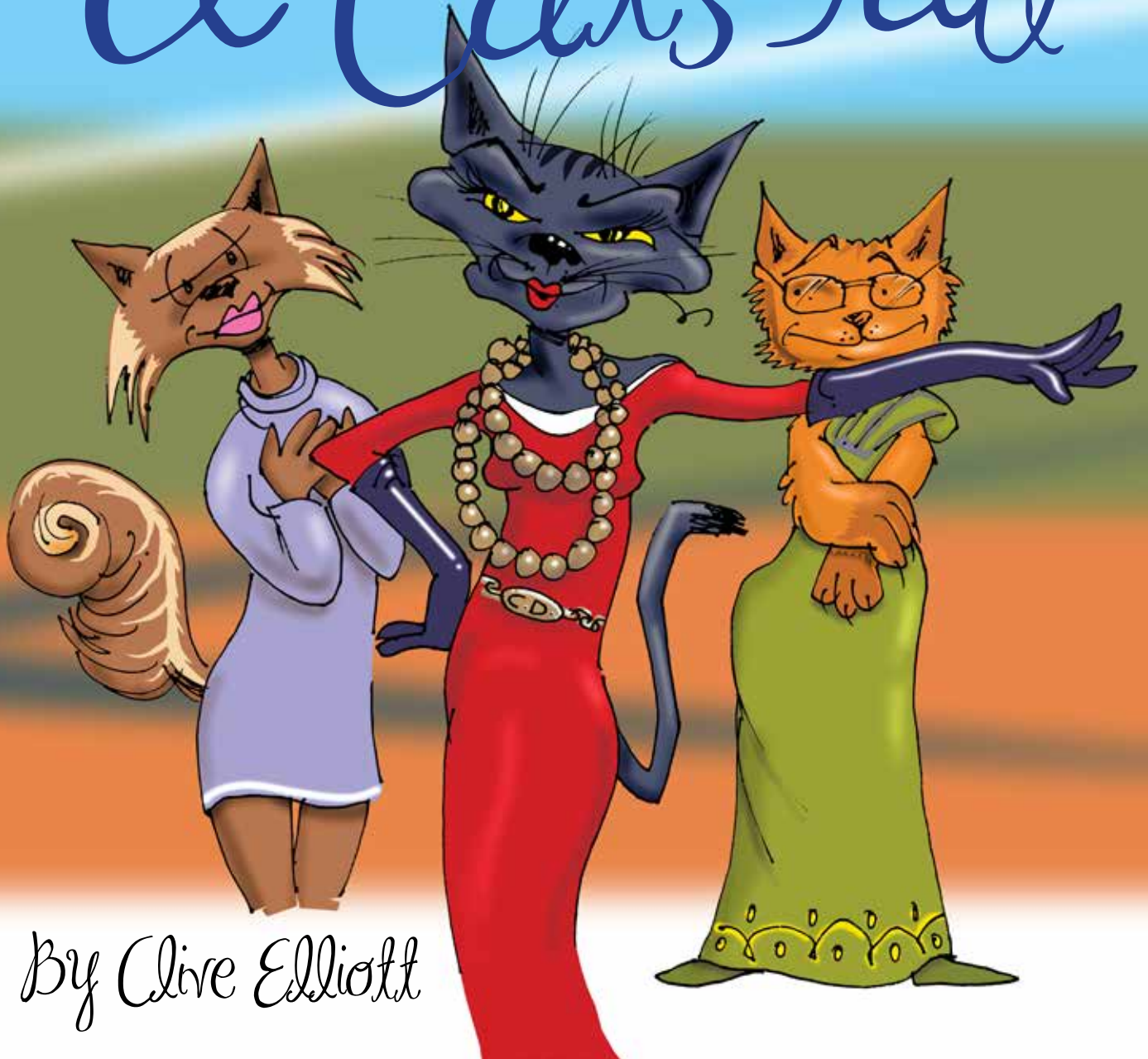


A Cat's Tail



By Clive Elliott

I would like to dedicate this story to my parents, my flatmate
and to my late brother, Hades Elliott,
without whom this tale would not have been told.

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www.cliveelliott.com

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By Clive Elliott



This is a story about me. But, it also involves others I have lived with from time to time. It's a short story. I have neither the inclination, time nor energy to do anything longer.

Much of the story is based on my recollection, some, or indeed much of which is now a bit hazy, especially when I try and recall my earlier years. Please bear with me. I will do my best to faithfully record what happened.

Life is strange! Some things make sense some of the time. Other things seldom make any sense at all. Yet others make sense to some of us, but not others. Here I am, going off on a tangent already. Allow me to stop myself right there! Back to what I was saying. This is a little story about my life, and some of the interesting things I've done.

Let's go back, right to the beginning. I was born somewhere in Auckland around 1988. The exact details escape me now, but I remember my darling Mum telling me it was one warm spring morning. We were a big family. Five kids in all, and each one born that day.

Mum was a star! I remember her well! She was sleek and refined. She had chocolate brown hair. It was like velvet. She glistened in the sun. She would spend hours grooming herself. Carefully and meticulously she would preen and pander herself.

She was beautiful.

She never neglected us. We all know how very demanding five kids can be. Two things were important to us, food and sleep, and not necessarily in that order. That is not to forget "play". Yes, play! Without play, life would be very dull indeed.

We had a ball! Seemingly endless cycles of milk, sleep and play. Milk, sleep and play. Milk... sleep...whoa! On and on it would go. Sleep can be a bit of a drag at times. Well, then it was anyway. Now, well ... that's another thing entirely. But we'll get to that later. Food, well, that was a must. But, the real fun was "play".

With five brothers and sisters, there was never a shortage of playmates. We would run riot

around the house. The kitchen was our main hangout. It was our turf. But if the kitchen door were left ajar for just a minute, through we would pour, like a marauding army, tearing around like lunatics.



And, then suddenly, the fun was over. We would be evicted in a hail of shouts and some curses. Invariably there would be a frenzied stamping of feet and clapping of hands.

I mean — really! I have never understood people. This seemingly endless need for gratuitous violence still puzzles me today as I sit here.

Why some of them can't act nicely I just don't know, Anyway, to us it was just another game, just youthful high-jinx, As long as you were one step ahead, which was usually the case, there was

no real contest [hee hee]! And all ended well. Life was great! I didn't have a care in the world.

How was I to know it was all about to change? I still remember the day. We were all sun bathing one morning. This man I had never seen before walked into the kitchen. He picked us up and started to examine us, one by one. His face looked kind but you can't always rely on first impressions, especially when it comes to people. What he had to say sent our human into a right real state.

