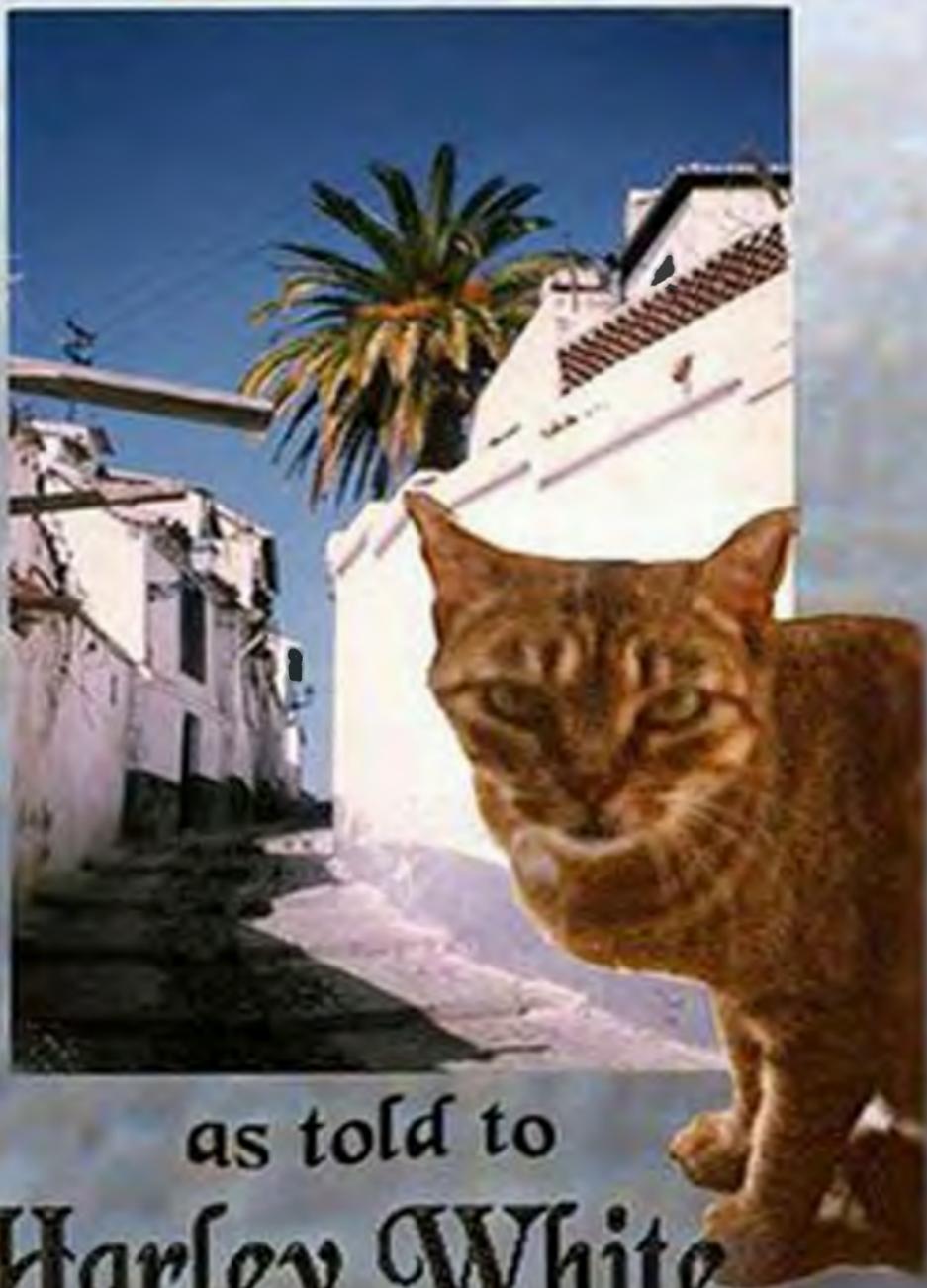


The Autobiography of a Granada Cat

5th
Edition



as told to
Harley White

*The Autobiography
of a Granada Cat*

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To Mama-cat:

From the depths of my heart, thank you Mama-cat for being such a true, sensitive, loyal friend and soul-mate and for genuinely being there for me throughout the days and nights of my darkest despair. Your great spirit will always remain in my heart! I will love you forever! Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo! H.W.

July 28, 1994

Part I

– 1 –



narrow streets of the Albaicín

They call me Mama-cat and I answer to it, so I suppose that is my name, though it wasn't always. I was born in Andalusia, southern Spain, in Granada, an area that is hot in summer and cold in winter, and I survived thanks to the ingenuity of my mother, who hid me in a deserted house along with the brothers and sisters of my litter. There I was safe from my father, turned enemy, and from the dogs and bullies who roamed my street. My mother, whose memory I cherish, has long since disappeared, and I have no idea what has become of my siblings. I fear that their fates have not been as fortunate as mine.

At first I had no place to call my own other than the narrow streets of the Albaicín, but soon I was more or less befriended by a lady who hung parsley over her

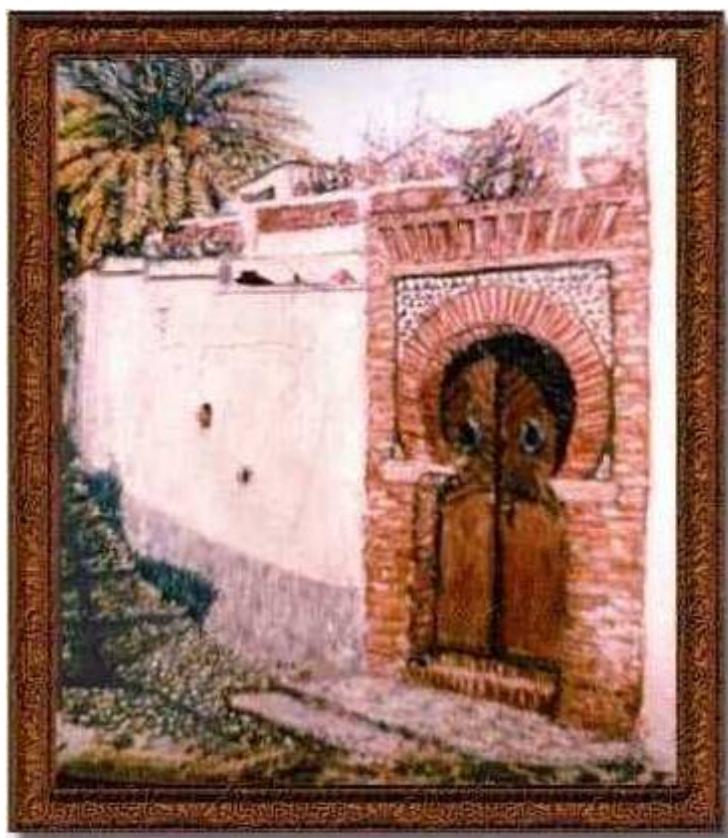
front door, from which a stream of strange men furtively came and went. She permitted me to enter her house from time to time and gave me an occasional pet on the back, for which I shall be forever grateful, since I learned from this that certain humans can be approached, though always with discretion, which realization has led to the improved quality of my present circumstances.

But to return to former times and places, since several other cats already claimed my new habitat as theirs, I had to take what food I could find when they weren't around. Initially it was quite difficult for me to grab more than a mouthful or two, but after a time, we settled into a sort of live-and-let-live attitude, which enabled us all to partake of what there was.

This wasn't much. Though our mistress seemed to have a big heart (unlike her neighbors who mostly tormented me), she would sometimes forget to leave us food and water. Or perhaps there simply wasn't enough to go around at these times. I was never quite sure. But there were feast days as well. The day following particularly boisterous nights—on which nights I would always take care to stay out of sight—there would be a plentiful supply of fish heads and tails on the street just in front of my parsley decorated door. On these occasions, I would be grateful for my housemates, who together with me, defended our fish from the ubiquitous street cats who always appeared in droves at such times, stalking the borders of our territory, in the hopes of snatching a fish head in an unguarded moment.

Of course, this hardly ever occurred, except, that is, when Tobias, the huge black dog who lived a street above had gotten out; or when the German shepherd, owned by the small man who sold things on a corner, came out for a stroll. At such times we had

no choice other than to abandon our vigil, and it was then that the leanest, meanest street cats dashed daringly close to capture a bit of our feast. (By the way, Tobias has been immortalized in a work of art, painted by the man. He can be seen, joined by



work of art, painted by the man

another small canine, perched on top of the wall with the Arab door, across from the house I was later to call my own, in his favorite Cerberus-like reclining pose. But I'm



Tobias ... joined by another small canine
[Detail from the painting by the man]

getting ahead of myself. For the lady and the man had not yet entered the scene.)

Most of the time, I stayed in the streets. Our neighborhood had

narrow cobbled ones, thankfully devoid of cars, but with plenty of other hazards, the worst of which were humans, particularly the ones called children, and the roving dogs, who delighted in pursuing me at top speed whenever possible (fortunately I'm faster and more agile) and putting my life in the direst peril. Indeed, once I was almost killed, in a particularly nasty incident, when I was chased straight into the jaws of the German shepherd. This was one of the most harrowing experiences of my life, the evidence of which I still bear as a long jagged scar on my neck.

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There are those who would claim that my days and nights at this time were relatively uneventful, though they certainly did not seem so to me. Besides my own struggles to survive and stay out of harm's way, I was witness to a great number of strange and wondrous happenings. The passing of several large beasts, laden with



Arre, arre! Painting by the man

rocks, to the cry of "Arre, arre!" was a frequent occurrence. They were not interested in me, but the tread of their heavy hooves and the stick of the man who drove them were to be feared. So I always watched from a safe distance, until their thundering steps had died away.

Then there were the neighbors I alluded to previously, for whom I had always to be on the strictest lookout. The one called Dolores was a menace to the feline community, since she did not shrink from kicking us if we came too near, and it has been whispered that many of our kittens have perished by her pitiless hand, deliberately drowned, so I have heard tell.

If there is any truth to the widespread beliefs that are held here and abroad in regard to cats, then Dolores is certain to suffer the consequences of her evil deeds. It is said, 'Never kick a cat, or you'll get rheumatism.' And 'Never drown one or the Devil will get you.' Still cause and effect operate over long spans of time, and besides, whatever Devil might get her could make her even more of a menace to me and my kind for the time being. So although I had faith that divine justice would prevail in the long-run, in the meantime, it proved wiser to give her a wide berth. Better to see the world as a merciless place than to expect miracles of kindness from such humans as Dolores.

By the way, I am including her name and the others of her house (though in an altered form), because the infamy of these people, especially Dolores, achieved mythologically villainous proportions among the cat community.

