

Conflict

by Rosalinda M. Soriano

From The Orion



There was something about cats that Mr. Gil hated. It would have been unnecessary to ask him what it was and why, for he would not have been able to explain the reason himself. He was that vague.

Mr. Gil was young at twenty-seven. His job was drawing-dream houses. And it seems he got paid for it, too. Folks said he was an architect. Actually, Mr. Gil was a law-abiding citizen who paid his taxes without the usual smirk, was well versed on world news situations, played tennis like a champ and was an ardent fan of St. Jude Thaddeus. He was also married. And he had cat phobia.

Now next to her husband and next to keeping house Mrs. Gil loved cats. Mr. Gil couldn't understand what was so attractive about the "green-eyed-be-whiskered pests", and his wife couldn't understand why a big guy like him was so allergic to the "soft, pathetic little things."

Anyway, it all started with Hobo Joe, a tattered little mouse that looked as if he had been on the road

for sometime and could do with a cup of coffee or anything Mrs. Gil's cupboard could supply. Thus it was that Mrs. Gil found him contentedly munching one side of a red ball of cheese. She suppressed a scream caused by the loss of one side of the expensive cheese rather than surprise and fright.

"You little hobo!" was all she managed under her breath. And Hobo Joe was christened.

Mrs. Gil lost no time telling Mr. Gil about the unwelcome kitchen visitor.

"A mouse-trap's just the thing," Mr. Gil decided and announced he would get one at the hardware next evening. Later in the day Mr. Gil came home happier than usual. It seemed he had a new contract signed with someone named "Esteban".

"Who's he?" Mrs. Gil asked. And Mr. Gil in his vague fashion explained who this Esteban was. And after a round-about explanation, it turned out that "Esteban" was a shipping-line tycoon who used to be a Mr. Nobody but who had now started go-

ing places and had just set his mind on building a mansion in a "villa" somewhere. . .

"And that's where I come in," said Mr. Gil enthusiastically. Mrs. Gil said, "Oh, how nice," and added, "But where's the mouse trap?"

Mr. Gil's face was a study. Here he was almost graduated from kiosk and doghouse designs he was so sick of, and his wife talked about a—

"Mouse trap?"

"You promised to pick one at the hardware's on your way home tonight."

Mr. Gil was a man of patience. He thought he should take the situation with tact and charm. After all, their marriage was almost half a year old and things were going on smoothly. No, he didn't want to make a wrong slip.

"Darling, here I come home with good news and you talk about a mousetrap." He had sounded exasperated after all. It was Mrs. Gil who handled the situation with velvet gloves. She clamped her mouth shut, handed him his slippers, kissed him on the nose to keep it from wiggling and went off to put the pan on the stove.

It was only after the last dish was dried and back in its place that Mrs. Gil spoke her line—

"About the mouse trap, dear. . ."

There was a sound from behind the newspaper. Mr. Gil was lost in the thick of the Korean war.

"I can't work with ease when I know there's a mouse somewhere watching my every move," she persisted. Mr. Gil's eyes remained

glued to his paper. He began to mutter. "President Truman went to Congress and couldn't read his speech. . . hmmm! MacArthur loaned him his 'Ray Ban' and Mr. Truman said "I shall return."

His wife began to speak louder. "We simply must do something about it. Mrs. Bonanza next door suggested dipping bits of cheese in rat poison and leaving them in the most obvious places for bait. I had to decide against it. You know how you prowl around the kitchen at night when you think I'm asleep and gobble up mostly anything eatable."

" . . . Stalin made his wife mad and she went after him with a hammer. . ." her husband mumbled on.

"So, I thought a cat would be just the thing. . ."

The newspaper crackled and Mr. Gil's head popped up like a jack-rabbit.

"A what?"

"A cat. C-A-T, cat."

"A cat! But what for?"

"To catch a mouse."

"A mouse? What mouse?"

"Oh, heavens!" Mrs. Gil ejaculated in despair.

Mr. Gil came down to earth. "Look Lily, what would you want a cat for when a trap could catch the creature just as well?"

"But you failed to get one for tonight. Goodness knows how that Hobo Joe is going to feast himself when we're in bed. Soon he'll eat us out of our own house."

"All right, I'll get the trap first thing in the morning. Please, no

cats. You know how I detest them, Lily. Have a heart."

But Mr. Gil was preoccupied with his dream houses and the trap was forgotten. That evening at home, Mr. Gil felt uneasy. He could not have explained the source of his discomfort. Before he settled down to his evening paper he looked around him. Everything was in its usual place. His favorite chair hadn't been moved. Mrs. Gil was quiet at her mending. But Mr. Gil thought she looked queer tonight like a Greek triumphant with a Trojan prize. Mr. Gil dismissed the thought, shrugged his shoulders and was at the point of turning to his paper when a grayish-looking object caught his eye. Mr. Gil crumpled his paper. . . His hair stood on end like a stiff paint brush. Eyes rolling, chin quivering, he was a mass of goose pimples and shattered nerves.

"Lily, what is that ferocious-looking animal doing in this house?" Mr. Gil stammered, fighting for self-control. Mrs. Gil was calmer.

"You keep forgetting the mouse-trap, so I got us a better one. Meet PoPo, dear. He isn't ferocious. I think he's glamorous."

"Lily. . ."

"Mrs. Bonanza assured me that he's an excellent mouse catcher" continued Mrs. Gil as she picked up PoPo and caressingly stroked his fur. Mr. Gil's nose wiggled. He felt guilty about the mouse trap but this was unheard of—a cat in his own house to share his every breathing moment under the same roof!

