

THE CAT FROM ACROSS THE

Written by

Ray Mooney

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ray@raymooney.com

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KITTEN IS A MIDDLE-AGED DRAG QUEEN RESIDING IN A LANE. THE
PLAY PRESENTS THE RITUAL SHE ENDURES BEFORE LEAVING TO
SERVICE HER PUBLIC.

LATE NIGHT.

A LIT CANDLE ILLUMINATES A LANEWAY LITTERED WITH RUBBISH. A SINGLE MATTRESS LEANS AGAINST A FENCE.

A FEROCIOUS DOG FIGHT IS HEARD. KITTEN, TERRIFIED AND CARRYING A SMALL CAN OF CAT FOOD, ENTERS THE LANEWAY. SHE EXTINGUISHES THE CANDLE, CREEPS TO THE ENTRANCE WHERE SHE ACCIDENTALLY SPRINGS A SET RABBIT TRAP. SHE JUMPS, BACKS TO THE SAFETY OF HER LODGINGS.

SHE INSPECTS HER STILETTOES, STOCKINGS AND BRUSHES HER CLASSY GOWN. SHE LIGHTS A MATCH AND CHECKS HER HIDING PLACES.

FROM ONE OF HER MANY HIDING PLACES SHE REMOVES A CARDBOARD BOX CONTAINING UTENSILS AND KNICKKNACKS. SHE SITS ON A WOODEN BOX AND USING A MILK CRATE AS A TABLE SHE OPENS THE CAT FOOD WITH A CAN OPENER. SHE SCRAPES HALF ONTO A PLATE, THEN PUTS THE PLATE AT THE OTHER END OF THE LANE.

Here, Puss, Puss, Puss. Here, Puss,
Puss, Puss.

A DOG BARKS. WORRIED, SHE PICKS UP A PARCEL WRAPPED IN BUTCHER'S PAPER AND HIDES IT IN A RUBBISH BIN.

SHE RETURNS TO HER TABLE, TAKES A SPOON FROM THE CARDBOARD BOX AND EATS THE DOG FOOD.

So there I was in the back lane
that rainy night. Soggy bread and
old newspapers. Hope in my heart.
But then I heard the back door
open.

CAUTIOUSLY LOOKS AROUND.

Who's there?

SATISFIED THERE'S NO THREAT.

Coming.

SHE CHECKS HER MAKE-UP

Coming. I said I'm coming.

SHE STICKS A BAND-AID ACROSS ONE OF HER CHEEKS.

Hang on, Charles!

SHE WALKS TO THE ENTRANCE. ABOUT TO LEAVE SHE SUDDENLY FREEZES, THEN BACKS AGAINST THE WALL.

You bastard, Hairy. Bastard.

SHE PLUCKS HER DRESS DESPERATELY AS IF COVERED IN SPIDERS, CLOSES HER EYES, THEN RELAXES.

You really are a bastard, Hairy.

SHE LIGHTS A MATCH AND IMMEDIATELY BLOWS IT OUT.

Sorry, Charles.

BLOWS A KISS, THEN PUTS TOMATO SAUCE ON THE CAT FOOD AND CONTINUES EATING.

The only friends in sight were
furry blurs high on fences.

AN AMBULANCE SIREN APPROACHES. KITTEN HIDES BEHIND THE MATTRESS. SHE EMERGES AS THE SIREN PASSES.

Hundreds of cats go missing each week. And owners are glad. I know one cat, Tabby, nothing more than a pussy. Well she gets bulk. Just for letting them take her picture.

SHE APPRAISES HERSELF IN A HAND-MIRROR. APPROVING OF HER MAKE-UP SHE IMAGINES HERSELF BEING PHOTOGRAPHED.

Chief Inspector Baker told me that most cats reported missing last year were found within forty-eight hours. He said that the concern about finding the others had led to the recommendation for recognition of the Missing Cat's Bureau. But I know better. Don't believe the gossip though. I'm no catwalk Nancy girl. I've been to the back of the queue, bled in the streets, frightened old ladies. But then who'd believe me if I screamed? I mean I'm not really a person am I? Just someone from across the road. Foraging my life in offices, factories, underneath homes. A ninth generation gypsy whose only sanction is the R.S.P.C.A.

SHE EDGES AROUND THE LANE.

Abandoned warehouses, creeks,
uncleared blocks, wild and
diseased.

SHE SUDDENLY JUMPS BACK AVOIDING AN IMAGINARY FOE.

Roewwwwwwwllllllllllll. Spring
cages. There's a Dog Act you know,
but cats have no status in the eyes
of the law. We're not registered,
luv. And why should I pay for a
microchip? Charles wanted me to get
the...you know.