She stormed out of the kitchen in a rage. The man followed her rather awkwardly. She then slammed the door behind them. We huddled together in a frightened heap. It didn't take much to work out that trouble was brewing. Mum drew us all in to her and held us tight. I could feel her heart beating like a drum. She didn't say a thing but we knew something was wrong.

I just buried myself in her warm embrace and waited. After a while I looked up and saw a faint tear in her eye. She brushed it away and tried to smile. She was so beautiful, and so proud.

Suddenly, the door opened. Next, the man was back. He towered over us. He started to grab us. Mum held on all the more. She hissed out! Warning! Leave them alone! Her claws were out-she lunged at the man — he cursed, blood on his arm. He snatched one of us. Suddenly, a box appeared and one by one we were thrown into it — very unceremoniously at that.

Mum let out a pitiful cry. I can still remember it today. She just lay there and cried. It was terrible!

Next minute the box was lifted up and we were carried out the house to a waiting car. Let me tell you, cars and I don't get on.

But before we got to the car I looked out of a hole in the box and saw our neighbour peering over the fence. He was very agitated and ran along the fence. Back and forth

He paced, letting out a strange low moan. It was heart wrenching. The last thing I remember before the car door slammed shut was his moon round face and his eyes — frantic but resigned, and covered in tears. That was all I knew of my father.



They say life has its ups and downs. That, dear reader, is an understatement! I was about to experience one of the downs. Life in this box, even though for only a short period, was hell. It was simply not big enough and with five of us fighting for space, it was far from pleasant. The heat was stifling, the air heavy with foreboding.

Eventually, after what seemed like an eternity, we reached our destination. We were carried in our bulging box to a big building. It was hard and austere and full of strange and frightening sounds. Dogs were barking, not just one or two dogs, but what...

Seemed like a whole horde of them. I realised soon; we had been deserted. We had been cast off at the home for the unloved and unwanted, the last stop for surplus animals, the SPCA.



The contents of our sorry little box were emptied out. We landed in a pile on the ground.

The sun blinded me. When my eyes adjusted, I found we were in a cage and around us were about 20 other kittens. They stared at us. We huddled together and tried to look composed. Somehow I don't think we quite carried it off. But, soon the new attraction lost its interest and everyone else got on with his/her business, Yes, you guessed — sleeping and playing.

Slowly we unbundled ourselves and explored our new home. It was a pretty basic place.

Very secure!

Oh dear! The thing I missed most was my darling Mum. Suddenly you could not sidle up to her and have a drink of lovely warm milk whenever you got hungry. This was nothing other than a prison!



Twice a day the warder would bring us food and milk. The first time he plonked the plates down I couldn't believe my eyes. Talk about a bunfight!

It was everyone for himself, or in my case herself. Instead of five mouths to feed there were now more like twenty-five and each mouth had four sets of razor sharp claws!

The moderate and civilised meals of the past were now a frenzy of hisses, scratches and barging. As one of the smaller and naturally more refined of the participants I just watched in awe and then horror — at least — for the first few times, until I learnt a busy kitten can't live on good intentions alone, and I joined the fray, with intensity that surprised even me. Go for it Junes!

My situation was not helped by an unfortunate accident that happened one morning. We had been at our new digs for about a week. Outside was a very interesting world. Being naturally inquisitive I had checked it out. By now I had things well sussed.

There were heaps of other enclosures, some with big cats in them, some with dogs. There was even a goat! No doubt there was more to be seen. Possibly this possie wasn't as bad as I might have thought.

Anyway, this morning I decided it was time I did a bit of snooping. As the warder opened the gate I took the gap.

The pain! I can still feel it today! Phew!

I won't bore you with the details, but I can tell you I ended up with a badly mangled leg. Not to mention my tail I tell you what, that oaf and I fell out after that!

Until my leg mended, it was very hard to hold my own and get a decent meal. It was a real jungle in there. At mealtime



I was no match for the others. I got thinner and thinner. However, nature has a way of ensuring that the worthy pull through — none of this “only the good die young” stuff you sometimes hear humans talk about. In pulling through though, I may have used one of my seven lives, but only time would tell.

Slowly my leg mended and I was getting back to my normal self before too long

If I had reluctantly accepted our predicament before, I hated it now. I knew I had a veritable cat-astrophe on my wee hands. All the same, time had to be killed, friends made and family connections kept. As the saying goes, “When the going gets tough, the tough...” Enough said, dear reader!

As it tends to do from time to time, life meandered on until one day fate intervened and an event occurred that was to change my life. One morning a couple of humans, a man and a woman, came to visit. They walked into the enclosure. No big deal, you think. So did I. She was small with a thin but friendly face. He was tall with a rounder face. I took no real notice, being involved in a rather hectic game of “chase, with one of my friends. I did however notice that one of my brothers curled up at the human man’s feet, “What’s he up to?” I thought. The man picked my brother up. The humans eyed him approvingly. I got on with my own activities. Next thing, I saw the couple talking. Suddenly, an arm stretched out, my red collar tag was examined, confirming I was a girl cat, and before my blue collared brother and I knew we were whisked out. Kidnapped! For the second time in our short lives!

We were thoroughly and unceremoniously checked out in the office.

I put on my most pathetic long-cat look Alas, none of it worked. Then. To my horror, I saw money changing hands, I realised we had not been kidnapped after all, we were being sold — we were no more than a commodity! What an insult! They say, “You never own a cat”. Correct! But, it seems you can “buy” and “sell” one, in our case, for just \$10.00.

Feeling thoroughly defiled we were put in another cardboard box and, once again, hostages



to fate, we were transported away. We drove for what seemed like hours. I was in deep despair. We just lay there and waited. Eventually, we arrived at our destination.

We were very carefully, but I must admit in all fairness, lovingly put on the kitchen floor in front of a big bowl of fridge milk. My brother and I looked at each other. Heck! What are we on to here! Then, it was all on. Uncertain as we were, we put on a real show hissing, spitting, pushing and scratching think they got the message — “Were no pushover got that! Their faces, I tell you, it was a sight!

By the next day we had own plates. The diet had been expanded. By the third day the house was infested with fleas and we had peed and a lot more in every room. We were making our presence felt, I could just feel it.

These new humans of ours soon proved to be kind and very affectionate. After my initial dislike for them I began to accept that maybe fate had come out tops this time. And, I still had my big brother with me, so it was not too bad, I suppose.

At that age, you live very much for the moment. Gratification had to be instant and varied. We had a blast! During the day our humans went to work. This meant the house was ours, for our every whim and fancy, The furniture was old and [as I discovered later] rented, so there was plenty of opportunity to come to grips with it.



Our favourite game was a type of “vertical lift off”; right up the back of this red armchair and down the front. Occasionally, we found an unfortunate human in the chair: inevitably a weekend or evening. Inevitably, again, curses, shouts and claps would emit: signalling it was time to be scarce for a while. What fun!

