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First Person

That old cat has me by the tail

By **JENNY MANSELL**

THE first I knew that the cold weather had struck was when a friend noticed a lump in my bed.

Closer inspection revealed "The Cat", which had snuggled between the sheets and put itself to bed well ahead of time.

It wasn't taking any chances because past experience had told it that I was going to do my usual and put it out to brave the cold while I went to my warm, cosy bed.

You'll notice I referred to it as The Cat. It's not really mine — just a leftover from a friend's move from a house to a unit. On top of that, it's 19 years old, selectively deaf and smarter than I am.

I asked myself today how I managed to get myself into this situation.

It must have been the tears of my friend when she said that it would have to be put down if she couldn't find it a home.

"Good," I thought, "that's one less cat to ravage the birdlife around here."

The vision of that book *101 Uses of a Dead Cat* ran through my mind, with some of the more vivid and horrifyingly funny drawings making me laugh.

"Oh, how terrible for you," I told my friend in a sympathetic voice. "I'll look after it."

I couldn't have said those words, I thought afterwards. I must have "sucker" written across my forehead.

I forgot my promise to my friend and went sailing one day, returning home to find The Cat screaming at me for food.

"Oh God, a talking cat! I hate talking cats," I thought.

Good, I thought.

Maybe there was a real cat in there.

You know, the kind that just sits on your lap, plays with woollen balls and looks pretty

Even after I fed it, it threw its food around the floor. I decided it had mental problems.

A few weeks went by and the cat became stranger. I felt it had "relocation syndrome", which I'm sure most people can relate to when they move and their animals don't adjust easily.

The lump-finding friend, a self-proclaimed expert in ugly cats and moving lumps, told me that The Cat needed to see a vet.

The word "money" immediately sprang to mind and I put it off for a couple of weeks.

"You've given me a deaf, mentally retarded, socially agnostic, whingeing old moggie," I told my cat-donating friend.

I took the cat to the vet. "How much does it cost for a needle?" I asked.

The vet convinced me that it wouldn't cost much to fix her up. I should have realised that a vet's idea of "cost" is different from mine.

When I returned several days later, the nurse informed me that the damage was \$240. I left the cat there.

The vet rang me. "When are you going to pick her up?" he asked. "It's not my cat," I replied in a faded voice.

A meeting with the vet assured me that most of her strange behaviour was due to the various illnesses she had.

Good, I thought. Maybe there was a real cat in there. You know, the kind that just sits on your lap, plays with woollen balls and looks pretty.

Unfortunately, I'm stuck with this one. If you lock it outside, it bangs on the door and screams to all the neighbourhood that I'm mistreating it. Having glass doors is a disadvantage when you're trying to hide from it.

I've decided The Cat is not the problem. It's my fault for being a marshmallow.

Jenny Mansell and her moggie co-exist at Manly.