She was rumored to have the same profession as my mistress (though certainly not the same disposition) with the exception that Dolores was bossed around by an

older woman called Milagros, who flew into fits of screaming several times a day. To complete this household was Milagros's offspring, Curro, who roared home on his motorcycle twice daily in a totally inebriated condition to the accompaniment of his mother's screams that he should be in jail. This point of view was not entirely disagreeable to me, since Curro, who, when awake, was always in the foulest of moods, certainly was no friend of mine; nor did he contribute anything to the peace of my neighborhood. Nevertheless, his comings and goings were as regular in my world as were the rising and setting of the sun.

Dolores seemed to be thoroughly cowed by Milagros's ravings and threats that she would be thrown out into the street. She seldom raised her voice during these tirades, but, as is often the case in such personalities, she vented all her fury on me and other hapless creatures who inadvertently wandered her way. I have seen her wield her mop and broom like deadly weapons. And once, at a later time, when I was desperately trying to protect one of my more adventurous kittens from her clutches, she managed, by some mysterious stroke of evil luck, to grab hold of me and fling me as far as she could. Though I managed to land on my feet, still this forced flight through the air struck such terror into my heart that forever after I have been unable to tolerate being picked up and held by even the most gentle and loving of humans.

Coupled with my terror of the moment was my frantic fear for the safety of my kitten, which emotion emboldened me to the point of returning immediately to the scene of the crime. I was determined to rescue my offspring, who had been cornered by Dolores and was piteously meowing, her courage having failed her completely. With no thought for myself, I jumped, hissed, and puffed myself up in my most

menacing manner, making sure I was positioned between her and my precious child. I think she must have realized that I meant business, because after receiving some scratches from my claws on her arm as she tried to grab my kitten, she turned and walked away with an enraged look in my direction, which I coldly returned.

Needless to say, I made certain that my kitten and I were never again in such close proximity to this wicked witch (as I described her to my little one), but all my care and protection couldn't save my daughter from the dreadful fall from a rooftop that finally took her life. At least that is what I prefer to think happened to her. Oh, bitter are the sorrows I have endured and many are the losses I have mourned! But I'm getting ahead of my story.

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I am one who cherishes a regular pattern of daily life, though given the ups and downs of my varying circumstances, I have often found this quite difficult to achieve. You see, I need a lot of sleep in order to maintain my equilibrium, because the sleep I get is often not of the most restful variety. Due to the precariousness of my environmental conditions, I am never permitted the luxury of falling into a deep sleep. No, I must slumber with one eye partially open, as it were, always in a state of maximum alert, in case of who knows what. This was particularly true in my Albaicín days, when mostly I dozed (dare I say catnapped?) in the midst of all manner of dangers.

In sunny weather, hordes of camera toting, strange sounding people would fill the streets, making me scramble over walls, where I snoozed on ledges (I had a favorite



...making me scramble over walls

one) or on rooftops, above the ever-present dogs who delighted in emptying our streets of all cats, and out of reach of the rocks and taunts of the children, who were a constant threat to our well-being.

Then there were the days when cracking explosions sounded, setting the dogs into a frenzy of barking howls. At other times, processions

of strangely garbed humans would take over our streets to the loud beating of drums and general cacophony of sounds. To add to the horror and misery of these days and nights, the children created all manner of havoc, and sometimes the adults jumped around in a strange manner as well, making our territory quite unbearable. At such times, no self-respecting cat would show its face, though we still found ways of foraging for our daily bit of nourishment.

Still, lest I give a false impression, let me hasten to say that not all humans were bad. I have, after all, survived to tell my story, for during my periods of desperate need, somewhere would appear a bag of the food that people consider edible, with perhaps a plastic container of water nearby, put there by the merciful hand of some well-meaning soul. And, though I sometimes hate to admit it, many were the times I was grateful for such offerings. I shudder now to remember having had to resort to sampling some of the most uncatlike victuals I have ever tasted. But I did what I had to do to stay alive. And there are those of my species who still feed on such morsels of the type at which *I* now turn up my nose.

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But let me go back to where I was. In rainy weather, well, you can imagine how difficult it could be to stay dry. Nobody hates getting wet more than I, unless by my own tongue. And in winter, even my fur-about couldn't compensate for the biting chill that penetrated to my very bones.

When I was not allowed in the house or when there was no one there, both of which situations account for the large majority of the time, I alternated among several different forms of shelter. There were quite a number of deserted houses, accessible through cracks in the shutters or doors, through which a cat could descend down, down to one or more streets below. These I shared with others, driven to the extremity of huddling together for warmth. Most of these houses had balconies, now in disrepair, upon which we could enjoy peering down on the streets from above. Or

perhaps, if in need of inspiration, we could gaze at the graceful Alhambra Palace, which is said to be the home of many of our kind, overlooking our vicinity, with the



...we could gaze at the graceful Alhambra Palace...with the serene Sierra Nevada mountains behind.

serene Sierra Nevada mountains behind.

These sights could not, of course, take away the cold nor fill our stomachs, but the stately beauty of our surroundings served, on occasions, to dull the pains of existence.

I was certainly not alone in my sufferings. In fact, there were others much less fortunate than I, for whom the job of keeping body and soul together was a full time occupation. But misery does not always love company, and I am sorry to say that I have seen my compatriots reduced to spitting and dashing at one another over a morsel of food.

I am proud to be able to hold my own when the situation requires it, as it did when some uppity new cats moved into the neighborhood, but I do not like to lower myself to the level of those they call strays.

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You might ask why I had to endure these hardships, since I was one of the lucky ones who had a home, but everything is relative, and, in many ways, mine was a home in name only. In fact, I was not even permitted to take naps in the house except on rare occasions. Most of the time I was ignominiously shoved off of chairs, sofas, especially the bed—in fact anything appropriate to sleep on—and this usually culminated in my being ejected through the front door (there was no back one), after which I would sit as tall as my size permitted, licking myself with furious speed, in an attempt to muster whatever dignity I could salvage.

There is, you see, an unwritten law among cats, no matter to what social class we belong. That law says, in substance: Whatever befalls us cats, let it be known that we have chosen our lot. No one can cause us to do other than what we please.

I will here divulge the well-kept secret that this law exists for appearance only. No matter what tortures we are subjected to and how much pain we may be suffering (yes, we do have feelings!) I have never known any cat that would not do its utmost to counteract the impression that it had done anything other than out of free will. We will do whatever it takes to preserve our aplomb. Indeed, it is not without cause that one of the world's noblest and most highly advanced civilizations, the Egyptians, held us in such high regard, in fact considered us divine. But I'm wandering again.

– 6 –

I am aware that my narrative is not unfolding in a very orderly fashion. The problem is that the memories flit about in my mind, like the strange bat-like birds that dive and circle in the summer sky at dusk. In contrast to the long peaceful twilights I now enjoy on the terrace four stories high, that I alone rule, my youth in the Albaicín seems remote. It's not that I'm over-the-hill yet or ready to give-up-the-ghost, but my life has changed so drastically since then that I sometimes feel like a different being altogether.

But to go back in time, to the house with the parsleyed door I called home, there came a day when my mistress disappeared, parsley and all, never to be seen in our neighborhood again. When this happened, I and my previous housemates were left to the mercies of chance. I must say that at the time it seemed as though the world had come to an end. To be abandoned was the worst fate that could befall a cat. Better indeed to have never had a home, I lamented, than to lose the security to which I had become accustomed of semi-regular meals and a sort of roof over my head—and at such a time! For, in full tribute to the name I was later given, I was beginning to bulge. Or, to put it more euphemistically, I was expecting.

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Let me here digress a bit in order to describe certain facets of street life which now pervaded my existence.

There was a definite hierarchy in our society, some aspects of which had to do with seniority, others with size and aesthetics, and others with sheer force of personality. It was during these times that I was courted by quite a variety of Tomcats, which I must say, all modesty aside, was quite exceptional, given the competition I had in this area.

I here confess that there were certain seasons of the year when these loud, raucous, show-offy, huge-headed, generally obnoxious brutes were absolutely irresistible to me. I will leave it to those who spend their lives exploring the mysteries of the world to reveal the reasons for this otherwise inexplicable phenomenon. Suffice it to say, that at certain times I was drawn to the streets as though by an all-powerful magnet, and the nocturnal wailing of the Toms was the sweetest music ever to me. Further, I am embarrassed to admit, during these periods I myself was inconsolable until I had submitted to their bites and mounting embraces; and, in between, I wanted nothing to do with them at all. Ah fickle are the forces of Nature!

– 8 –

I stayed in my vicinity as a matter of course (Where else was I to go?) and watched and waited for signs of new occupants in my house. They were not long in coming; this time there were four people with, horror of all horrors, two small children.

Their main means of communication was a system of strange guttural sounds, the likes of which I had only heard now and again from an odd passerby.

But my major concern was what their attitude would be toward me, especially given my delicate condition. This turned out to be one of a minimum form of tolerance, coupled with, I thankfully add, the remains of their lunches and dinners, which appeared at regular intervals in the street, and to which I forcefully made claim.

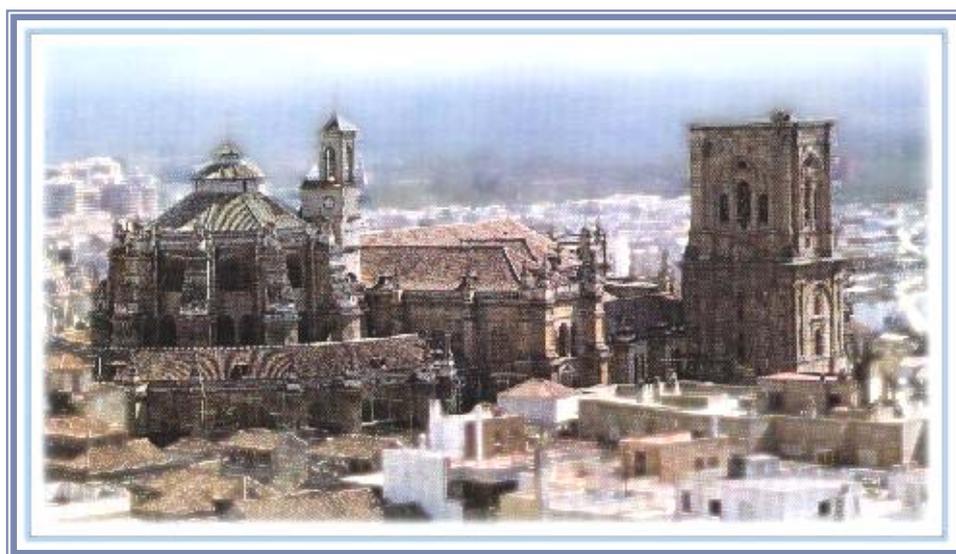
However, I was no longer permitted to enter the house at all. This seemed to me a mixed blessing, since I have no doubt it would have been extremely unwise for me and my young to try to inhabit the same house with their children. Thus I was saved from the effort of attempting the impossible.