Another favourite caper was the “ace of lace”! It was the most fun, but it introduced me to something new and very human in kind — a hiding. After one very successful attempt, I think I got at least half way up, I got my first spanking. It was to prove to be the first of many such unfortunate encounters.

One thing I was to learn is that if you choose to live with humans they have this bad habit of expecting you to behave like one. For a cat, no matter how intelligent, this can be a bit demanding and at times difficult.

Potty training was one such area.

One day, just like that and for no apparent reason, we were expected to be potty trained. Any deviation from the rule meant instant punishment - having our noses pushed into the affected area. The first time it happened, I couldn't believe my eyes - what a base and depraved form of punishment. But, all the same, I have to say one thing for it - it worked! Before long we were potty trained, well mannered and rounded in all the necessary social etticat.

Before long I had learnt the game. If you wanted to examine the insides of the lounge settee or use the drape as a stepladder, you did this in your own spare time, that is, when the humans were away. Unbeknown to me I was on the way to reaching a level of development I had never imagined possible.



Cats are the most misunderstood of all animals. We all know that every cat is his own master or mistress. Even so, we are often tagged with the very demeaning title "pet". I won't even dignify it with a comment.

Humans have mastered a lot, but one thing they still don't understand is the feline mind. We have an advanced language. We converse with each other and with humans. We don't work. We don't buy houses and food. But why should we when our humans do that for us? We enjoy the good things in life like a plate of food, a warm fire, affection, etc. As for the stresses of a career, success or worldly things, we have no need for them. We don't talk about politics and religion at dinner parties.

It's little wonder we are such good allies to the human kind. We have kindred spirits but we don't want the same things in life. As a result we get on without stepping on each other's toes. Well, most of the time at least!

It's disappointing when we don't get proper recognition for our abilities. Let's take an example. One common fallacy is that cats don't talk. What rubbish! We talk to each other

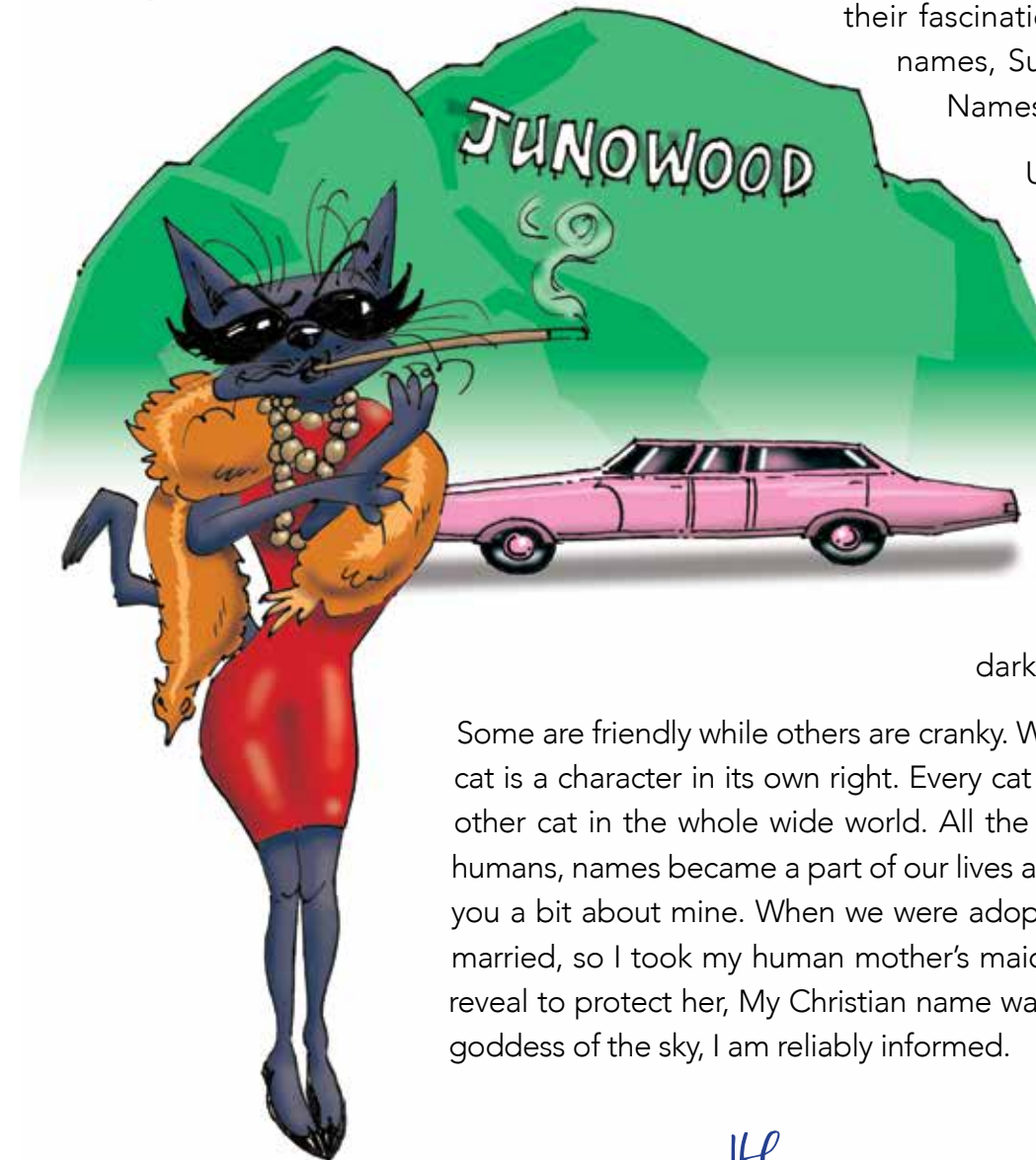


every day. We also talk to humans, if they're willing to listen. Otherwise, how do you think I managed to tell this story? There, then, I rest my case.

Another strange thing about humans is their fascination with names. Christian names, Surnames, and nicknames. Names, names...

Us cats don't have names like this. We have never had the need for them and probably never will. Every cat is different. Some are young, some are old, some are thin, and some are fat. Some are tabbies, some are dark (similar to me).

Some are friendly while others are cranky. Who needs names — every cat is a character in its own right. Every cat is an individual unlike any other cat in the whole wide world. All the same, as a cat living with humans, names became a part of our lives and I should, I suppose, tell you a bit about mine. When we were adopted our humans were not married, so I took my human mother's maiden name, which I will not reveal to protect her, My Christian name was "Juno" after the Roman goddess of the sky, I am reliably informed.





My brother was called "Hades" after the Greek god of the underworld. He took our human father's surname. Once again, details are withheld to avoid embarrassment to our humans.