"But what's wrong with having a

cat in the house? I think cats are the grandest house pets."

"Pets! Pests, you mean, and I hate them." Mr. Gil stormed.

"Don't shout at me."

"Who's shouting? Look, Lily do you realize this is our first quarrel? And over a cat?"

"I'm not quarrelling, you are! Look, you promised me a mouse-trap."

"But—"

"I know dear, you forgot. If you'd only keep your dreaming on blueprint. . ."

"But it's my. . ."

"It's your job, I know, and it may mean a dream house of our own. . ."

"Now, Lily. . ."

"Now, next thing you'll be asking me is why I couldn't have bought the trap myself?"

"Yes, that's exactly. . ."

"And turn my budget topsy-turvy? Not on your life. Now I thought we could bargain and give PoPo here a chance to catch Hobo Joe, say a week from today. And if that mouse isn't caught by that time, the cat goes. I promise. Otherwise it stays."

"That's quite sensible, I think. But a week with a cat!—oh, never mind. But remember, if that mouse isn't caught by that time I will personally see to it that that creature leaves or it'll join its ancestors in no time."

"Emmanuel Gil! you wouldn't dare!"

Mr. Gil really didn't mean that. But wished he did. That night he asked the Saint of the Impossible if he couldn't do something to make

cats attractive to him just enough to please Lily. A whole solid week with a cat. Why he'd be asthmatic before the week's out!

To Mr. Gil the days crawled at snail's pace. Mrs. Gil wondered what made them fly. Here it was Tuesday with only three days till the deadline. Hobo Joe was stuffing himself in the meanwhile with Mrs. Gil's cooking and had an uncanny knowledge of where she hid the food.

Mr. Gil took pains to get out of the cat's way. Patiently he brushed off the loose fur PoPo left on his favorite chair and even actually thought he contacted asthma when Lily had him feed PoPo his milk.

"You'll be house-hunting in a couple of days you ugly thing," muttered Mr. Gil, "unless you catch that mouse. I hope you don't or you'll make me miserable the rest of my life."

"A black Friday for us both if you don't catch that mouse," mumbled Mrs. Gil as PoPo yawned sleepily and stretched against her ankles. PoPo was lazy and mice didn't seem to bother him in the least. Why waste breath on an insignificant little mouse? This is the life—good food, a soft rug and an adoring mistress. The master? Aw, he's like the mouse—insignificant and asthmatic.

But Mrs. Gil was worried. She didn't want to lose PoPo. She had to do something about this mouse business. If PoPo wasn't going to catch "Hobo Joe" . . . Thursday afternoon Mrs. Gil dropped in on Mrs. Bonanza next door. That night she set up a tray by Mr. Gil's bed.

"So you wouldn't have to get up and prowl about my kitchen," she explained. Her husband grinned and was glad he had married such a thoughtful wife.

"Ha! today's the deadline," Mr. Gil triumphantly announced at breakfast next day. "Mr. Good-for-nothing PoPo will have to start with his packing."

"The day's just beginning. Give him time."

"Time? Lily, remember, a bargain's a bargain. I shall expect that cat off the premises this evening. It would be a relief to have our usual peace and quiet," observed Mr. Gil kissing his wife goodbye.

"Oh, go back to your blue-printing."

Mr. Gil wondered what brought on that queer look on his wife's face again. Kind of triumphant, thought Mr. Gil.

Noontime and Mr. Gil couldn't wait to tell Mrs. Gil that Mr. Esteban was so pleased with the plans for his mansion that he had contracted him to design the interior of his new ship, too.

"Good news, Lily!" he called out at the front door. He sought her out in the kitchen and he was grinning. So was Mrs. Gil. But Mr. Gil's grin froze.

"Good news, too, dear," she announced holding out the stiff, gray carcass of the late Mr. Hobo Joe between a pair of tongs.

"A bargain's a bargain," she mimicked. "Here, dump him in the garbage out there."

Mr. Gil stood unable to speak.

Mechanically he took the tongs from his wife and moved toward the back door. On the threshold he stopped and stammered, "So, he got it?"

"No, I killed it myself."

Mr. Gil didn't move. He turned the tongs around and around.

"You see, dear, I just couldn't have PoPo sent out of the house. He's lots of company. I feel less alone, since he's here. Besides, he's

something to fuss over."

Mr. Gil looked at the dead Hobo and then back at his wife. Suddenly his face creased and he began to laugh aloud. The next minute his wife was laughing too. He put his arm around her and both laughed till they had tears in their eyes.

"Lily" said he, "it's just like I always thought, a cat around the house brings good luck."

LOST LOVE

Gracia C. Queaño

*The pale, vagabond moon kept its vigil
On her being, frail and small,
As she begged the heavens for vigor—
To suffer, to toil, live on—
While the winds seemed to whisper
Words she feared to hear—
"He's gone... gone... he's gone..."
And the leaves of the trees seemed
Unpitifully echo—
"Never, never to return..."*

As a general rule people, even the wicked, are much more naive and simple-hearted than we suppose. And we, ourselves, are too.

Catholic Digest

The story is told of a Russian girl who took a government examination. After it was over she feared she might have failed, and worried particularly over one question: "What is the inscription on the Sarmian wall?" She had written down the answer: "Religion is the opiate of the people." So she walked seven miles from Leningrad to the Sarmian wall to make sure. Yes, there it was: "Religion is the opiate of the people." Falling upon her knees, she crossed herself and said, "Thank God!"

Catholic Digest