REFERRING TO HER CROTCH.

But he can't claim it on Medicare.

SHE POURS MILK INTO A SAUCER, GETS ON ALL FOURS AND SIPS IT.
SHE OPENS THE CLASSIFIED SECTION OF HERALD SUN.

'Hot Gals, grannies, trannies.
Bored blonde, Kellie. Ring a bell?
Good time Nellie. Quick and
discrete. Long tall Sally.' It's a
bloody copper who writes that. Ex-
copper now back door secko. Picked
me up once 'Just tell us a dirty
story, luv, yer dirtiest.' Mental.
I told him to make his own up. Run
out of ideas he reckoned so I sent
him to Cheetah. (LAUGHS) Full of
scabies. I'll give him smack me in
the face. If you want someone to
have a go at why pick on me? I mean
look at MasterCard, and landlords
and Telstra. Tabby reckons that
Telstra make her pay high tariff
rates. And if your old man's a
copper where do you think you got
your dishwasher from, luv? And if
the Mormons can own Safeways and
McDonalds, well why give us a bad
name? We're not even allowed to
hang round the Seven Eleven. I
can't leave my box anywhere if I
want to go out. And anyone who'd
shop at Seven Eleven would bear
watching. Real estate agents are
crook on cats. Reckon we piss on
the carpet. How do I know? 'Cos
I've been in their houses, luv.
That's right.

SHE LAUGHS, FLUTTERS HER EYELASHES AND PULLS HER DRESS HIGH
ON HER THIGHS, PURRS WITH AFFECTED SENSUALITY.

It's thirty for oral, forty straight, fifty all inclusive. What would you like?

DROPS HER DRESS WITH AFFECTED SHOCK.

No we don't do that sort of thing.
I'm a cat, not a dog. Scat.
Sssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

SHE SORTS THROUGH HER BOX OF PERSONAL EFFECTS. SHE REPLACES A FLEA WRIST BAND WITH A NEW ONE.

We cats have trouble with redbacks
I don't get into most cars. You never know whose left their window open last night, or parked under trees. I've had some nasty experiences with spiders in cars.

SHE FOLDS THE NEWSPAPER, HOLDS IT READY TO STRIKE.

This one had been crawling all over us. And one in the centre...

SHE STALKS THE SPIDER.

...a big hairy one poised to strike.

SHE BANGS AT THE SPIDER UNTIL SATISFIED HE IS DEAD.

With a quick snap of the paw she paralysied Hairy for crawling too fast. (ORDERING) Get back in your skip for five minutes, go on. No use playing dead ants on your back, Hairy. Hairy?

REALISING HAIRY IS DEAD.

Oh no. I didn't mean it.

SHE STRIKES A MATCH, EXTINGUISHES IT. COMPOSING HERSELF SHE ATTENDS TO HER MAKE UP.

Well, naturally being pushed out of my place in the shopping line, naturally I became a cat. Nobody pushes a cat out of their place, do they? And Charles certainly wouldn't let them get away with that. That's good advice, I'll tell you. Now I don't get surly service in restaurants Or sworn at. Treated like proper royalty I am. Cats must wear make-up to look older.

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(CONT'D)

I'm only putting extra on because Mouser said I looked washed out under dark lights. Only pedigrees work from under lamp posts. Too much light for me. If I could afford proper make-up though it'd be different.

SUDDENLY SHE JUMPS, SCREAMS, THEN QUICKLY AND DESPERATELY BRUSHES A SPIDER OFF.

Oh shit! You bastard, Hairy!

SHE GOES TO WHERE SHE KILLED HAIRY WITH THE NEWSPAPER, LIGHTS A MATCH. UNABLE TO FIND HIM SHE DESPERATELY SEARCHES THE LANE.

Everybody needs to be owned you know. I just want to grow old and retire at an old lady's foot.

SHE PROWLs THE LANE RUBBING HERSELF AGAINST THE WALL. THEN, AS IF A FASHION MODEL ON THE CATWALK, DISPLAYS HER FELINE QUALITIES.

Sooner or later you've got to look after number one. So I chose Charles and his now wife. Catty little bitch. Makes him wash up while she watches telly. Other wise it's zip bang the chastity belt. I don't mind sleeping on the floor. That's where visitors should sleep. Things are different now I'll tell you. I no longer go for guys in show business though. Only think of themselves. Give me the small business man who owns a few licensed groceries, any day. And sporting types. 'Was I good, Kitten?' 'Sure, luv, the best.' If he's wearing a three-piece forget it. Must be working for someone else. Despite her unaristocratic background she was unpretentious, home loving and would have adored litters and litters. She was in fact the girl next door.