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Many were my hardships then, which I recall with an aching heart, though at the time, I was so busy trying to eat regularly that I barely felt anything other than hunger and fatigue. I was almost always obliged to share my meager meals with several other cats who remained unconvinced that they belonged to me.

Then, after my kittens were born, I had to struggle doubly hard to protect the little darlings from the savagery of life in the streets, so that I became thinner and thinner. One after another they disappeared I knew not where—I cannot tell this part of my story without feeling a stab of intense pain—until I had only one baby left to care for. This was the kitten I spoke of before, who had managed to grow into a fine youngster and who looked exactly like me, that is, elegantly tiger-striped with a delicate shade of honey-gold on her tummy, if I may indulge in a bit of bragging.

A bold little feline she was. She would follow me every day to the rooftops outside the upstairs window of my former home. From this vantage point we could



look across the houses below to the monumental Cathedral with its Renaissance interior (as the guidebooks say) and the adjacent Royal Chapel, guarded by Gothic gargoyles, of feline aspect, with imposing spires reaching to the sky. The great bell in the Cathedral tower chimed the hours and always its presence soothed me and my little daughter. This Cathedral, with its vaulted baroque face, had borne witness to five

hundred years of humans coming and going. Perhaps, after all, we would not be homeless forever. But fate was not to favor me quite yet. A succession of misfortunes followed, until I nearly lost all hope in humanity.

I have already related in what manner my little one and I were treated by Dolores. My poor kitten was never to know the joys of full-grown cathood, for one terrible day she appeared lying in the street, dead of mysterious causes, perhaps having fallen from a rooftop, or perhaps having perished by the hand of Curro, Milagros, or the dreaded Dolores. I was never to be certain.

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This great sorrow was soon followed by my again being abandoned. That is to say, once again I saw everything being carried out of my house. Once again, I was given a cursory pet on the back and then they were gone.

The next part of my story I recall as a blur. What I came to call home was an ancient, now stationary motorcycle, which was chained to an iron grate two doors down. I could wedge myself behind it; and there in the window sill, behind the bars, I was safe from the German shepherd and other hazards larger than I.

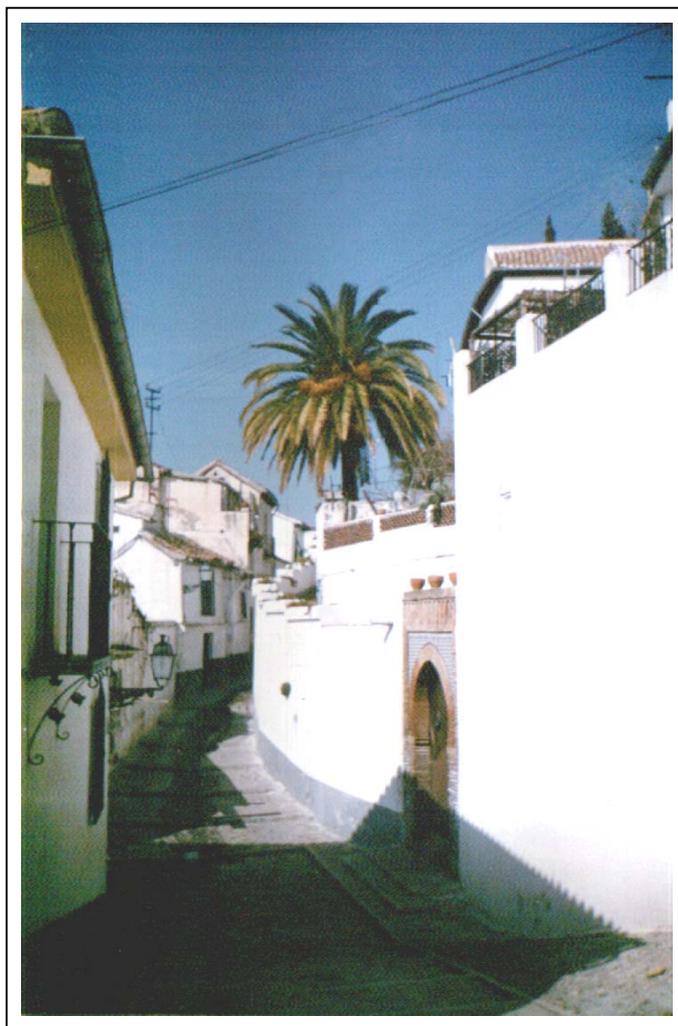
Though I wished with all my heart to leave the area where Dolores lived with Milagros and Curro, I knew nowhere else to go. I dared not desert the place I knew for parts unknown that might be even worse.

So, once again, I lived the life of the jungle in the Albaicín streets, hunting when I could an occasional mouse or lizard and taking charity from humans when I couldn't.

– 11 –

One thing led to another and I found myself awaiting the birth of a new litter, at least one or two of which, I was sure, would be black and white like their father, who, by the way, bears evidence of this love-match in the form of a bite or two from me on the ear.

With this realization, I had another problem to face. How would I again be able to provide food and shelter for my babies, when I was now



the place I knew

completely homeless and barely able to find nourishment for myself? I needed sustenance enough to be sure they would have plenty of mother's milk. The very thought of the appalling trials and tribulations my little ones and I would have to undergo made my fur stand on end.

Another worry, though less pressing, involved the possibility of a black kitten among my babies—a strong possibility indeed. Humans, you see, are prejudiced

against them, for reasons I have never understood. Perhaps their bias is related to the universal fear of darkness which people share—a fear unknown to us cats, for we welcome the close of day. Be that as it may, humans are known to shy away from even the most charming black cat if it walks by in front of them. They consider this to be a sign of bad luck. Such superstitious creatures they are! I have also heard that, in some cultures, custom has it that owning a black cat will bring good fortune; but, alas, this is much less widely accepted than the previous belief. Thus, I rightly feared for the future of any black offspring I might give birth to, since, like it or not, he or she would have to depend to a large degree upon humans for continued survival. After all, we cats are accustomed to living in close proximity to their species.

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If I remember correctly, it was just as a nip of autumn chill began to permeate the night air that there came to the house I still called mine a man and woman, who spoke a mixture of sounds which at that time rang foreign to my ear. I have since come to understand and appreciate their tender tones and

phrases, which are now as familiar and dear to me as my native tongue. But more of that later.

They settled in, bag and baggage. Quite promising I thought was the friendly demeanor they exuded. The woman, especially, seemed bent on trying to communicate with me whenever I came near and the man, for his part, made the more usual overtures of 'Missy, missy, missy.'

I, however, am an inveterate skeptic whom it takes more than a few 'missys' to win over, besides which neither one of them appeared to be inviting me into the house. But all things in their good time.

I was encouraged by the empathic glances they threw my way, and I decided to make my presence felt by staying just outside the door, whenever possible, so as to make them aware that I was open to future possibilities, and also, so as to discourage potential rivals who might undertake similar strategic moves.

Nevertheless, I did have a distinct advantage over my companions. Although the cats who lived in these streets were too numerous to be counted, very few had had even the slightest physical contact of a pleasing nature with humans.

I, you will remember, had been stroked on occasion, and, what is more, I had liked it.

While I am on the subject of what I like, let me here interpolate a few guidelines of conduct, as regards what type of treatment I prefer from humans. These predilections of mine I believe I share with almost or perhaps all others of my kind.

First of all, I am not a plaything nor is my tail, except when I see fit to use it for the amusement and distraction of my kittens, which utilitarian form of recreation spares me countless headaches in the rearing of my babies. Other than this, however, my tail and I should not be considered toys. This is probably the major reason I keep as far away as I can from children, who have no respect for my point of view in this matter.



I am not a plaything

Secondly, I deplore being laughed at, nor do I take kindly to being stared at either. In this regard, I am probably quite similar to people, though they usually don't appear to realize it.

Moreover, I respond in a very negative manner to being treated condescendingly. I would venture to state that, while I don't always show it, I am able to comprehend even the most complex patterns of conduct exhibited by humans. It is,

in fact, *my* capabilities that are often beyond their grasp, for instance, my telepathic powers, which some humans envy and wish to emulate.

Furthermore, I am highly sensitive to criticism and feel that it is unnecessary to be scolded. I am, after all, extremely loyal; but I only give loyalty where it is due.

Above all, I am inordinately curious, so I prize my independence. Others may feel that they own me, but, in reality, though I may accede to a discretionary limitation or two, I am my own master (or mistress in my case). I require the freedom to fully explore my surroundings unhindered by human sentiments to the contrary which cramp my style. My sensory world is all-encompassing. No smells, no sights, no sounds are too lowly to be investigated. I delight in my liberty, albeit subject to certain dictates of circumstance, whats, wheres, and whens.

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Notwithstanding the above inclinations and predispositions, I was inwardly yearning to share the abode of sympathetic humans, and this couple seemed as likely candidates as any, especially given that they were already living in what I considered my house.

Still I vacillated in a dizzying manner between the extremes of the desire for comfort and attacks of trepidation. What terrors might lie in wait for me within those walls? Beneath those benign exteriors, could they be cruel, heartless ogres? On the other hand, I would certainly welcome the warmth of a cozy room, where I could curl

up on a sofa once again. Besides, it would not be long before my babies arrived, and I wanted a better life for them than to be born in a deserted house.

The lady was in the habit of putting leftover food from her table plus a steady supply of bones—I considered chicken bones a delicacy back then—next to the wall of the house. We cats anticipated her and the man's arrivals, always with the dread that we would have to relinquish these treats to the diverse dogs who sometimes stormed the scene.

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One particularly luminous night, when chicken bones were on the menu, and a large moon shone enchantingly in the cold sky, I succumbed to the sudden urge to let myself be petted by the lady. Many cats were hovering about the spot, helping themselves, but all the others shunned a human's touch, except me. The sensation of having my back repeatedly stroked, of being rubbed behind my ears and under my chin struck me as more delicious than the chicken bone I was gnawing.

This experience is indelibly imprinted in my memory, for it marked the moment of my surrender. I wanted the balm of belonging, not being a lowly street cat anymore, and I was willing to risk taking the leap of entering through that portal, if the opportunity were offered me. I liked this lady and I felt that my feelings might be reciprocated. Overall, I craved more creature comforts.

Initially, we were circumspect in our advances. I often sauntered onto the step to bathe there in the sun, meanwhile peering through the front door to see what lay



Initially, we were circumspect in our advances

inside, and she, for her part, often left it open so I could. Both the man and the woman talked to me more and more, though I was afraid to let the man touch me. The three of us watched and waited.

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It was lentils that first led me into the house. The lady put a container of them on the doorstep and I came to sample the dish. I no longer eat legumes, but I still have a sentimental fondness for lentils, because they were my first meal in my real home.