There we were, two part-pedigree, orphaned sophisticats, living in upper class Herne Bay, with Christian names derived from Greek and Roman gods, Strange yes, but let me assure you, true! Life was turning out to be an odd and at times perplexing experience for both of us. More of that later, my ever patient reader.

Life went on from day to day. As I said, both our humans worked during the day, This meant we had the house to ourselves during the day. At night they would arrive at home and a different type of fun and games would start, as Hades and I would play with our human foster parents.

There was hide and seek:

Another favourite — puncture the pencil [preferably so that it was so badly bitten that it couldn't be used again]; knead the freshly folded washing: pass the parcel (usually a supposedly "priceless" ornament of little value to any cat): follow the leader (a game of high speed chase) and "Flesh Dance" (a type of pirouette on someone's lap).

One game we frequently had to play, but never enjoyed, was the "Brutus Slip". Our human neighbours, with whom we shared a back yard, had this big stupid dog called Brutus, They seemed to adore this mutt, This is something, which has always defied my refined cat logic. Brutus was a substantial animal of unknown and decidedly uncertain origin. He was a mongrel. Call him a mutt if you wish, Not that there is necessarily anything wrong with a mixed heritage: particularly as I have one myself. What really grated was that our dear and misspent Brutus always wanted to play chase with us. Bearing in mind that Hades and I were probably ten times smaller that Brutus you could imagine our sheer terror when this huge, partially co-ordinated collection of chest, legs, arms and teeth advanced towards us.

Retreat is supposedly better than valour and the human saying: "He who runs away lives to fight another day"





became our motto in those dark days. As we got older our humans would put us outside during the day while they were at work. When Brutus was on the loose the only safe zone was under our house. Once you got onto the lawn it was open slather. The only other safe zone was under the next door fence. To get there in one piece involved a death-defying dash of about forty feet.

Remember -- that for a cat is the equivalent of a summer crossing of Death Valley on foot. It's not impossible, but with a generous dollop of luck, it is achievable. Equally, it is not fun.

Two things were essential. The first was simple straight-line speed — no problem there. Where life itself is at stake, a hotly pursued cat will always beat a dog, and this was no different. The second is a clear and decisive head. Once a decision was made to cross no-mutt's land, that was it! There was no turning back. This second rule, I learnt, was just as important as the first.

A very fast cat is no good to anyone if it does not have a good idea of where it is going. Yes,! Two things were essential, a clear objective and a clear head!



These truths I discovered on one wet winter's day. I was doing the usual mercy dash in less than perfect conditions, the going being heavy under-paw. Next, to my sickening surprise, the dreaded and almost demented looking Brutus loomed out of the mist. I quickly realised that my much-vaunted speed had been left severely wanting. Not to mention my timing, which until now had been exemplary. Where to now, I thought! Just as the vicious fangs of the deranged animal were about to descend and tear me to pieces, I did the unexpected - I turned!

I threw out a hideous hiss and readied myself for battle. To my eternal amazement the once feared jaws remained poised suspended in time, The dumb hound just stood there and gaped at me sheepishly.

So much for the dreaded Brutus. Typical mutt — all bark and no bite! Ha!

I mustered together my wits, calmly walked to the fence and lithely slipped under it to safety. Phew! My face might have looked calm, but my heartbeat would have told a totally different story.

That episode was a frightening but valuable one for me. I realised what I had suspected for some time, that a cat is, by definition and design, infinitely more superior to a dog. I also realised that after humans, we have few peers. Why I might ever have doubted this, I don't know. Another important thing I learnt was that no matter how fast or big you are, if you don't use your brains, you're dead. Speed, my friend, is no substitute for IQ.

Days merged into weeks and weeks into months. Hades and I grew, or should I say, Hades grew and I matured delicately. What Hades had in bulk I compensated for in beauty.



While I had unmistakable finesse and grace he had undoubted girth.

Still, with our black coats tinged with chocolate brown and our bright yellow eyes, you could see we were brother and sister. As we grew older I realised that I was never going to be a giant amongst cats. Instead, I got the uncomfortable but distinct feeling that I might turn out to be a bit of a midget — not a particularly pleasant thought.

Surprisingly, the thought of being small and diminutive never bothered me. One of the reasons for this was that I was starting to discover something that had never occurred to me before - I was uncommonly bright and gifted. I was also caring. In fact, I was what is



commonly referred to in the cat community as a "SNACK". No, not something you eat — but a "sensitive new age cat"! This is the new 90's type of cat, switched on but sensitive.

If Hades was your traditional red meat and veggie type, I was decidedly calcium enriched/ salt reduced environmentally friendly cat bikkies oriented. So, when my human father rather unkindly called me, amongst other things, the "runt" of the litter, while we were playing on the bed, I delicately turned around, and gave him a thoroughly old-age fart in his face. I then calmly sidled away. Try that for size! I thought. There comes a time for even the most sensitive of us where we have to draw the line and I think I had made my point.

As winter turned into spring life became far more pleasant. Brutus remained a constant nuisance, but nothing more. The neighbourhood was quiet and we had grown quite attached to our home. My highly developed cat sense should have warned me that all good things come to an end and that the current state of domesticated bliss was all about to change.

Change it did, It transpired that my humans were getting right on in life, They had decided to marry and buy their own house, in the nearby suburb of Westmere. Unbeknown to me, our comfortable little world was about to be turned on its head. One day the peace, certainty and solitude of our family home was replaced by movers, trailers, noise and bustle. This was definitely no place for a cat of advanced sensibilities. So I took refuge, as I had done often before, next door on the roof. I could see the whole sorry spectacle unfold as the contents of our home were emptied onto waiting trailers and whisked away.

I made a decision right there and then: to be no part of it - I was staying! When the job was done I saw Hades getting bribed out from under the house with a piece of meat (yes, red of course). I was disgusted that he would succumb to one of the oldest tricks in the book, but Hades is a cat in the real sense of the word, and not the brightest at that. So much for any semblance of solidarity. I steamed like a cat on a hot tin roof. I uttered a few curses and watched in growing dismay.



My resolve hardened, until slowly the reality starting sinking in. For all his faults, Hades was my only known relative and I couldn't imagine living apart. Damn! What do I do now!

Well, to cut a long story short, I eventually went, but not without a fight and, I should add, with my dignity intact. I decided that if I had to go, which it increasingly became apparent I did, I would make them regret it.

The first thing we did (Hades now having been brought back into line) when we got to the new house was to hide under an old bed for a few hours.

This resulted in desperate (but unanswered) calls, hee, until we were found. But that little caper backfired when my human Mum decided to use some old witchy-poo wives tale remedy on us.

What a waste of time! There is no way I intended going home anyway, not knowing for a minute where it was. You laugh! Spend five minutes in a black box in an equally black car boot and then retrace your steps... Dumbo!

