

# Cat's Life

"I want to shake out the fat broom!" Melonia said to no one in particular, unless you count the black one-eyed cat (left eye missing) with the sheared ear (right tip missing) that was licking its white front paw on the terrace of her house, also minding no one in particular.

Of course you should count the cat. Cats are expected to be rather significant in witch stories, whether in the traditional fables or in the more modern variety. Old fairy tales often predicate their entire plot and element of fear (fairy tales are, of course, devices of warning) on the real existence and influence witches hold over our world (where the witches are usually depicted as a dangerous lot, forget that "Good" one Melinda! Melonia resented to no end how close their names were, clientele often confused them which she tried to pretend, smiling through tight lips, was "no big deal at all, happens all the time!" but my oh my was she fuming inside). Modern witch stories are more weary about calling out a witch as such (once more, annoying Melonia who liked calling spades and so on), but are instead overly laden with metaphors and symbols designed to elicit a sense of the esoteric, that inexplicable awe in the face of our contemporary science-trigger-happy world.

But more importantly, you should count the cat because Melonia was indeed talking to the cat. The cat was ignoring her. Cats do that, on purpose. You don't need to be a witch, and certainly don't need a telepathic cat to know that. Just spend a few minutes with any random cat (they are never random, of course) and you will quickly gather that cats are opinionated, maintain very firm boundaries, and are fully committed to the notion of self-care and putting themselves and their desires first. That should help frame the comparison to dogs rather explicitly and expediently, dogs being quite the opposite except perhaps the opinions piece, but dogs show none of the feline passive-aggressiveness and cold-shouldering. Dogs prefer the deep remorse effect (mostly with their eyebrows, and the specific way they choose to slump down), the remorse regarding the fact you don't seem to see eye-to-eye with them on the topic of say, chewing on the new Persian piece-de-resistance carpet you have finally just had delivered, and rolled out with a keen eye towards the perfect placement on the renovated living room floor, believing the puppy is finally old enough. But enough of dogs. Out, out you go, run after some silly stick. This tale is for cats only.

Why then, the ignoring? Because he knew Melonia was about to pull a fast one and disappear for a few days. And yes, cats will pretend they don't care their humans (or their witches, for that matter) are gone, but deep down inside they most certainly do.

Not out of fear for their humans' health and well being, or out of painful longing (again, think dogs, but do it quietly). Mostly because they like to assert they are in control, and the taking-off humans seem to be capable of doing, without any preparation and without obtaining permission, really rains on that particular parade cats believe themselves to be a part of.

Melonia has been getting testy lately. She's been stuck at home. Covid-19. Like everyone else in the neighbourhood. Being a witch doesn't quite grant one full viral protection. She hated everything about it, which you'd hardly think would be the case, considering her reclusive lifestyle and general hatred of the general population. She had always been happier to not see humans, religiously (if that can be said of a witch) avoided public gatherings of more than ten, and had for years been ordering online all of her foodstuff, herbs and artifacts of magicking (those Phoenix talons were so darn tricky to get on the dark web, and of poor quality, and often mixed in with inert falcon ones, because who can tell the difference anymore, and way too expensive, which of course pissed her off, again, to no end, and catapulted her into livid arguments with the anonymous sellers, all done over email, using her ancient yahoo account address, which didn't do much to impress them of her credibility either).

Really, the only reason she left home was for the monthly full moon gatherings of her rather dwindling coven (Netflix binging, if you can believe it, being the main reason for the increasing numbers of no-shows) and to get the special stuff, that which cannot be delivered. So, what was the big deal that got her so restless, longing to get out, considering the risk while pacing back and forth in the living room, driving the cat bonkers? The cat was at a loss, but strange times, strange behaviours.

Then, out came the broom. He wasn't going to say anything, but he suspiciously one-eyed it. It wasn't her standard broom, the short straw one, excellent for city parking, great maneuverability, incredibly magick-dust efficient. No. She was bringing out the big gun. Full horse hair double-duty beast, a real guzzler. What the hell was this about? But if anyone had more pride than Melonia, it was the cat, so he didn't ask and she didn't tell. Off she took, with a bit of a swoosh. *Showoff*, he thought and turned his thoughts and tongue over to the other paw, black like the rear ones.

Not too long after, actually, surprisingly quite a short time after, she returned. There was a big box balanced on the broom. The cat, who at this point would rather we referred to him by his name, Lucas (with a silent s, the French pronunciation) enjoyed the glee her rather graceless landing allowed him to experience. She untied and unloaded the box, picked up the broom, huffed at him, and stomped inside.

