the big goofball – eek!"

A lot happened at once. The moment she saw a chance at freedom, Charlotte made a break for the opening. At that point, physics started to play. Charlotte's launch set Regina tumbling in the opposite direction. Charlotte found herself floating in a straight line rather than falling. She began to twist in all directions, claws out, an attempt to align herself to land on her feet. The problem with this in microgravity is down is relative. I ducked to avoid the buzz saw.

Regina's screech was more likely due to her cat's unique pigment challenge. "You bought a purple cat," I observed in a helpful manner. "Like, more Barney purple than grapey purple, but still, purple."

"What did you do to my cat?" The words came out as a low growl.

"I did? I didn't even know Sweet Charlotte was along for the ride." I glanced at the TransMat. "Could be a reassemble glitch. I can check the service manual or call the helpline."

Regina tried to grab a wall to stop her spin. "You do that. Otherwise, that's the only pussy you're going to get familiar with this week."

"On it," I sighed. "Here, kitty, kitty, kitty."