SHE ADMIRES HER REFLECTION. A CAR PULLS UP. SHE SUDDENLY SHRIEKS AND FRENZIEDLY ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE SPIDERS FROM HER BODY. UNSUCCESSFUL, SHE WHIMPERS IN FEAR AND SLOWLY EDGES TO THE LANE ENTRANCE.

Is that you, Hairy? How many of you are there? Oh no I don't do trucks. No you can't come in! No really, boys.

REACTING TO BEING SHOVED.

I don't want to. Please. Don't force me.

HER DEFIANCE IS BROKEN.

You boys been out on the town? Did you have a good time? Oh careful. Hang on. No I'll do it. Hang on. Oh, if Charles caught us like this, well I just couldn't guarantee what would happen.

HOLDS OUT A CONDOM.

Put one of these on. Please.

THE CONDOM FLIES FROM HER HAND.

Bastards! Now come on. Hang on! Oh, alright. Alright I said!

FALLS TO HER KNEES, HEAD DOWN, ARSE UP. WHIMPERS. AFTER ENDURING THE ASSAULT SHE ROLLS OVER.

Take it. Just take it and go. Take it all. It's all I've got. True.

AS IF KICKED HARD IN THE STOMACH SHE COVERS HER FACE.

Not my face. Please not there. Please.

THE CAR SPEEDS AWAY. SHE STRIKES FOUR MATCHES, IMMEDIATELY EXTINGUISHES THEM. SHE HURRIES TO HER HIDING PLACE AND RETRIEVES A TATTERED PAPERBACK, OPENS IT, SMILES, RELIEVED. SHE EXAMINES HER FACE IN A MIRROR AND REAPPLIES MAKE-UP.

We were always going to be cats you know. Floating specks to yabbies. Monkeys. Then the genetic accident. Should of gone straight from monkeys to cats. Instead we cop men with their bloody disorders. Though I couldn't of coped if it hadn't been for Charles.

PUTS MAKE-UP AWAY IN A HIDING PLACE.

Started drinking heavily when she was eleven. 'Would you mind sending your child to another school, thank you, mam?'

STRIKING WITH HER PAWS.

Roewillllll!
(MORE)

(CONT'D)

Living in old cars in Thornbury and stealing from milk bottles Don't ask her to give it up. You wouldn't know. If I could I'd put all the prices down. So everybody could afford to buy fruit and veggies. (LAUGHS) When mum's working the old man's the maid. I worked on the registers once. Mum would expect it, you know. Dollar twenty, fifty, dollar ten, total fifty cents. Then she'd blue if I'd lift from her purse like to go to the Bowl. Once I tipped the kid behind the counter a dollar and Mrs Shitface ran the Jacks. That started it all I tell you. If it hadn't of been for Charles. People can't understand cats need company too. We get booked for consorting just for knocking round together. Mum says we'll get into trouble if we're together. But Charles is not like that. We talk about how we want to keep out of trouble. He encourages me to write. One thing about his old lady, she's always been understanding.

SHE LOOKS AT HER WOUNDED HAND, SITS THEN DELICATELY LICKS IT. STILL LICKING THE HAND, SHE OPENS THE PAPERBACK, REMOVES A LETTER AND APPRAISES IT. SHE PURRS.

'My dearest Charles. My beautiful Prince. I'm sorry for taking so long to reply to your wonderful letter, but I know the Palace guards censor everything for your protection. I've had to choose my words carefully. Your photo does you justice. I imagined myself finding you sitting in your throne asleep. What must you have been dreaming of? And after creeping past the guards, down the corridor, I positioned myself over your enormous throne. Then slowly I eased myself down, careful not to disturb you least Her Highness enter before I had the chance to cum. I'm turning your photo face down, it's too distracting. Charles Dearest, if you'd like another letter please send me twenty-five dollar. More if you are pleased.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

As for now I'm going to take another peek at your enormous throne, and you know what that'll lead to. Yours breathlessly, Kitten.

SHE FOLDS THE LETTER, AND RETURNS IT TO THE BOOK.

Oh sure, it'd had been explained to her that she would have to be an uncommon mixture of old fashioned virtue and animated vitality.

A CAR BEEPS ITS HORN. SHE PREENS HERSELF AND SLIDES TO THE EXIT.

Here I come, meow, meow.

SUDDENLY SHE DESPERATELY ATTEMPTS TO BRUSH SPIDERS OFF. SHE FRANTICALLY STAMPS ON DOZENS OF SPIDERS. EXHAUSTED, SHE STAGGERS BACK. LIGHTS A MATCH, EXTINGUISHES IT.