After I had taken a few voracious bites, she moved the dish through the doorway, down the stairs. (Many houses in the Albaicín are built in this unusual way.) I dared to make the move inside with the lentils, in order to continue eating. We had done it! She had beckoned; I had followed.

This signaled the historic beginning of our association and of my new life as a full-fledged house-cat. From now on, I would belong to someone. My head would be held high, my tail erect. No more skulking behind the old motorcycle to shiver in the night chill, except in the direst emergencies. From this day forward, I would be known as Mama-cat.



a full-fledged house-cat

Part II

– 1 –

But everything did not change overnight. The transformation happened slowly, in stages, with concessions made on both sides little by little. This process would have been painful, if there had not been so many positive elements to counterbalance it.

For now I was given the run of the house. I was regularly fed, in fact I had a constant supply of food and water all my own. I was petted, invited to sit on their laps, and allowed to sleep anywhere I chose, except on the table where they ate. In the beginning, all the attention was a bit overwhelming. But very soon, I grew accustomed to these luxuries as part and parcel of my new mode of existence.

– 2 –



a chosen place in the sun

To digress a bit, one of my favorite pastimes is lying in the sun. In truth, I could be called a sun-worshipper in my own fashion. I have been known to ascend to dizzying heights, rooftop over rooftop, in order to catch some elusive rays. I will recline on top of a narrow ledge or sprawl on a wall, there to bask by the hour. I will roll around on a

balcony or pavement in a sunbather's sheer ecstasy. Even in the scorching summer, I will not let a morning or evening pass without enjoying a chosen place in the sun, until I am thoroughly baked and must turn to the solace of a shady alcove or stretch myself full-length on a tile floor.

Granada is a good habitat for sun-lovers like me. Many are the cloudless days of dazzling light. Here cats coexist, hand in paw, with humans, who also meander about seeking sun-beamed spots.

There are even special places named after our species, such as the River of Cats



(which usually has almost no water) where cats were always to be seen roaming about, nibbling on the grass that grew in its verdant bed. (Unfortunately, in the name of progress, this riverbed is quite barren now.)

These were not domesticated cats, but scavengers with a semi-wild nature, of the variety known as strays, mixed with some, no doubt, that had once seen better days.

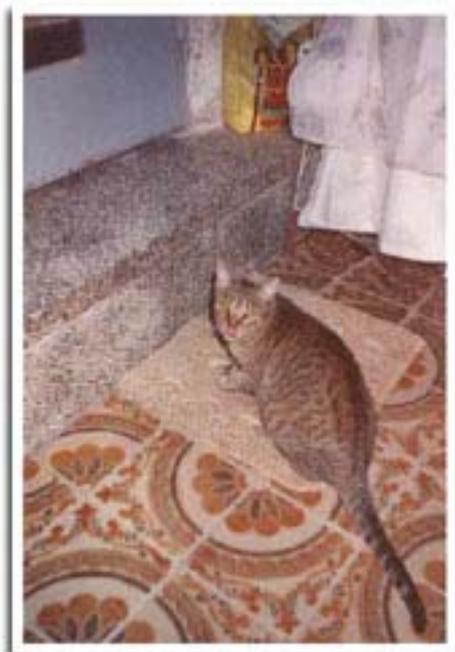
I heard my lady reminiscing about a Christmas Day some years ago when she and the man took a morning walk along this river, also called the Darro, above which, if one continues strolling, the Alhambra can be viewed in all its superb splendor.

They heard a noise of mournful mewing, and looked down at the cats in the river below. A small black one, the probable mewer, was gazing up at them with such a sorrowful expression in its green eyes that my lady was wrung with pity.

Fortunately for me, it was too far down for her to reach. You see, I do not relish the idea of sharing my home with a stranger. But she was so moved by its supplications that she and the man wandered about till they found some day-old bread, which Spaniards throw away in the streets, and flung it down. The poor creature devoured this meager offering ravenously, while my lady showered it with tender words of encouragement.

I have only related this anecdote to illustrate that my lady has a soft spot for cats, even black ones; and because her behavior struck me as unusual for humans, particularly on Christmas Day, when their minds are usually filled with matters pertaining to their own society. Judging from this, you can get an idea of the sort of life I now lead, in contrast to my previously straitened circumstances.

– 3 –

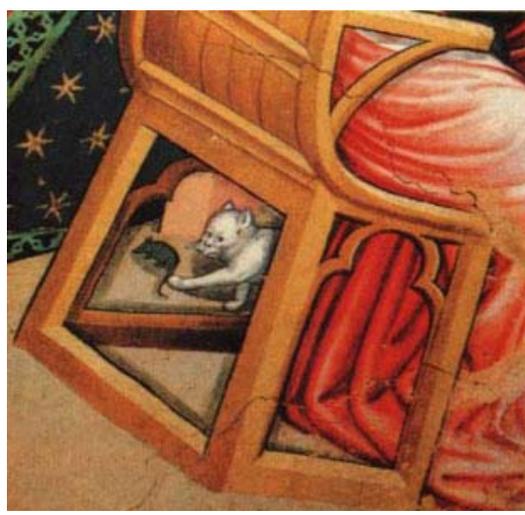


Lest I give a falsely sanguine impression, however, there are certain drawbacks to being a member of a household, such as the inability to open heavy doors, which severely restrict my mobility. In fact, most barriers are quite disagreeable to me, notwithstanding their ability to bar undesirables from entry, in particular, dogs and children. Likewise, when I want to go outside, which now means climbing the stairs to the terrace

above, I don't like to have to wait for the whim to strike a human's mind to let me out.

In addition to this inconvenience, there are certain things on which my lady and I simply don't see eye to eye.

I am a hunter by nature, a good one I might add, and as history goes, cats were first valued by humanity chiefly for this reason. The talents of my species as mousers are renowned, and we will most certainly get any lizard or bird in our clutches that we can, not to mention



[Detail from XV century Italian fresco]

grasshoppers and a host of others, whose slightest stir will rouse us out of the soundest

sleep. This instinct has permitted my breed to survive, as well as to be treasured as guards of human kitchens for centuries in fact.

But my lady has a double standard when it comes to this issue, and her responses to my prizes can be quite contradictory. That is, she gives me conflicting messages, such as, 'I want you to catch mice that are in the house, but don't show them to me.' This I find completely incomprehensible.

Moreover, she gets upset if I bring her gifts like lizards and will actually betray me by taking their side against mine. And when it comes to birds, she transforms into my enemy, defending and protecting them from me at all costs.

Grasshoppers and other insects are less celebrated causes of hers, although my lady will often interfere when I have finally trapped even one of these.

For my part, I make no distinctions among these various and sundry creatures and find her position totally untenable. After all, I want to be more than only another mouth to feed. If I can justify my existence in her home by making small contributions, I would think that she would appreciate it. Wouldn't it be better if I were more self-sufficient, less of a burden to her? No, I will never understand my lady when it comes to this. Humans can be downright inscrutable at times.

– 4 –

Nevertheless, to return to my saga, if my story merits such an epithet, let no one say I had not found myself in a happy home, and just in the nick of time for the arrival of my new litter.

Well, I'm exaggerating a bit, because I passed most of the winter as an expectant mother. During this time, I began to develop new habits of civilized society.

I now had a litter box (Why this word coincides with my babies I'll never know!) and I grew so accustomed to using it that I could no longer bear to relieve myself in the street, except in the utmost emergency. It took me awhile to master the fine art of a small box of sand, but I must say I became quite proficient in this area, much to the relief of my lady and the man.

With great rapidity, I learned to be extremely discriminating about food. No longer would I eat any old scraps from the table, nor would I bother with bones, unless they were generously laden with meat. (I have since given them up altogether and have trained my lady to give my meat to me in chunks, and, whenever possible, white meat if chicken.)

While I'm on the subject of food, I was now introduced to the dry and canned kinds, made especially for cats. These vary considerably in quality, some being worthy of the term delicacy. (In Spain, such commodities were unknown until quite recently.) I was also allotted a particular place in the kitchen where a supply of dry food and water was always available.

Furthermore, I soon started appearing regularly during the mealtimes of my lady and the man. It was then that the ritual developed, which has persisted to this day, of giving me treats of some sort afterward. These have become more and more elaborate over time.

– 5 –

That was the first winter I can remember being really warm. I could wriggle under the covers of their bed and snooze there to my heart's content. I found a way to perch on the wooden-bar base of the dining table, over the electric device they used to heat the room, the sensation of which I would describe as heavenly. And then there were numerous nooks and crannies I could occupy in order to keep away the cold, when they went out. One of my favorites was a low shelf containing fuzzy garments, some of which I would pull off so as to make a perfect nest for myself. Endless seemed the cubbyholes, cupboards, and corners of closets for me to explore. As the time drew near for my babies to be born, I began to do this with increasing urgency.

– 6 –

One day, my lady showed me a sort of nursery she and the man had prepared for the big event. It consisted of a large box filled with soft material, the whole thing overhung with a canopy, through which there was an opening for me to enter.

I must admit, I was impressed by all the effort they had undertaken on behalf of my next generation. Such concern was touching, to be sure.

Still, I was not totally convinced that this locale would be the most secure, conspicuous as it was, from unknown dangers. I am a stickler for safety, when it comes to my kittens, and will go to great lengths to secrete them, most particularly

from the Tom-cat (in this case, black and white) of whom I had been but recently so enamored, when they were conceived.

So I held open other options, including, but not restricted to, the closet floor with its myriad shoes (not really very comfortable), under the bed (not all that secure), or one of the shelves (the kittens could fall off); and I finally settled on the elaborate construction that had been made, as being the most suitable haven for my maternity ward. After all, they had had the uncanny intuition of situating it in one of the most out-of-reach portions of the house.

– 7 –

Though I had given birth to perhaps many dozens of offspring during the chaotic epoch of my past, this would be my first labor and delivery in such pampered surroundings. I was overjoyed at the prospect of sharing my new privileged world with my soon-to-arrive kittens.

But, looking back on it from the vantage point of the present, little did I know what irrevocable methods humans have for determining the destinies of our babies. I have racked my brain to try to discover a clue to the rationale of my beloved lady at that time. I simply cannot reconcile the heart-rending disappearance of my kittens, which must have been engineered by her and the man, with the otherwise sweet solicitous attitude they displayed toward us. Suffice it to say that my lady has feet of clay for me, dating back to then, although I have no doubt that her intentions were

always the best. (My lady is certainly no Dolores!) Nevertheless, we all know that good intentions are not enough and what road to where is paved with them.

Luckily, this state of affairs has not arisen in the long time since then. This may bear some relationship to the medicinal taste I detect in the otherwise inexplicable treat of varying brands of gourmet canned food that I receive every Saturday morning. Furthermore, I am no longer even faintly drawn to the periodically howling Toms that used to be my decided weakness.

Thus I have forgiven my lady and the man their transgressions toward me while in the throes of motherhood. For transgressions they seemed to me, even though they took great pains to assure me that my kittens had been whisked away to better lives.