By this stage I was ready to chew someone's arm off. The hisstrionics were something else! For the next two days I didn't talk to anyone. I didn't touch my food. We are talking about a real hunger strike here. And, when I did eat something, I made sure I brought it up at the

appropriate time (when someone was watching) and at a strategic place (for example, on the new lounge suite the humans had just bought). I was a real little minx! Even Hades got the cold shoulder.

But, after a few days it all got a bit much and I decided, reluctantly I should add, to accept the lot fate had just thrown me, whether it was for better or worse.

Anyway, a look around also told me that our new house was not too bad. It was much bigger and sunnier than the previous place and we had our very own back yard - minus the mutt! So, I decided to give things a try before making any final decision about my future, but as my human father (a lawyer) would say, on a strictly "without prejudice" basis; which in catalk means "yes, no and maybe," all wrapped up together, Intriguing, this human logic!

So, as one door closed, another opened. Life soon settled into a nice steady cat-monotony, just the way I would have it.



We soon realised that while our humans had slipped a social notch in terms of suburb, from upper to decidedly mid-middle class, our lot had improved by the leap and bound of the hound Brutus who thankfully rapidly became nothing more than a distant memory.

And, thanks to nice high wooden fences, all the local mutts were kept off our turf. Harmony had been restored.

Hours merged into days and days into months. Months became years, often with little to distinguish one from the other. That is not to say that boredom ever became a problem. "Boredom" is never something a self-



respecting cat ever has to trouble itself with, being a uniquely human condition. Life was great!

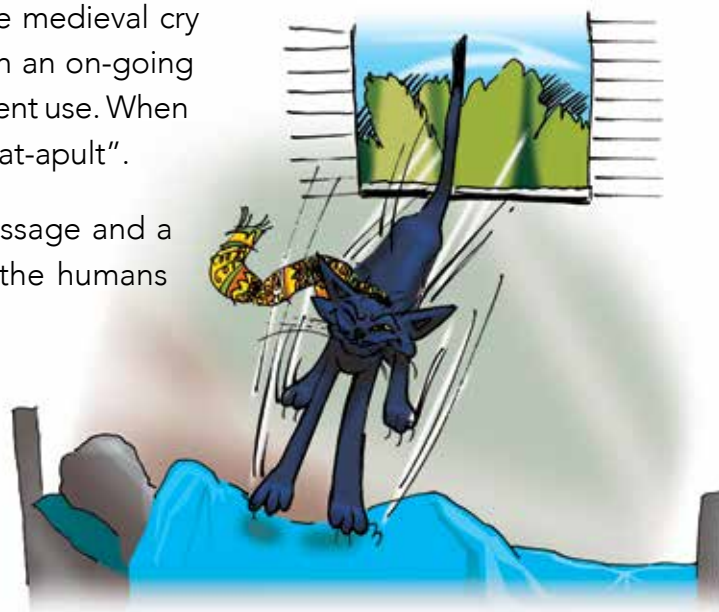
Let me illustrate this by outlining the events of a typical day. The first thing a cat has to do is wake up — a less than brilliant and self-evident fact. The second is to wake the rest of the family, irrespective of the time of the day. This can be done in a number of ways. The first is the considerate and subtle approach — to stretch and yawn.

If this is unsuccessful, the next is to scratch (regardless of the need) and shake. This

normally does the trick. If however, the all family still remains asleep at this point, more drastic action is needed. The medieval cry of “bring out your dead” has worked but not on an on-going basis, the humour tending to diminish after frequent use. When all else fails, I fall back on what I call the “feline cat-apult”.

It involves a good head of speed down the passage and a headlong jump at the bed, directly at one of the humans with a stiff-legged landing.

This sure brings out all but the dead and the dying. If there are two humans present, a good long purr tends to mop up any stragglers. And, it’s “aye for away”!



After all pleasantries are over, the next trick is to score breakfast. This is usually at about 6.15 on weekdays. Next, while our Mum is at the gym I sun myself, usually on one of our windowsills. Our bedroom is off limits at this time, while our Dad sleeps on. Then, it’s time for a quick cuddle, if I’m in the mood and out into the garden for a touch of “Out of Africa”.

This activity can be very time consuming and for anyone other than a cat, tedious. For me though time is not a problem. I’m happy to wait for hours on the off chance of a nice big fat tasty bird to ambush, wound, torment and then eat. Tough luck! A quick bird is often too damn fast for a quick cat, me included. Hey! Where was I when the speed was dished out?

With the daily hunt behind me it’s time for a more reflective and recreational purr-suit. To my mind, this necessitates a lie in the sun in winter and a lie in the shade in summer.

Now, that’s more like it! Summer, winter, shade and sun. Once again one merges into the other with monotonous regularity. Funny, isn’t it, I seem to recall saying that earlier. Anyway, as I said before, you will need to be patient, us cats need time to tell a tale.



Just like today, my lie-in normally takes me well into the afternoon. From here on in it's time for some socialising, either at my place or somewhere else in the neighbourhood. I've never understood the need for some of my comcatriots to get all silly and territorial.

Like dogfights and bun-fights, catfights are such an absolute bore - Really! MY philosophy is live and let live! Anyway I'm too small to be successful at territorial exploits and my brother Hades, for all his good qualities, has always been an unfortunate scaredy-cat when it comes to the crunch.

So, for cats at least, our property is a total aggression-free zone.

Or, should I say, as far as I'm able to make it one. There have been a few scraps over the years, some involving cats we've never met before. Weird really, but thankfully none have involved me. As a result my formidable looks have withstood the ravages of time remarkably well and without the need for expensive facials, animal tested face creams and the strangest of all - mudpacks - ughh! Human folly!

By early evening the humans come home from their daily toils, just in time for our evening meal. After dinner it's sentry time on one of the windowsills or the roof.

Occasionally, we get visitors, Stress City! If I'm outside it's no prob. It's simply up and over or under the fence and it's "A" for away!

And, if the visitors include in their number kids it's "Away with a big A because there's nothing I hate more than a little fiend who smiles at his mother while he proceeds to tear one of your ears off or blinds you in one eye with a grubby finger tip!





So, being one who hates to disappoint, I prefer to make myself scarce before any temptation is put in their way.

The problem becomes serious when Hades and I are caught inside the house when visitors arrive. One thing is predictable: the humans will come in the back door. The trouble is that there is one escape route out of the house — through the cat door in the very same back door. The choices are limited; it's a case of either hiding out under the bed,

under the duvet. Or trying to get out of the cat door before the visitors get into the house. Like always timing is the key. If you leave the run too late, the bed is the only the real choice.

Otherwise, if you fly through the cat door at a hundred miles an hour, the visitors tend to be so stunned by the sound and the flash of black fur that they don't try to apprehend you. From there, it's through enemy lines and freedom!