There was something moving in the box. Thrashing about and making strange sounds.

*Wonderful!* Lucas was all of a sudden giddy. Previous adventures with animated noisy boxes demonstrated to him, rather conclusively, there is often something delicious inside. Sometimes it was Melonia's deliberate attempt to either delight him, or placate him. A few fluffy chicks, still yellow and tender, a pigeon or two, mice of course, classic, and so on. There was the sad affair with the lizard in the box that was placed on the kitchen counter, the lizard that wasn't quite for him, but he got a bit ahead of himself and took liberties, and made some assumptions that perhaps he neglected to verify, and oh my, was Melonia not happy to not find the lizard the next morning. Lucas did not feign innocence, or show shame, that's obviously reserved to the other, lowly pets, and instead he opted to smirk and slowly walk out of the room, with a raised tail. Slow, but not too slow, rubbing against her leg just once, then making some haste, before she got into full rage mode, spewing a long list of curses, about what, one meager lizard? Really now.

Oh yes, Lucas also had to remind himself of that other time, in fact now that he thinks of it, not too long after the lizard business, where that rather delicious smelling boxed toad got him horribly sick, and he had dreadful dreams of his past lives, but by and large, boxes, more often than not, meant treats for him.

More sniffing and shuffling sounds. And something that sounded like a yelp. How many things were in there? Lucas had to wonder. And should he proceed? With caution? It was, after all, a really big box. It didn't look like it was meant for either mice or chicks. Melonia saved him from making the call, by stomping back to the terrace, and leaning down over the box. She opened it, reached inside, and voila! She lifted up one Golden Retriever puppy.

A wait, what?

The indignation!

The sheer chutzpah of that woman!!

How. Dare. She.

Melonia ignored Lucas and his increasingly loud thoughts.

"Who's a good girl?? Who? Who? Yes! Yes!" Melonia cooed as the puppy, by way of answering, licked her face with her long, moist and infuriatingly inelegant tongue. Ugh. What an utterly undignified thing, Lucas could not believe it. He bit his tail, no, he wasn't dreaming. How can it be? What witch in her right mind adopts a Golden puppy? While Lucas wanted to run away and jump atop some cupboard, (perhaps using the opportunity to calmly paw whichever trinkets were put on there to the edge and over it, and observe with satisfaction how they fall, and sometimes break), he

was mesmerized by the whole experience of watching, almost in slow motion, and at the same time, in the blink of an eye, his perfect world about to transform into a train wreck. He couldn't help himself, it was in morbid fascination that he remained seated in alertness, looking at Melonia, still in her heavy boots and bike helmet (he always thought she looked positively embarrassing in it, and she told him he can judge all he wants, her safety was paramount), scratching the puppy under her ears, and hugging her with a categorically idiotic smile.

The puppy noticed Lucas.

She tilted her head (*how cute!* A little voice inside Lucas said and Lucas smacked it on its head right away, let's agree this never happened). She walked towards Lucas on wobbly legs. Really, this puppy couldn't be more than three weeks old! She was going to try and lick him, Lucas realized in great alarm, almost too late. Lucas hissed, arched his back, fur raising. The puppy stopped in her tracks. She sat down. She looked Lucas straight in the eye, the one eye, and then, lowered her head, and raised it. Slowly, deliberately.

What was that about? Lucas considered.

The puppy raised her snout to face the sky, closed her eyes, and delivered a long, thoughtful (though still quite high-pitched and squeaky) howl into the night.

Something old stirred inside Lucas.

Something he hadn't thought about in many many lives of comfort, toads or no toads. Decades of vacation, unpaid time off. Mental health accomodation. He really needed the break. Not having to deal with any issue, let alone big messy ones at a global scale. Like curing plagues.

For a brief moment, memories surfaced. The soldiers coming home, the bodies accumulating in the streets. The young nurses coughing, coughing, then dying. The blue skin, the black toes. The millions. The millions.

He sighed, and slumped down, very un-catlike.

*This is going to be a long ride*, he thought to the dog, and added, *Welcome. It's been a while. I suppose that means I have to get back to work.*

*Yup*, the puppy thought back. *And, I did miss you old friend. You can go right ahead pretending you are not thrilled to see me again.*

"You two clearly have some catching up to do," Melonia interrupted. "I'll leave you to it. Tomorrow, we begin."

She walked inside and gently closed the door behind her.

*(With thanks to Alice Walker)*