Yet what imaginable improvement could there have been over a kittenhood amply endowed with not only the niceties but also a loving mother's care and comfort, until the time they would naturally have ventured out on their own? Or perhaps the youngsters would have elected to share our habitat, which was certainly large enough for all of us. Yes, I have forgiven the lady and the man. But I have never forgotten.

When spring was just heralding its arrival with a mild breeze now and again, one nightfall I felt the first twinges of what I knew presaged the appearance of my newborns.

These happy events always have their frightening aspect, not to mention their painful side, which culminates in the miracle of new life.

By this time, my lady and I had fallen into a state of mutual trust, a rapport which has continued to grow into its present telepathic proportions. I am a bit confused as to the sequence of the subsequent episodes. As I remember, we were together on the bed, when it became crystal clear to me that this would be the night.



As I remember, we were together on the bed...

Signaling my distress and apprehension with meows full of import and urgency, I let myself be carried (for one of the only times in my life) to the nursery area. Wonder of wonders, I didn't even struggle, as I was cradled in the arms of one of them—I can't remember which one—and borne to our chosen place.

I will spare you most of the details of those excruciating moments, except to recount a few of the marvels that passed between my lady and me.

First one, then two, then three tiny creatures delivered themselves into the light of the world. Absorbed as I was in these magical happenings, I was aware that my lady remained at my side, stroking me lovingly and calming me in soft, coaxing tones of reassurance.

It was at that point that she must have felt things were going well enough for her to depart from the room for awhile. But, to my own surprise, I would have none of it. I wanted - needed her with me, and so, leaving my three infants, I pursued her, meowing insistently, until she returned with me.

Then, when my lady was once more positioned at the side of our box, my last little one made its appearance—whereupon began the ceaseless toil, albeit labors of love, of licking, cleaning, grooming, nursing, feeding, amusing, entertaining with my tail, lugging around by the nape of the neck, cuddling, protecting, instructing in all manner of skills, arts, and abilities—the likes of which only a mother cat can fathom—, and providing round-the-clock tender loving care. You see, I am not called Mama-cat for nothing.

— 9 —

So my lady was there in my hour of need. Now I was the proud mother of three black and white baby boys, each distinctly individual, and one baby girl, almost black, with enticing traces of tiger-stripping on her head and back. A finer litter I had never had!

December 29, 1999

– 10 –

My story suffered an almost indefinite interruption, due to a catastrophic series of events, which plunged my lady into such excruciatingly intense grief and pain for such a seemingly infinite time that I was barely able to bear the suffering either. My lady's sorrow is my sorrow, her suffering is mine. That is simply the way it is. Her tears fell and fell, and, when her eyes were dry, her sadness and desolation were so agonizingly deep that I tried never to leave her lap.

The only thing that seemed to comfort her and me was an intoned sound she made over and over, which undulated soothingly through me as well. It buoyed us up from the profundity of our despair. It became our very breath, heartbeat, the pulsing rhythm of our life.

Finally, after what appeared to be an eternity of devastating anguish, she took up her pencil again one day and asked me to continue my so-called saga.

– 11 –

But during this interminable interval, the last of my, as they say, 'nine lives' (some say, 'seven') came to a close. In other words, the final sunset of my existence expired; my earthly time ran out.

It seems I had immutably reached the mysterious end of my checkered life, because finally I found myself beset by a progressively debilitating illness, from which, due to my advanced age, no recovery was possible.

My lady was terribly distraught and immersed herself in trying every possible remedy (sparing no expense), in addition to offering me all manner of gourmet treats and delicacies; but, sad to say, all was in vain, although I will always be grateful to her and the man for their extreme efforts. My lady truly suffered, agonized with me, as I had suffered with her. Indeed, never, in any lifetime whatsoever, will I forget her loving kindness and tears of grief, not to mention the soothing sounds which helped me surrender to submergence into the unknown, and the tender words of comfort with which my last weeks were surrounded.



My wish is that we may forever find each other, she and I, throughout our eternal cosmic journeys of latency and manifestation. And, in my present repose, I feel that her wish is the same.

– 12 –

But what of the narrative we were engaged in? Should it stop here, leaving the rest untold? It is not for me to judge what value my recollections may or may not have for others, but such an abrupt ending seems somehow inappropriate.

However, now I must communicate with my lady from this other dimension in which I find myself, which fortunately I am able to do, insofar as she is willing and open to receiving me. And yes, she said, yes she will. Yes.

Therefore, let us go on with the story, in this novel manner, as one millennium gives way to a new one – one age to the next – let us go on .. onward ..

January 8, 2000

Part III

– 1 –

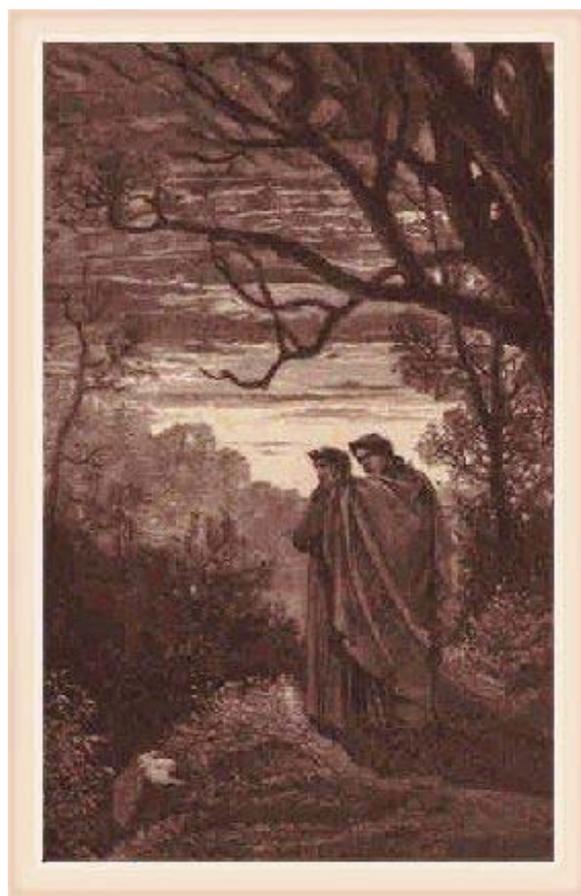
We begin again, as a new epoch opens—new, let us hope, in more than name and numbers only. For the history of the human race, with which I have been closely connected, has been brutal beyond belief. Still, most humans refuse to include themselves in the category of animals, no other species of which has had a chronicle even remotely comparable to the bestiality of the *Homo sapiens*.



[F. Petrarca, 1304-1374.
Italian poet]

Yet, who am I to judge? It is true that human beings are also capable of displaying great talents, wisdom, and nobility, more of which, if I might indulge in a little wishful thinking, could find a way to become manifest, as this new chapter of the future unfolds. Perhaps the intimate association of people with cats will prove mutually beneficial. After all, Petrarch died by the side of his best loved feline pet; and, during the entire creation of *The Divine Comedy*, there was a cat on Dante's lap. But, lest I continue to wax philosophical, for the moment, we must regress to the past.

If my narrative seemed jumbled before, it will most certainly zigzag even more now, as I traverse the events and anecdotes of my late life from such a far distant vantage point. It may be hoped that my present perspective has rendered my vision clearer, more insightful, and that I will not overload whatever faithful readers have remained with my episodic adventures thus far, with superfluous details and irrelevant happenings (that is, irrelevant to humans). But that is for you to say, not I.



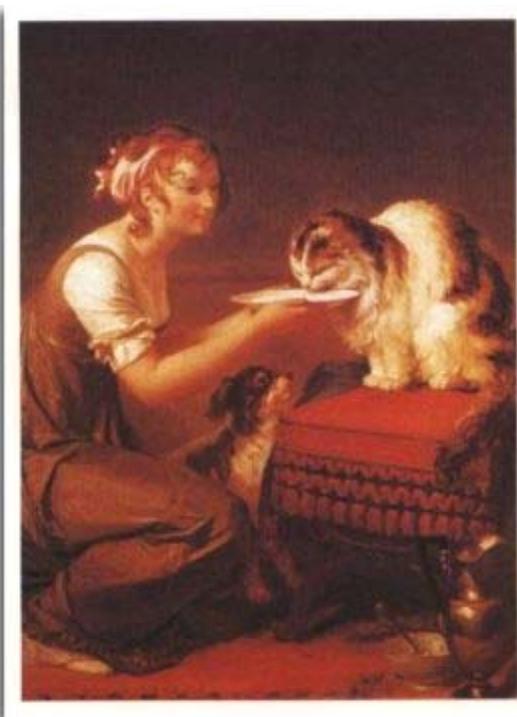
[Dante and Virgil in the savage wilderness. Detail of etching by G. Doré for *The Divine Comedy*]

– 2 –

To resume in a cultural frame of mind, there is a profusion of works of art, around the world, painted by what are, apparently, cat fancying artists. From the Egyptians, who endowed goddesses with feline heads, through Classical Greek and Roman artistry and artifacts, on down to the present, cats have frequently been featured in primary positions and central roles. And wherever cats appear they upstage (so to speak) all others, calling attention to themselves—away from whatever additional elements have been portrayed alongside them.

This is evident in a painting by Albrecht Dürer (1508), titled "Young Girl Weaving a Garland", as well as in Willem van Mieris's "Woman Fishmonger" (1713), where the calico cat clearly takes the spotlight, even though she is located at the bottom of the picture.

Among the impressionists, the incomparable Auguste Renoir has one with a young woman, for which no commentary is needed, since the cat, who is standing on her hind legs, is obviously the main attraction.



...the natural superiority of cats over dogs
[*The Cat's Breakfast*, by Marguerite Gérard]

To continue, there is "The Cat's Breakfast" by Marguerite Gérard, in which the cat is enthroned, as she laps milk from a hand held plate, with a dog watching enviously from below. This is perhaps a visual testimony to the natural superiority of cats over dogs.

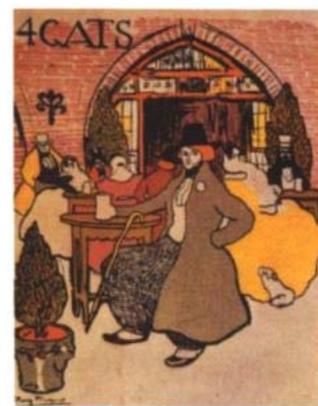
Many are the magazine covers and posters featuring cats, with one of the latter by the French artist Toulouse-Lautrec, of the English singer May Belfort, painted in 1896.

Toulouse-Lautrec has illustrated her in the act of performing her famous song, "I Had a Little Kitten", while holding a small black one.