Once the visitors leave we return home, but only after waiting a while to ensure the coast is fully clear. I've had a few false starts with visitors who seem to leave but don't. Another trick is for some to leave but others to stay. This ploy used to work, but I've learnt to count on my fingers and toes, I'm no longer a dummy for that trick.

Once peace and normality are restored, at dark, it's bed time. My spot is on the left of the double bed, on the left pillow naturally. This is MY side if for some reason this is the same side my Dad sleeps on, when he's not away on business, that is. When he gets to bed, it's all on. The fight for dominance can get pretty savage.


The pattern of behaviour has become almost a ritual. If he moves me to the end of the bed, I simply cross the bed before he gets to his side. He tries the same trick again, and beat him back again, By this point I usually get flung across to the



Other side, my Mum's right side, where I'm allowed to sleep, with Hades I might add. This means one on one side of the bed and three on the other — a blatant injustice!

With a defiant shrug I'm off to sulk, until I feel suitably forgiving and I deign to return. This is also usually just long enough for the humans to be dropping off to sleep. Ha! Stiff luck you're having, folks.

But, once in a while comes a time for really drastic action. A while back, my father cane home very late and very drunk. This human affliction "drinking" Really I would normally have my say, but, this is my stony, not his! So, I'll move right on ahead.

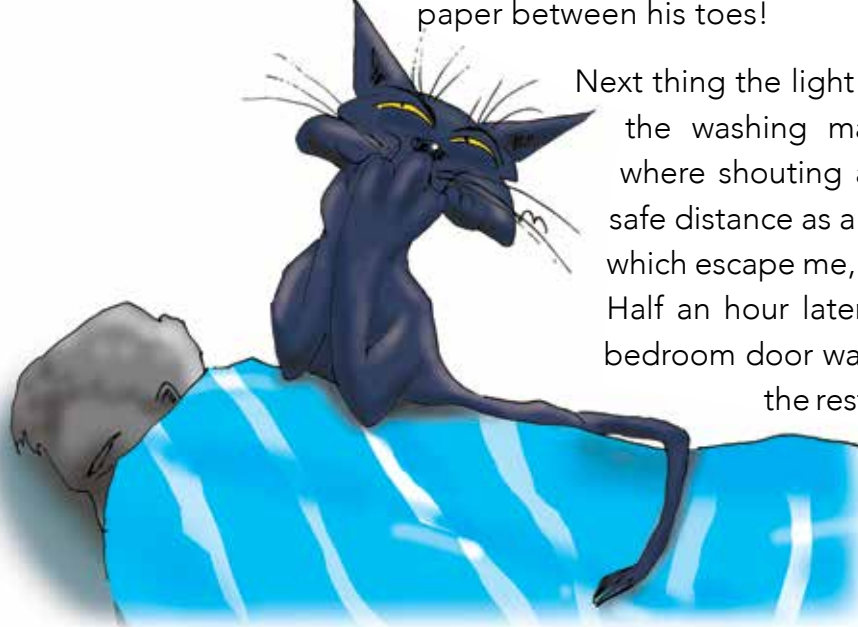


Anyway, as I was saying. Here comes my father in the wee small hours and proceeds to kick me off my rightful left right side of the bed. By three am you'd think a law abiding and valued member of the family [yes! That's me] could feel safe and secure in her own bed. But, it seems you can't.

So, there I am, tossed unceremoniously aside at the whim and fancy of my human Dad. Huh! And, when he started to gurgle, puff and wheeze like a beached whale I retaliated in the only way that came to mind. I walked up to him stood on his heaving chest, withstood the rancid red wine fumes and as a cat would say "parked a tiger"!

As he is family, I used a bit of my somewhat limited resources of charity and parked it on the kerb — alongside his sleeping frame.

The look on his face! Words can't explain the mixture of surprise, annoyance and disbelief. You'd have thought I'd put pieces of flaming toilet paper between his toes!



Next thing the light was on, the bed was stripped, the washing machine was on. The humans where shouting at each other watched from a safe distance as all hell broke loose. For reasons, which escape me, they were blaming each other! Half an hour later peace was restored, but the bedroom door was slammed. Hades and I spent the rest of the night in the spare-room.

Punishment admittedly, but well worth every minute of it!

While not always considerate, we are a considered bunch.

Some may even venture so far as to say we are calculating. I don't go that far. We have patterns and preferences, however. Let me explain. Mornings are my loving time. I kiss and cuddle, and rub and scent, scratch, purr and preen, play with half laced shoelaces and generally I am a pleasure to have around. During the day, however, I'm off. No contact time — off limits for all and sundry. Then, by late evening I'm back on stream and make myself available for love and attention. And, by bedtime depending on my mood, I'm usually not averse to a bit of attention and care. It is these rituals or repetitions that characterise our relations with our humans. They bond us together.

When you boil it down there are just two types of cats. There are high cats and low cats. High cats like to position themselves at a vantage point and watch the world go by.

High cats tend to take an interest in the world around them. They are intellectual and often question what they see even if at times, they choose not to share their innermost thoughts with those around them.

Low cats on the other hand are a completely different story. As their name suggests this group, if you will, leads a somewhat more brutal and limited existence. They tend to seek out dank and comfortable spots A typical such spot will be in the depths of an overgrown and neglected shrub, planted many years ago and forgotten ever since.

Forgotten that is to the TLC of the human kind but all the same home to our bottom dwelling low cat variety.

The main problem with this mode of existence is that while in this inner root-bound sanctum the world ceases to exist in any real sense of the word, for the rest of us it continues unabated. The tragedy is that the low cat sleeps, while the rest of us savour the interests of life.

Let me give you an example. When I've woken the humans in the morning there is sometimes a delay before they emerge from bed to give us our breakfast. I love nothing more than to sit on the Southwest facing windowsill and watch the sun coming up.



But, cats are not sentimentalists: sunrise has limited attraction for us, What gives me a real buzz is the ebb and flow off the street. People walking up the pavement on their way to work. Others going for their early morning run. And then of course there are the animals mainly dogs. Some on leads, others pulling their humans along on leads. Others just hanging around, looking for mischief — stray cats being just one preferred type!

The morning passes by. It's then time to move to a new vantage-point. This time it's the north-facing window. A new passage of humanity passes by all taken in by my vigilant eye. Nothing goes undetected. And, as the day comes to an end, I watch wait and listen.

Problem is, ours is a quiet indeed boringly quiet, neighbourhood and once you've seen the neighbour, you've seen the neighbour. Once seen he or she stays seen. And once, you've seen one mutt, you've seen them all. And, when you see the same old faces day in and day out, it does become a bit tiresome. But, that's a high cat's lot and someone has to do it! Actually, now that I think about it, maybe I should try spending a day hidden in the shrubbery, it may make for a pleasant change from the chore of being on the constant lookout for some excitement.

