

Soul of Cat

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‘Those who are humane toward animals are not necessarily kind to human beings.’

– Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich*

The water fell from the sky really, really fast. I found shelter under the big tree. I was used to the sound of the rain pelting the concrete beside me, but it was so harsh. Living on the street, panic was always right beside, tailing me, like a shadow in the constant light radiated from the not-trees. Peering through the low set foliage, a shadow crept in through the light, growing in size second by second. It was the shape of a tall, tailless, two-legged cat, the species of which, I was informed by my mother and my friends, was ‘evil itself’. I never could understand what they saw in the not-cats. Me, personally, I always thought that the anger in their voices was due to their resentment of being born without a tail. Clearly a deficit, which affected not only their body, but also their character. Nonetheless, I knew to avoid the shadow, I took three big steps backward, safe in my sanctuary.

The man, who was the object of the shadow, pulled a small beeping contraption which I later learned they called ‘a phone’, out of his breast pocket, and held it to his ear. Perhaps he liked the sound of the beeps, or perhaps the hearing of the not-cats was somewhat inferior to mine. Either way, the beeping stopped, and the man began speaking. ‘I’m not interested, take my number off your list,’ The man slid the beeper back into his pocket. ‘Hey little buddy, what are you doing here?’

Was he talking to me?

‘Why aren’t you inside with your people? It’s awful cold for a man like you to be out.’ The man, now in a crouched position was looking at me. His wide eyes like those of a predator hunting prey. I froze.

Where am I? It looked like a cave. There were no trees to climb or grass to lay in, but I could see them. They were now in a place he called ‘outside’. They were outside, on the other side of the glass, but I couldn’t reach them. I saw the man out of the corner of my eye. He called

me Scott. That wasn't my name. My Mother called me Raoul. But somehow, I recognised the name Scott. The whole cave, or 'inside' smelt strongly of me, like I had occupied it for weeks. I guess maybe I had. I must have lost some time in between the street and the cave. It wasn't cold anymore; the flowers had gone into bloom.

For the longest time, I knew him only as 'the man'. His work, whatever it was, must have been fascinating, for he would come home at night smelling of the most wonderful smells. Smells from all over the country, and I imagined that he spent his days travelling. Chicken, fish, eggs, rats, mice, cheese, pork, a plethora of delicious aromas. He mentioned to me once that he had had a long day, and that it wasn't as easy as one would think being what he laughingly called a 'Garbologist'. I'm not sure, but before I lived on 'the inside', garbage was the best place to get the best food! Outside of his job, he didn't seem to have much else. I was the only one that he ever really spoke to. But even then, he didn't say much. He would just tell me over and over, 'You're the only one that understands me, Scottie.'

I didn't know how to break it to him but, really, I didn't - understand him. I didn't understand the man at all. Why he thought that Scott was a fitting name for me, when I totally look like a Raoul, why he would speak to me with the most loving voice but have hatred in his eyes. Another oddity I noticed was that he could control the rains. Although, I would often find him using this power to his disadvantage. He would be stood inside a glass box, just standing there, under the water. It would fall on his skin, in his hair, and he would just let it, not even try to stop it. He was a strange man.

One night, the man came home from work later than usual. He smelt of other people, and fragrances that I had come to learn were called cigarettes and beer. He sat below me, cross-legged on the floor, and pulled out a crinkled paper. He read it to me: Want to make things better? Meet at the Kings Arms at 7:30pm on the 7th.

What was so wrong in his life? He had me.

Nonetheless, the man must have understood my puzzlement, as he proceeded to explain to me what all of this meant. He spoke to me, of things called rallies, things called political parties, protests, a movement. *What did I know of such things?* He told me that HE would change the world. *Why did it need to change?* Life is good. I get my crunchies on time, I have

my fish that he gets from the tin, I get chicken treats when he says, and I get to tunnel under the covers. Maybe that's what he means, the treats, I mean. Maybe the man has realised that I'm a 'good boy' all the time. *What else could he mean?*

As time went on, the man would invite these smoky smelling people over more and more, and in increasingly larger numbers. The first time was the Saturday. There were three of them. Three strangers in my house. Three of them. All with no fur on their heads, and big boots. I knew they were called boots, as Brian had always commented on what he called my boots. The dark fur from my paws which stretched up my white legs, on all but one of them. These boots were different though. Heavy and clunky sounding, some of them had shiny things called buckles, some of them laces that a man like me might want to play with, but these boots were scary though. They could easily squash a little guy like me if I got in their way.

And the fur, or lack of it. This was puzzling. Perhaps it was their particular breed, I'm not sure. I could see that some of them had tried to compensate for this lack by drawing pictures where they previously had had fur. It was just another thing about this tail-less breed that failed to make sense to me. Yes, at least Brian still made some sense to me, with his head of thick dark fur and his green eyes, like me. Yes. He still had his fur on his head. Until he didn't.

The following Tuesday, the house sung that there were people at the door. I remember that it was the Tuesday because it's the day that Brian cleans my toilet box. I have a good memory for these things, as by the end of the week, it would be reasonably unpleasant in there, and I would usually protest, by aiming at the wall, or the floor, or anywhere other than in the box. Unfortunately, Brian never picked up on my protests to change it earlier.

Brian let the people that were at the door in. It was the three men from the other day, and one extra man. An even scarier looking man, who I'm sure would not have gotten any treats this morning, as he did not look like he was a good boy. I made sure to keep myself scarce and hid far under the couch.

Brian opened the fridge, and took out five beers, and some of my milk. He poured a plate of my milk, and while I was scared of the men, I didn't want to offend Brian, so I did plan on drinking the milk. I had to wait until the men were distracted, before I could leave the underside of the couch. In the other room, they were playing with some strange anti-fur

buzzing device that they put on Brian's head. I felt sorry for Brian, and I hoped that it didn't hurt too much, but I am just small, and there was nothing that I could do to stop it.

I left my safe haven under the couch, ready to attack, if need be, but Brian looked happy to be losing his fur. I started to lap up the milk, milk was always good. Cold, yet strangely warming on the way down, it reminded me of when I was a kitten, and had my mother and brothers and sisters with me. Hmm, yes. Old times, good times. I started to feel sleepy, as I often did after a hard day and a nice cool milk. I might just go and find myself a quite spot to curl up and have a little nap. That's just what is needed right now.

Brian had thrown his jacket onto the floor in the hallway. It was nice and cosy. It looked like a nice place for a nap and it smelt like him. Him and his garbage. It was very nice, and just made me want to purr. Before long, I was sleeping like a little kitten. I had forgotten about the strange and scary men in the house, until it hit me. It was like a ton of bricks, like when I was younger, and my brother had smacked me in the face, only this time it was worse. It radiated through my body, my head on fire. *Is this what I had heard the man call pain?*

What was going on? I felt it for a moment; and, then I didn't. The pain had left. It was gone; but so was I. I was gone. *Gone where?* I think I was dead? But I couldn't have been. I could see myself; I was looking at me. But I wasn't. I don't think that makes very much sense, but it does, one day I mean. Today was that day.

There I was, on the jacket. There was wet stuff too, not pee, I couldn't smell it, and I was too big for that. I heard Brian say the word 'blood', I could sense that he was upset, but at the same time, he wasn't.

I could see him. That man. The scary one, with a furless head. The one who had a picture painted on it. I was confused. I had heard them call the picture some kind of 'sticker', and I knew what that was, from when I saw Brian pull them off of my fish tins. But this wasn't that kind of sticker, it seemed to be a part of his skin. He was looking at me, standing over my body. Over my blood. Smiling. He had it on his boots.

Then I was certain of it. He was not a good boy.