

Doors
by William Anderson

He didn't mind the physical changes. The grey hair, back problems, the seemingly inevitable weight gain, the uncooperative memory... even the old man in the mirror. These changes happened so slow that he had time to adjust.

He was comfortable. No worries there. When Beth died he sold the big house and the Audi she had to have. Then he had an estate sale for all her antiques. That with Social Security and his retirement plan, he was comfortable.

He wasn't sure if he was lonely. He lived alone but really did not miss the company of others that so many seemed to need. But he was vaguely unsettled. Was that loneliness? He didn't need things. His small apartment was bare. He did have a couple of pictures of Beth and the kids. But they were for when the kids visited, which, thankfully, was not too often. He had worked long hours plus a miserable commute so the kids grew up with Beth. He was more like a favorite uncle than a dad. Oh, and of course, there was the goodbye gun.

He was the product of his environment. Choices were made for him. College, career, even how he combed his hair, these were clearly determined for him. He didn't like his work but he was very good at it and so provided well enough for Beth. She loved status and shopping and he smiled and quietly resented her.

Not that he complained. He was acutely aware of the basic inequality of life and he knew he was lucky.

But it was the doors closing that spelled the end. He had survived his coward's life with his fantasies for tomorrow. And though his dreams were Walter Mitty in style, he needed them to be based in some personal reality. Then, one by one, his ageing began to close the doors of real

possibilities. Without the day dreams, without the fantasies, there was no future. All that was left was the daily grind of being alive. So now he filled his days with the only dream left: the fantasy of being brave enough to end. To close the last door.

So this was his final fantasy. There were so many ways to do it. But he had been so responsible for others all his adult life so he worried about how to lessen the impact of his final act on others. The others included, obviously his kids, but also the first responders who would have to deal with whatever he left. Why did he care? He set out the pistol and the gun cleaning kit to stage it like an accident. He carefully loaded the pistol and cocked the revolver. Then he had most odd feeling. He hadn't checked today's mail. That worried him. There would be no real mail, just advertising. But bringing in the mail was his responsibility. Even now. Maybe his last. So with a groan that punctuated his painful back, he rose and went to the front door. He thought he heard scratching. He opened the door and looked down. A small tabby cat looked up at him. Small but not a kitten, They looked at each for a long moment. Then with a wag of his tail the cat assumed a look of entitlement and calmly entered. He sauntered past the old man and jumped up in his chair.

The cat watched him as he walked over to the chair. "I don't like cats. I will leave the door open as I get the mail. Why don't you go home?" He turned his back on the cat and went to check the mail. Then remembering the cocked pistol, he returned to the table and uncocked the gun. The cat watched. "didn't want an accident", he explained. He unloaded the gun and put it in its box.

As expected there was no real mail. And when he returned the cat was still in the chair. That was two months ago. Since the cat didn't seem to want to leave. The old man accepted his responsibility for the cat. For the first time in years, he left his home and met his neighbors trying

to find the cat's family. When that failed, he went to Walmart and bought cat food. His next door neighbor was a single mom and she and her young daughter brought him a cat box and litter.

Since the young girl visited often to pet the cat, he locked away the gun. She was annoying pushing him into talking with her, and even into answering questions about his distant family. Even so, he missed her on those days when she did not visit.

He still left the door open when he checked the mail always expecting the cat to leave.

The cat never did.