Among the examples in Spanish art, we find Francisco de Goya's portrait of a young boy, a detail of which shows three cats, one barely visible, intently observing a bird, which the boy has leashed on a string. And, in 1899, the prolific Pablo Picasso

made a drawing of the celebrated artists' café "Els Quatre Gats" in Barcelona, in which, for some odd reason, no cats are in evidence.

Closer to home, there is a huge seventeenth century painting, on the refectory wall of the Carthusian Monastery in Granada, depicting "The Last Supper", at which dinner the menu is fish. The man, who especially esteemed this work, insisted that even a quick look would cause one's eye to be drawn away from the pious scene above to the real action under the table. There a cat has puffed up, in response to the machinations of a dog.



[Picasso poster drawing]

Yet I shall let the Americans have the last word with an unforgettable photograph by Harry Warnecke. The scene, an afternoon in 1925, on Center Street in New York, dramatically captures a mother cat literally stopping all traffic, with the aid



of a smiling policeman, as she carries each of her kittens across the highway. It inspires me, my name being Mama-cat, to meditate on this image and let my imagination

meander freely through a society in which ethical standards such as these are given priority. The photo says it all!

– 3 –

Let me here interpolate that I had a number of special attributes, shared with other felines, which most humans find unfathomable. For instance, my whiskers served as antennae, that is, extra sensing devices that enabled me to gauge areal dimensions more accurately, especially in the dark. In addition, these stiff bristles extended my intimate space, distancing me that much further from unwelcome intrusions on my person.

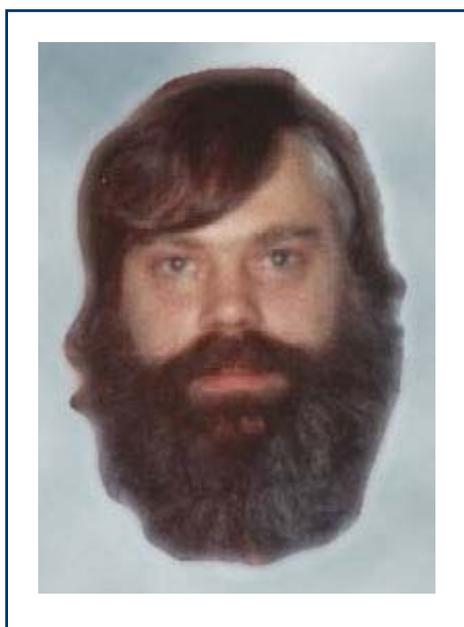
I realize that I just applied the word 'person' to myself. The truth is, in the latter years of my existence as a tabby, I had virtually no



contact with other cats anymore (except to observe them in the street below from my front balcony). Therefore, I began to regard myself as more human than catlike in

many of my emulated habits and patterns of daily life. But here I am wandering far away from the very feline topic of whiskers.

One of their distinct advantages is to aid and augment the functions of smell in detecting prey and in determining the direction of the wind or air currents in the hunt. Though this may not seem terribly important for us house-cats, we are still expected to



be mousers. And don't forget we are close relatives of the lion and tiger. Furthermore, these wiry hairs have often served the purpose of stopping gnats from entering our noses and barring other flying insects which are fond of buzzing around the face. In short, whiskers could be considered the perfect integrating factor of eyes, nose and mouth, certainly much more utilitarian than the abundant beard and mustache the man usually

had, which are not located in a very strategic spot and seem to interfere somewhat with eating.

Insensitive people, however, consider whiskers created especially for them to run their fingers over, so as to make our faces twitch. Once again, children are the worst offenders, though sometimes the man fell into this category as well. No matter how fiercely we glare our annoyance and disapproval, many of their kind simply refuse to control their prankish impulses.

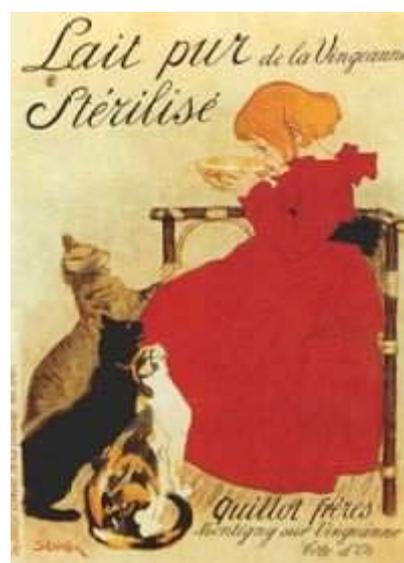
– 4 –

To continue in a similar vein, I have heard the words finicky and fussy used in association with the dietary preferences I developed over the years with my lady and the man. But I regard my behavior as the natural refinement of taste that went hand in hand with the plusher life (to which I had become accustomed), which distinguished the rank and social order of being a house-pet.

By the way, the cliché about cats and milk is false when it comes to me. It is true that if given the trite saucer of milk, I would eagerly lap it up, but I always got a terrible case of the runs from cow's milk. And I am by no means the only one of my kind on whom milk has a deleterious effect.

As for my moods, I believe I can honestly say that equanimity was one of my assets. I loved the simple, ordered routine of domesticity and had no need for sporadic bursts of excitement, as do some humans, (although once in a while my curiosity got the best of me). I was contented when our home-life was relatively stable and peaceful, but agitated when it was not. And, as I have affirmed earlier, my lady's happiness or melancholy were also mine.

My lady and I even had our own unique gesture of affection, in which we lovingly put our heads together—in this case, our foreheads—and maintained this silent contact, devoid of the clutter of other details that are often added to caresses,



with only the slightest pressure, until we were both satisfied that we had felt the full warmth of our expression of demonstrated devotion. Most assuredly, I learned to enjoy her very human kisses as well. I sometimes ask myself if I could be crossing out of my species into hers. But that is a question I am not sage enough to answer.

– 5 –

"Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate." So said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I believe I left off my account just having begun to mother my new litter of infant kittens, whose appearance, and subsequent disappearance, I previously alluded to.

I am endowed with extraordinarily well-functioning self-protective instincts, which extend, of course, to my offspring, too. We cats know very well how to throw our enemies off the scent (both figuratively and literally), and we can be very adept at eluding detection.

This being the case, a great inner categorical imperative began to dictate that I must move my infants to an unknown location. So, one morning, when my lady and the man were not around, I carried them, one by one, by the nape of the neck, to the prime location of the bed. Carefully I nestled each of my babies under the covers, where I could be sure they would be warm and comfy.

When my lady returned, she discovered my hiding place, and, although retaining her humor in the midst of being astonished, she undid all my difficult labor and returned the kittens to their former box, ignoring my vehement protests.

What could I do? In fact, I tried again, moving my babies back to the bed (which was firmly not permitted), into the closet (also nixed), and various low shelves (forbidden as well).

At length, my lady, in a strategic effort to contain my sundry shifts, relocated the former nursery, now filled with different neutral-smelling cloths, putting it in their bedroom on the floor just next to her side of the bed. This appeared acceptable to me, and so I acquiesced to letting my infants stay there, until they were able to climb out on their own.

And yet—alas and alack!—I was to remain in the dark for several weeks more, as to the frightful suffering in store for me. How could I foresee the black days ahead, when each of my kittens was to vanish, leaving me with an agonizing void nothing could fill—that is, until the passage of time served to dull the pain.

— 6 —

As my little darlings became more and more mobile, they began to investigate every corner of the upstairs. The baby girl, in imitation of my own feisty, inquisitive nature, even ventured to scramble down the stairs, in spite of my chiding meows. Needless to say, I could not allow this at her tender age.

The fact is, my tiny female feline seemed particularly drawn to my lady, and vice versa. My kitten would seek her out and, in strongly voiced cries, insist on being



May Belfort ... performing ... "I Had a Little Kitten"
[Toulouse-Lautrec poster, 1896]

picked up or, failing that, would climb up her clothes, to take what she seemed to consider her rightful place on my lady's lap. And my lady appeared to be enchanted with all these special attentions as well, since she always kept up a steady stream of the most affectionate phrases, while the two were together.

Still, inseparable as they seemed to be, my charming little daughter mysteriously disappeared, along with the gentlest of her brothers, never to be beheld by me again. My lady, when pressed, reluctantly related that they had been taken to live in a country house with a large garden and a great deal of land surrounding it.

Having tried my best to teach my children to be good survivors, I continue to exercise a mother's prerogative in refusing to entertain the notion that they could have perished in the wild. Rather I prefer to imagine that a new strain of black and white, mixed with tiger-striped, cats has emerged in this area and is still flourishing to this day.

Oh yes, while the subject of the fates of my last litter of offspring is still fresh in my mind—their awful evaporation into thin air as it appeared to me—I was informed by my lady and the man that one of my cute salt and pepper sons had been taken to live in a city apartment with, horror of horrors, a little boy.

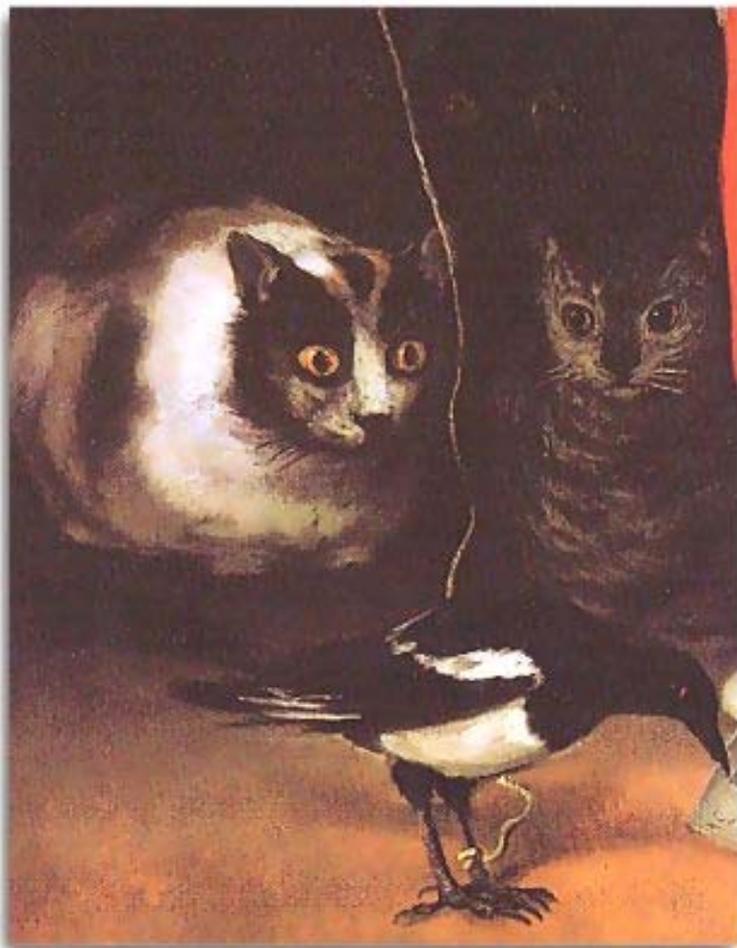


Francisco de Goya's portrait of a young boy

— 7 —

But, to back up a bit, it so happened that a black and white baby of mine had found a special place in the man's heart. This kitten was particularly frisky and sweet (indeed, each one was wonderfully sprightly and frolicsome), and the man had wanted him to remain in the household. This lovable little one was dubbed Wilbur by the man, and, as destiny would have it, Wilbur also became the immediate favorite of

some neighbors down the street, who had decided to adopt one of my kittens for the amusement of their three children—certainly not for the betterment of my child.



detail [of Goya's painting] ...which shows three cats, one barely visible

So off he went to their house. The man was disappointed at Wilbur being the first to go, but he and the lady reassured themselves, and a distraught me, that he had found an especially happy home close by and that we could all visit Wilbur frequently. I, of course, would never have set foot in that house.