I read that she's ugly and shallow, skin stringy, unable to suckle and the district nurse has to come and pump her milk and the brats rarely sleep and scream. Not even toilet trained. Delicate as a shell. Ha! Muted colours and snowdrops and roses. Ugh! And I know for a fact she got it off with Inspector Horseradish in the elevator. She's crackle and pop and her erratic periods are anticipated with salacious interest. Snap! Snap! Snap! So what if she does like to touch people? Who cares? She's just a bitch from the golden ghetto, gift wrapped. Bitten fingernails. Charles should've put her in a brown chaff bag and dumped her in the Maribrynong. See what'd happen to her fresh dewy charm after a night on the prowl. Remote snowdrops in cheap litter trays'd be more like it. And mum says that forget it because even if Prince Charming bashes her they've got a rule that says they have to stay together. Mum says people are only really interested in how you appear anyway.

CAUTIOUSLY EDGING ROUND THE LANE.

So that night I split. Climbed the wall and the paddocks for miles.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

Bus to McElroy street. There they were in the window.

HOLDS THE PAPERBACK OUT.

The most beautiful silver plates I'd ever seen. 'To the Prince and Princess. From the people of Australia' Well you don't look a cat in the eye. She looks you in the eye. Anyway I can't talk to people anymore They're all still into Jason or Kylie. You're better off with her, my prince. She's a real top mover, Put the fever into Saturday night. (HIGH PITCH - DOUBLE SPEED) Oh but you made a mistake when you were going with that girl called Kitten who loved you and started going with you with the avowed intention of marrying you. You broke down her faith when you wrote her stating you were tired of going with her. Were you aware that she was very sensitive in general If you only knew what I suffered when I knew you were marrying her who you did not love and was only doing it because you were being forced to by the Queen. Do you wonder how I suffer when I know you are in the arms of that hussy. I caused you but fifteen minutes of pain referring of course to the rupturing of my hymen.

NORMAL VOICE - SHE MOVES AROUND THE BOOK.

Plates fit for a King. And the beautiful Princess nibbling tit bits fondue on the balcony. Ha, it was easy to distract the dog on guard. 'Here Boy, here boy. Have some Meatybites. My, that's a nice hat'

SHE CAUTIOUSLY EDGES OVER THE BOOK, LIFTS HER DRESS AND SQUATS.

Pppppiiiiisssssssss.

SHE LAUGHS AS SHE PISSES ON THE BOOK.

Charles read my telegram to the people. 'My dearest Charles. Stop. Please excuse my inappropriate behaviour. Stop. If you just send me the bus fare I promise not to...

SHE SHAKES HERSELF AND STRAIGHTENS HER DRESS. SUDDENLY SHE SEES THE SPIDERS. SHE BACKS.

Get away, Hairy. I was just starting to create a sentiment to appease the people's anger against his indiscretion. Get away, Hairy! You are aware aren't you that I was poisoned by order of the Royal Family?

SHE STAMPS THE GROUND ATTEMPTING TO KILL THE SPIDERS.

Of their inhumane methods used to take my life? An injection of one fourth dentine in my hind leg, sufficient to kill a tigress not under protection of the Kingdom. The second time the same poison was injected into me on the end of a thermometer. In order to ensure I would die they operated on my front paw, under the pretext of putting a drain tube without any anesthetic whatsoever or evening cocainine the surrounding flesh. That took another of my lives I was then left for a time in peace. That night one of the Royal Henchmen came to my bedroom with the intention of inserting the thermometer. I was awakened by someone putting his whole weight on my sore paw which was fulcrumed over the rail. I felt their grubby hands manipulate my liver.

SHE REMOVES THE PARCEL FROM THE RUBBISH BIN, LIFTS HER DRESS AND HOLDS THE PARCEL AGAINST HER CROTCH. SHE EMITS AN AGONISING SCREAM AS A SKINNED RABBIT FALLS TO THE GROUND.

I now weigh four and a half kilos.

SOBBING, SHE LIGHTS A MATCH, EXTINGUISHES IT. SHE REMOVES THE BAND-AID.

The day Kitten was littered, it was obvious she fitted the demanding role of Queen. Don't push me, Hairy. I'm warning you.

A CAR PULLS UP.

Coming. I'm coming.

SHE WRAPS THE RABBIT IN THE BUTCHER'S PAPER, LEAVES IT ON THE FLOOR AND ORGANISES THE LANE TO HOW IT WAS PRIOR TO HER ENTERING. SHE SAUNTERS TO THE EXIT, SETS THE RABBIT TRAP AND LIGHTS THE CANDLE.

Oh, hello, Charles. Looking for a girl? Ough you are a naughty one. Never mind. That's a nice truck. If you're nice to me I might introduce you to the Queen herself. Meow. Meow.

SHE EXITS.