But, I digress. The point I am endeavouring to make is that high cats are a cut above

our fellow low cats. If I've failed to convince you so far, let me say this. The proof of my proposition is in this: A high cat will, by nature, find a possie elevated from the fray, This may be on the back of a couch or high on a cupboard. A low cat will lie on the carpet, getting in the way, get stood on, cursed at, and generally condemned for bad timing, bad form, bad taste — you name it, the low cat will get it all. The sad thing is that the low cat will suffer the indignities, and absorb them with good grace. Heck, talk about letting the side down big time. Us high cats will see it all and look down on proceedings with disdain as a fellow cat takes the flak.

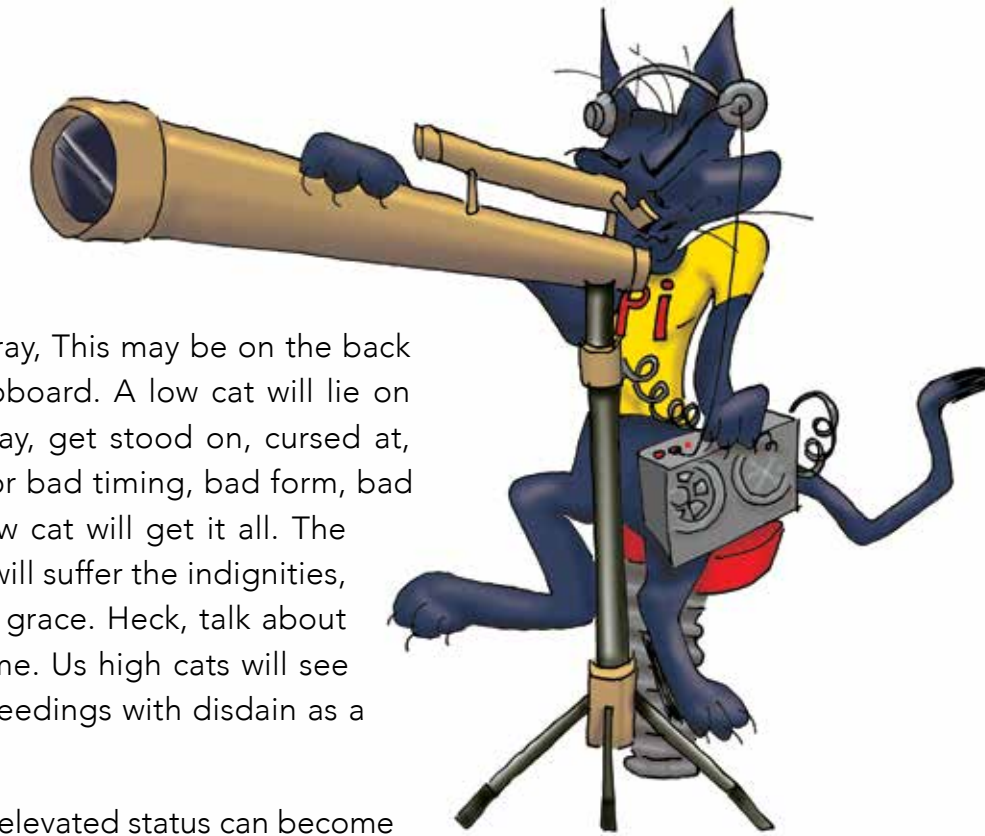
Now, observing life from this elevated status can become tedious. So, what we do is to introduce a bit of variety.

This is how it's done. We work in a cycle. Week one I spend on the sofa (when not on the windowsill). I have a particular spot. This is where I stay, come hell or high water. I cannot be enticed off for any reason. I leave when I and only when I choose to do so. This is a period of deep reflection and cleansing, both physically and mentally.

Contact with the humans and my bother Hades is kept to an absolute minimum, even if it means hurting those around me who depend on me for companionship and comfort.

Finally, when the rest of the household have given up on me and convinced themselves that I'm a selfish and self-centred cow, I re-enter society. This means a move back to the bedroom.

These patterns may seem strange but they form the fabric on which we weave our life. From



couch to bed and bed to couch may seem trivial, even banal, but these little rituals are important to a cat. Humans just don't understand the need for these rituals — many of which we repeat over and over again, unthinkingly; almost unconsciously.

So, dear reader, as I say, the cycles and rituals go on, day after day, Soon days merge into nights and nights into days. Weeks merge into months and so the cycle continues.

Through this all, a constant source of irritation! Try as we might it's always there, The problem, sibling rivalry! Here's how it goes. Humans get up and go to work. They spend the day away at their so-called "jobs," What happens to us cats? Well, you may ask. We are left at home to fend for ourselves and to keep ourselves occupied.

What do we do? What do you think? Apart from the things we do ourselves, Hades and I hang out together. That is, we lie in the sun together (winter) and lie in the shade together (yes of course dummy — summer). Fun hey! We sleep in the shade and sun in the sun — together. Not the most demanding relationship you might say. However, when the humans come home or should I say if they make it home, the pressure goes on. Sibling affection rapidly turns into unbridled and sometimes ugly sibling rivalry.

Hades and I are fine together and hopeless apart, but introduce the humans into the equation and things soon turn nasty. It all comes down to rivalry and, dare I say it, open jealousy.

Here's how and why. Human time is short and, in a weak moment let me concede, limited resource. When the humans emerge from the trials and tribulations of office life, both of us want a fair share of the love and adoration they seem to have for us. Cats are good at taking but not so good at giving. When it comes to sharing, alas we are the world's worst.

This is the source of the problem. But, most problems have a solution and here's mine. Our humans have to shape up. Here's what I suggest.

1. Don't fuss over one cat at the expense of the other. Remember, when it comes to seeing attention showered on someone other than moi, cats are like a jealous lover. We need to be the star of the show. And that means always!
2. Don't chastise us for being jealous. Cats will be cats. Don't try and change the way we are. Punishment seldom achieves its ends, especially with a wilful cat.
3. Don't try and limit our leisure time.
4. Understand the need we have for ceremony and circumstance. We have a sense of our place in life. Don't knock it!
5. Give each of us at least an hour's uninterrupted attention each day. Passing pats and reassurances are not enough. We need and expect quality time.
6. Keep your nerve, Remember, all the rivalry, stress and tension is over you. Lucky someone.
7. Try not to take sides — even if you see the merit of my case.

Hang in there and hope that one day all of us will pull through the trauma with our relationships intact and possibly even enhanced.

Now, folks, having got that off my chest, let's move on straight-ahead. Having lived most of my life with our human foster parents, I have grown to understand their ways a bit better.