Be that as it may, the unhappy fact is that things

did not turn out as they had hoped. First of all, his name was changed to Blanquito (an odd name for my black and white boy, it seemed to me) and he backslid into the pitiful protective mechanism, so they ventured to tell me, of huddling under couches, behind chairs, or in corners, to try to escape the terrors inflicted on him by the three little monsters and their shouting mother and father. These young girls and their parents seemed to lack even the most elementary understanding of how to treat a small feline.

For one thing, he was shown absolutely no respect—that is, his feelings were totally ignored. In addition to the trauma of having been separated from me, sweet Wilbur, as he will always be to me, was subjected to being handled like a toy. He was pushed and pulled, fought over, cornered—in short, dealt with in the thoroughly reprehensible manner of many humans who consider themselves superior to all other lowly creatures. Also, his diet deteriorated abominably to whatever was left over from the family's meals—remnants *I* would have shunned—which usually lacked the nutritive ingredients necessary for a youngster's healthy growth.

— 8 —

Yet the most miserable termination imaginable of this abysmal state of affairs occurred months later, when the neighbor woman, claiming to have discovered that she was allergic to cats, returned one morning with the ill-starred Wilbur. Melancholic to remember, something went terribly wrong with my sensory system. It must have been the suffocating smell of the scarf drenched in perfume, in which Wilbur had been wrapped, that sabotaged my ability to even rudimentarily recognize my own son.

I here vehemently denounce all types of the perfumed smells which humans love to splash all over themselves. Rather than believe that the bond between my dearest Wilbur and me ever could have been broken, I prefer to blame that odious odor in which my precious son had been soaked. I feel strongly that my sensing mechanism was subverted by the natural fragrance of my little one being drowned by the stench of that stinking perfume. As far as I am concerned, no other explanation for my own

traitorous behavior toward my offspring contains any plausibility whatsoever. Oh humans, how can you have so dulled and obscured the subtleties of smell that are absolutely essential to our inter-relatedness in the animal kingdom?!

– 9 –

Poor Wilbur was so overjoyed to find himself once again in my presence that he could not contain his delight and, with a bounding leap, rushed up to me.

And how did I return my son's great affection? To my everlasting shame, horror, and remorse, I failed to know my own Wilbur, and I lashed out with my claws open and hissed at him, as though he were my most hated enemy.

Wilbur was completely crushed, though to his great credit, and our excellent genetic inheritance, even in his utmost dejection, the brave little tyke never shied away from his pitiless mother, until he eventually won me over and I realized lamentably late that I had been cruelly rejecting my very own child. Finally, we were united in a true embrace, licking each other and cuddling together once again.

But, sad to say, my heroic little Wilbur, in all his natural exuberance and curiosity, ran out of the house one day, never to return. All our cries were to no avail; all our combing the streets could not bring him back.

We all suspected, and still do to this day, that Wilbur was stolen. Friendly, innocent little guy that he was, it would have been easy enough for someone to snatch and sequester him. It is even possible that some well-intentioned person supposed that he or she was improving my kitten's lot in life. Well, the three of us, my lady, the man,

and I, mourned his loss for a long time and tried to imagine that he might, at least, be in happy circumstances somewhere else.

But a year or so later, a woebegone Wilbur look-alike, scrawny and dirty—a shadow of his former self, if indeed it was he—in an unguarded moment when the front door was open, slunk silently into the kitchen, and, making straight for my dry food, ate furtively though voraciously what he could in a moment, only to dash out the door and disappear once again. We all hoped with all our might that it hadn't been Wilbur. The tragic truth is that we never saw him again.

This marked the end of my mothering days. From now on, I was to be Mama-cat in name only.

Yet, the longing for my lost children remains as an ache. Only a grieving parent will truly appreciate the feeling that compels me to seek some resolution with the following addendum.

My lady has a cat calendar for the year 2000, and the picture for February is a perfect likeness of me, back then, and Wilbur, grown to his full stature. It is the happily-ever-after finish that I always wanted us to have, as does every mom for her child. Thus, I am including it here, with the wish that my son, Wilbur, and I will enjoy this future together in the great unknown that lies ahead.



that my son, Wilbur, and I will enjoy this future together
in the great unknown that lies ahead

– 10 –



In 1634, there appeared a book called *Human and Divine Rhymes*, by Lope de Vega, a world-renowned lover of cats. Within this volume, the stellar piece was a 'mock' epic poem titled "The Battle of the Cats", which, though it came to be greatly admired, was regarded as a 'burlesque' by the majority of humans, due to the protagonists' being felines. In this epic, as I consider it, the loves, jealousies, and combats of cats were rendered into the high rhetoric and lyric

verse they deserve. As befits my Spanish genealogy, I am proud to note the inclusion of Lope de Vega's fabulous felines among the eminent heroes and heroines of the time-honored epics.

Here I would like to insert a few quotations, paraphrases, and sayings from the abundant body of literature throughout the ages, inspired by cats. Descriptions, metaphors, similes, and other poetic (and non-poetic) figures of all types abound.

I might start, and finish as well, with, for me, the most poetic of poets, whose lyricism I would like to particularly praise, Dylan Thomas, who penned his own memories of Welsh felines in enchanted lines about polar cats.

To him, we were "sleek and long as jaguars" and we "would slink and sidle over the white back-garden walls." These phrases can be found in the part "waiting for cats" in Dylan Thomas's long Christmas prose-poem in which he also mentions the green of our eyes. There are also graphic words which apply only to certain more savage lion-like strains, such as, "horrible-whiskered, spitting and snarling" – all of which makes me assume that Dylan Thomas had a special affinity for our species. (I will save a line to which I am peculiarly partial for the end.)

I am also fond of the famous metaphoric poem about the fog coming in (most aptly) on little cat feet. And then there are many favorite rhymes, one in which a cat is coupled with a fiddle and another in which a calico cat replies, 'Mee-ow.'

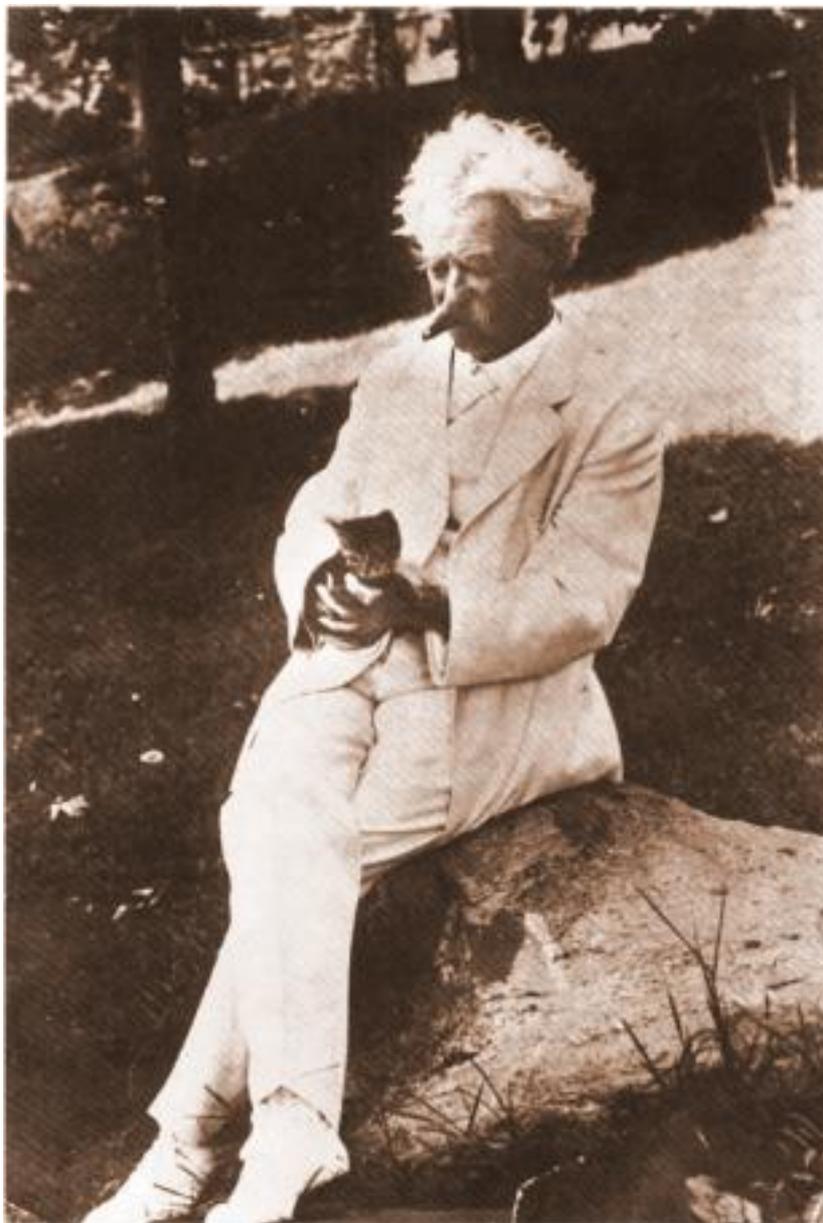
As for proverbial expressions, it should be kept in mind that when someone is 'cool' he is referred to as a 'cat.' Everybody has been exposed to the saying, which I don't like, about not letting the cat out of the bag, and the one I've never understood about raining cats and dogs. And of course there is the well-known game called cat's cradle.

Shakespeare's literary outpourings contain numerous references, such as one in which we are praised a bit offhandedly when the sound of our voices is preferred to poor poetry in the lines:

*I had rather be a kitten and cry mew,
Than one of these same meter mongers.*

Another Shakespearean quote, apropos to the theme of poor Wilbur's tale, is, "Thou owest ... the cat no perfume." His Spanish contemporary, Cervantes, wrote this bit of folk wisdom: "Those who'll play with cats must expect to be scratched."

