

## Hide and Seek, Gracie Style

**Peter Gerstenzang's cat, Gracie, has developed a hiding habit.**

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My cat Gracie has learned some funny tricks in recent months. If I put a box of Kleenex on the floor and pretend to sneeze, she pulls one out and brings it to me. She can slip up my pants leg so stealthily that it's several minutes before I realize I'm not wearing an unusually heavy argyle sock.

But lately, my little kitty has come up with a nerve-wracking trick that's going to require someone zapping me with a defibrillator if she doesn't stop. See, Gracie has found out how to hide while I'm out. And then I can't find her. I don't even think a Bloodhound or TV psychic Sylvia Browne could find her.

Then, while I'm doing, say, meditation, up pops Gracie. And I need to breathe into a paper bag to stop hyperventilating.

What's a father to do?

Gracie's game only recently became Hide and Seek. It actually evolved from that time-honored classic, "What's Wrong With This Picture?" In other words, Gracie would knock something from its shelf, use her powers to imitate it and dare me to find her. Early on, she pretended to be a vase (which took me 20 minutes to find her), a copy of "War And Peace" (15 minutes) and then, her masterpiece. I have a stuffed cat on my writing desk. Well, I came in one day and searched in vain for Gracie. My dog Happy joined in. But not before I peered down his throat and looked at the size of his stomach. You never know.

An hour later I sat down, very upset. But not as upset as I became when the stuffed cat stood up and started to stretch. I was so spooked, I shrieked like Little Richard. Gracie seemed very proud of herself and waddled off. To this day I think she and Happy buried the stuffed cat together. In seven different locations!

But that was nothing. Now, it takes hours. I check under beds, in the bathtub, nothing works. No matter how I grill Happy, he won't give her up. Gracie must have something on him. In any case, this once placid household recently has turned into an episode of "Law & Order: Criminal Intent."

What have I learned? Patience. She eventually appears. So, I just have to relax. Besides, as with kids, I think this hiding thing is a phase — like piercing. If I don't make a big fuss about it, Gracie is bound to move on to something else weird soon.

Of course, if I ever come home and find her, say, rearranging the furniture, I'm going to be totally freaked out. And I'll long for the days when she was just hiding. Until that time comes, I'll just try to sit back and laugh. Gracie is healthy, gets along with my dog, and generally is a terrific cat. If this is the nuttiest thing she does, I'll say what I often do when I look at my cat: "Peter, you are one lucky guy."

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