The operative word is "bit". Our parents are





currently childless. For some strange reason Hades and I seem to have become surrogate children - very weird. Let me explain.

The first step was getting not just Christian names but also surnames, The next step was to get birthday presents and then, wait for it, Christmas presents. To make matters worse, these consisted of toys.

Thankfully, the number and variety of cat type toys is somewhat limited, as are the number of specialist cat stores [phew]. To this day our toys have remained in the corner largely untouched, as did the expensive scratching pole. I mean, honestly, who needs a scratching pole when we've got a perfectly good couch to rip to shreds!

Then came the cat voices! I mean! Are you supposed to laugh or cry I'm still not sure! Both parents would launch into long and cry convoluted discussions with us in these silly "pet" tones - the patronising sods. And, the final indignity, they started calling us "the babies". The "babies" indeed! We were fully - grown [albeit in my case less than completely] adult cats, by that stage.

But, all things have their funny side. One day I was sunning myself in the next door yard. My mother stood on the deck of our house. She asked me what was I doing next door. She told me to come home. Naturally I ignored her and carried on snoozing. Remember now, this whole conversation is taking place in her designer "cat" voice.



My Mother says to me: "I can see you!" "I can see you". No response. She then says: "Don't you ignore me. I can see you there!" Still no response. Just then, cur neighbour, who had unbeknown to both of us, been gardening behind the fence (which in turn was directly behind me) stuck his head up. Rather uncertainly he asked: "Are you talking to me?" He of course didn't know I was there and there was no way I was telling! No way, Jose'!



My Mother stammered: "No! I was talking to my "baby"...I mean cat!" He looked at her puzzled and rather blandly. My Mother rushed inside, blood red! Humans! What more can I say.

Now, about this cat-talk. You may be asking yourself again whether I'm a cat after all. Of course I am, even though my parents sometimes say I'm really a human caught up inside a cat's body.

What nonsense! I'm just a smart cat! So listen up!

Have you ever considered why cats and humans get on so well? Let me tell you why! Cats don't have to be right all of the time — just most of it. Cats know how important understanding and mutual respect is, Cats know we all need affection — something they can give without stubble rash or carpet burns.

That sounds fine, but there are other reasons. Cats don't hog the bathroom in the morning. Cats don't drip on the toilet seat or leave the cap off the toothpaste tube.

Cats don't exhibit bad manners at the dining room table, They don't burp or pick their teeth in front of the guests. Cats know how long it takes to get ready when you're going out and want to look your best patience is needed for the "well groomed" look!

Did someone mention creature comforts? Of course! How forgetful of me! Any self respecting cat doesn't mind a bit of good old fashioned human flab, in fact we love it! There's nothing better to snuggle into on a cold night. You see, cats know good accommodation when they see it.

At night, they don't mind if you fart as long as they're in clear air, i.e. on top of the bed. You see we know how to accommodate! Hence the fact that a cat soon becomes an indispensable member of each family they join.

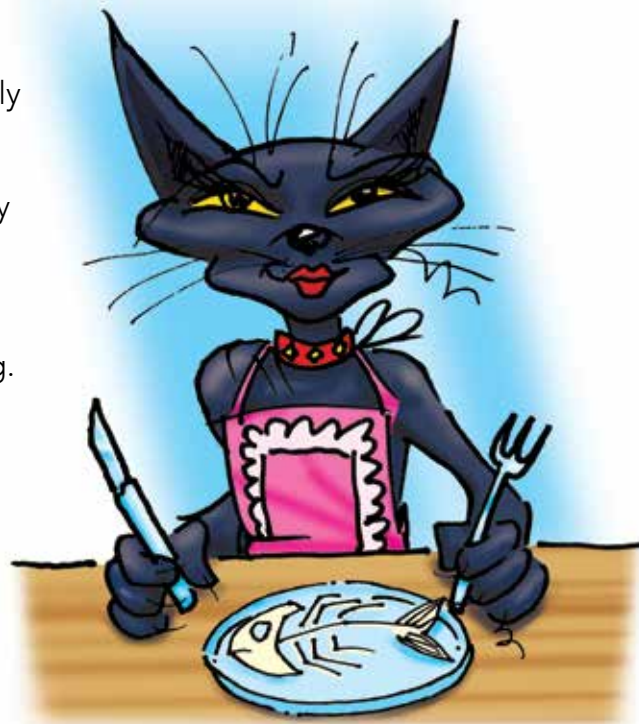
Almost purrfect, but not quite! Why, dear reader, you might ask? Why indeed! Regardless of his or her lot in life, every cat has to take the good with the bad. Likes and dislikes all too often have to be subordinated to the greater good. SSigh!

Anyway, here are a few of my loves and hates. As is my feline won't, I would prefer to start with my hates, numerous as they are! However, with my typical spirit of compromise, I will start off on a more positive note, with my "likes," less in number though they may be.



My likes are these:

- Cat biscuits three times a day [I now understand they may be addictive - Great! - A cat with a Substance abuse problem!]
- Turning my nose up at specially bought treats like fresh fish.
- Sharing the human's fish and chips with them.
- Staying in bed all day, under the duvet [unfortunately only when the humans are home]
- Sharpening my nails on the lounge suite [a very risky but immensely gratifying experience].
- Waking the humans Kamikaze style at sunrise [as described before], particularly on a Sunday morning.
- Lying low when the humans get back from holiday [ha! The cheek of them leaving us alone!]
- Scenting the window sills and curtains with my own personal fragrance (Mm! Delectable! But risky if caught).
- Re-organising the Christmas tree decorations, (sadly a treat which comes up only once a year).
- Re-shuffling partly finished jigsaws (one of my more creative pursuits)!



Now, dear reader, for the important part, my hatessss!

- Strangers.
- Children.
- Visitors.
- Cat food.
- Flea collars.
- A cat door (electronic of course) with a flat battery.
- Being pushed around.
- Being told what to do.
- Being thrown out of bed for no rhyme or reason and without warning — very upsetting.
- Getting picked up when not in the mood.
- Doing the shopping.
- Paying the mortgage.
- Driving in the car.
- Going to the vet [inevitably something closely associated with the former, the car].
- Cars generally! [Cars and misfortune seem to go hand and hand.]



Now, dear reader, having got that off my chest, my time short. I have cat-people to see and places to go. But, before I go, let me leave you with a few words of wisdom. Never second-guess or patronise a cat. Give them lots of love but strictly on their terms. If in doubt, ask, but don't assume yo know a cat's mind — you don't!

How do you connect with a cat? When you meet a cat, have your say, but also listen, you might be surprised at what you hear.

So, my dears, it's time I took my leave. But before I do a final word. Remember, when you next meet a cat with "attitude, bow, and if they nod and meow, consider yourself cat-egorically the richer!