Mark Twain asserted unequivocally, "If a man could be crossed with the cat, it would improve the man but deteriorate the cat." – no comment from me. And there's another by him, which expresses sentiments my lady embraced: "A home without a cat, and a well-fed, well-petted and properly revered cat, may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove its title?" Mark Twain also liked to use us as a point of comparison, as in his somewhat puzzling passage, in which nine lives are mentioned: "One of the most striking differ-



[Mark Twain with his] "...well-petted and properly revered cat"

ences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives."

More than two and a half thousand years ago, Aesop posed the question, "Who shall bell the cat?" Of course, there was also T.S. Eliot, who fairly recently wrote a

whole book about us, which was made into a hit musical, and a modern play is titled *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a scorching though highly dramatic image.

We can discover a more dignified line by Kipling: "The Cat. He walked by himself, and all places were alike to him."

Pertinent to the efficacy of our claws (of which I will soon say a little more) is a sentence from Benjamin Franklin: "The cat in gloves catches no mice."

There are also lesser known phrases with pleasant images, such as, "It would make a cat laugh." And, more profoundly, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats— all human life is there."

Then, in conclusion, let me add a Lewis Carroll exclamation: "Oh my fur and whiskers!" To finally end, as promised, with Dylan Thomas: "The wise cats never appeared." I could go on and on.

— 11 —

This seems as good a moment as any to append my thoughts about claws. Yes, we cats are endowed with them, as people are with fingernails, and we must sharpen them frequently. We need claws in order to climb trees—a subject I will return to later—defend ourselves, or to hunt for food, in case we find ourselves reduced to scavenging in the wild. I have heard horror stories of house-cats being de-clawed. This deplorable practice should absolutely be abolished.

Never would I have scratched anyone who was my friend or who treated me decently and with the dignity all living creatures deserve. But I always needed my

claws. After all, who knew when a crucial emergency might arise? They were part and parcel of my offense-defense mechanism, and no one should take them away from me or my fellow felines.

– 12 –

While I am being tangential, there comes to mind a male specimen—no ordinary Tom—who was quite a character in the cat community. He was totally ashen in hue, and, when taken together, his face, head, and unusual ears made him bear a marked resemblance to a bear (a coincidence of words and bearing), or more accurately, a teddy bear. My lady called him Charcoal Gray, on account of the shade of his fur, and always greeted him, as he patrolled the limits of the territory he prowled.

They seemed to have a special rapport. My lady would speak to him, as if he were much more than just a casual acquaintance, addressing him by the name Charcoal Gray to which he appeared to respond. He would stop to listen, answering with his eyes, which he fixed on her in a doleful gaze, as though in silent recognition of the sad reality that no matter how kind her words, she would not be able to alter his lowly lot in life. Still and all, he always carried himself with a jaunty air, maintaining his poised self-possession (an inveterate trait of us cats) although in the throes of constant adversity. In exemplary fashion, Charcoal Gray simply turned a cold shoulder to the scornful treatment he customarily received from all save my lady and the man. It was these qualities, plus his unique bearish aspect, which have caused me to pay him the tribute, albeit a bit grudgingly, of inclusion in my memoir.

As a footnote to the above, it is conceivable that Charcoal Gray could have been descended from the revered strain of French Carthusian cats, related to the British Blue



Charcoal Gray could have been descended from the revered strain of French Carthusian cats [Frame from the Carthusian monastery of Granada, by Luis Cabello]

variety, whose deep gray fur was poetized, by the 'Pléyade', as 'rare and beautiful as satin'. This blue-blooded breed has been described as well-built, with round head and

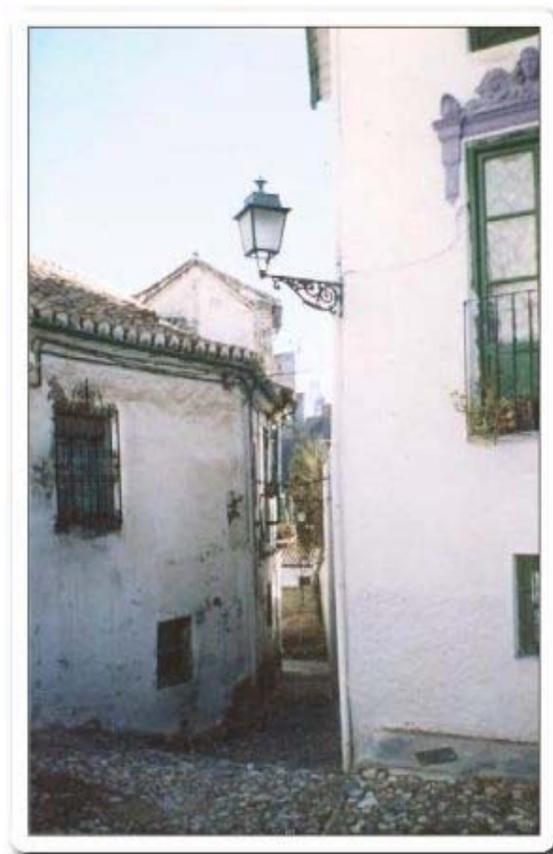
cheeks and fur analogous to the best Spanish wool, all of which is quite an accurate verbal representation of Charcoal Gray's salient features.

In final afterthought, it makes me pensive to realize that, had Charcoal Gray been born into different circumstances of time and place, it cannot be ruled out that he might have been greatly prized – that is, treated as royalty (as were the cats of Colette and General De Gaulle), rather than as the outcast he was in the social hierarchy of our stomping ground.

– 13 –

The environment I lived in was plentiful in local color. My entire life was spent in Granada, a city rich in multi-cultural history. Though the splendid panorama of its past is evident everywhere, nowhere is it more obvious than in the canyon-like cobblestone streets of the quarter called the Albaicín, which was my haven for well more than half of my earthly existence.

The prevalent theory holds that its name derives from Moors from Baeza having inhabited the area. After having fled the



the canyon-like cobblestone streets
of the quarter called the Albaicín

Christian capture of their town, they are reputed to have been invited by the sultan of Granada to settle there in 1227. Another supposition, quite popular and perhaps more accurate, claims that the name originated from the Arabic words 'Al bayya zín' interpreted as 'quarter of the falconer' (not at all a comforting idea for a cat).

The final and least known suggestion for the source of the name is that it was so



called for the Arabic words which literally meant 'village on a steep hill'.

Whatever its etymology, the Albaicín looks toward the majestic Alhambra Palace, as though in contemplation of its august profile. An air of mystery seems to waft around every corner (not always romantic, but often sinister) and this locale has managed to preserve, with remarkable purity, its original Arabic appearance.

As far as I know, the Albaicín is still a maze of steep winding streets interspersed with precipitous steps—regrettably wonderful for the robbers—as well as a testimony to the Moorish arrangement of urban dwellings, which dates back to before the Christian conquest of the city.

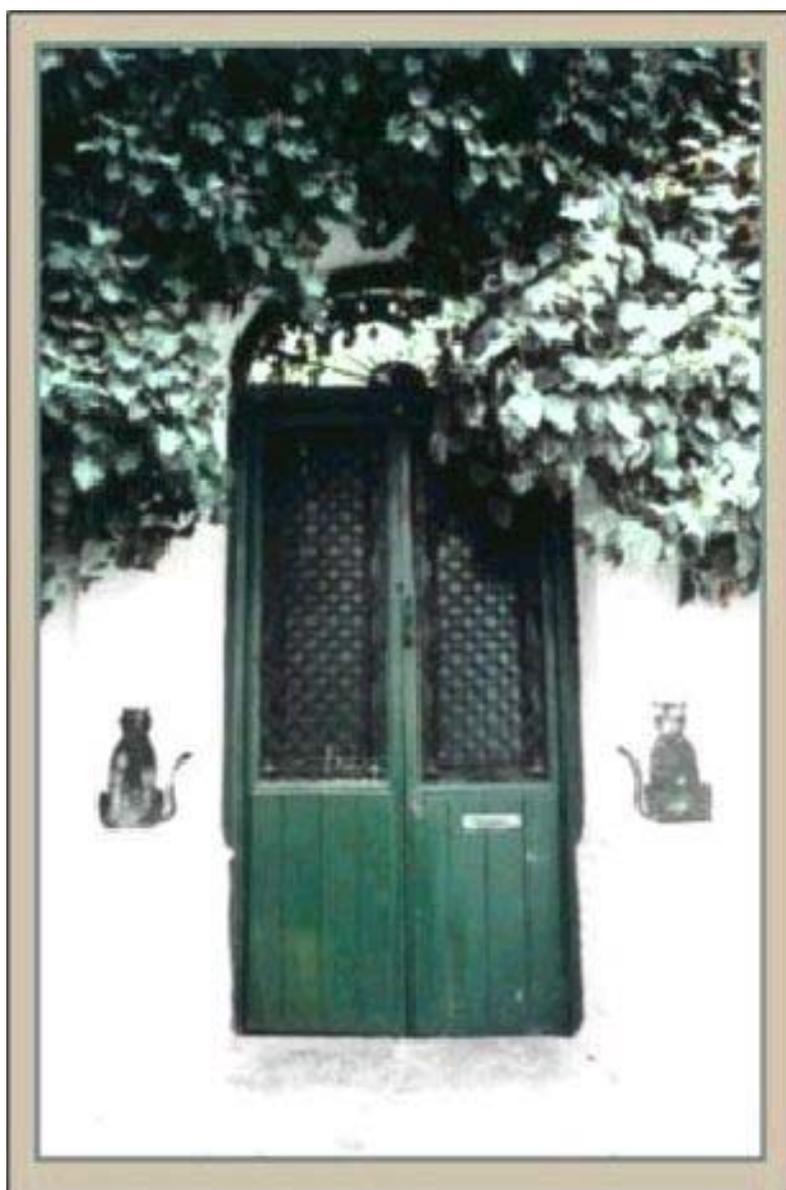
The contrast of sun and shade is extreme in this distinctive district, and many are the whitewashed walls which can blindingly reflect the sun at one moment only to turn dark as night the next. While, on the one hand, humans have declared the Albaicín a historical heritage on account of its cultural significance, we cats, on the other hand, valued our jungle-like labyrinth habitat for the never-ending shelters and escape routes provided us, although I, personally, was not immune to its inspiring influence either.

– 14 –

Before I leave the topic of my former neighborhood, I would like to cite a couple of examples of streets, not far from the one I thought of as mine, which were so called in honor of us cats.

There was one known as "Aljibe del Gato" (meaning Cistern of the Cat). This name dramatizes a legendary tragedy of a cat who fell into a well there and died. It is one of the most beautiful streets in the area and appropriately features two black cats painted on either side of the ivy-canopied door of a house.

"Calle del Gato" (Street of the Cat) is so labeled, rumor has it, because a shrewd old man 'got away with murder' and thereby gained the epithet 'cat' for his cleverness. Although this folkloric anecdote has no known basis in fact, its existence might be construed as an homage to us felines.

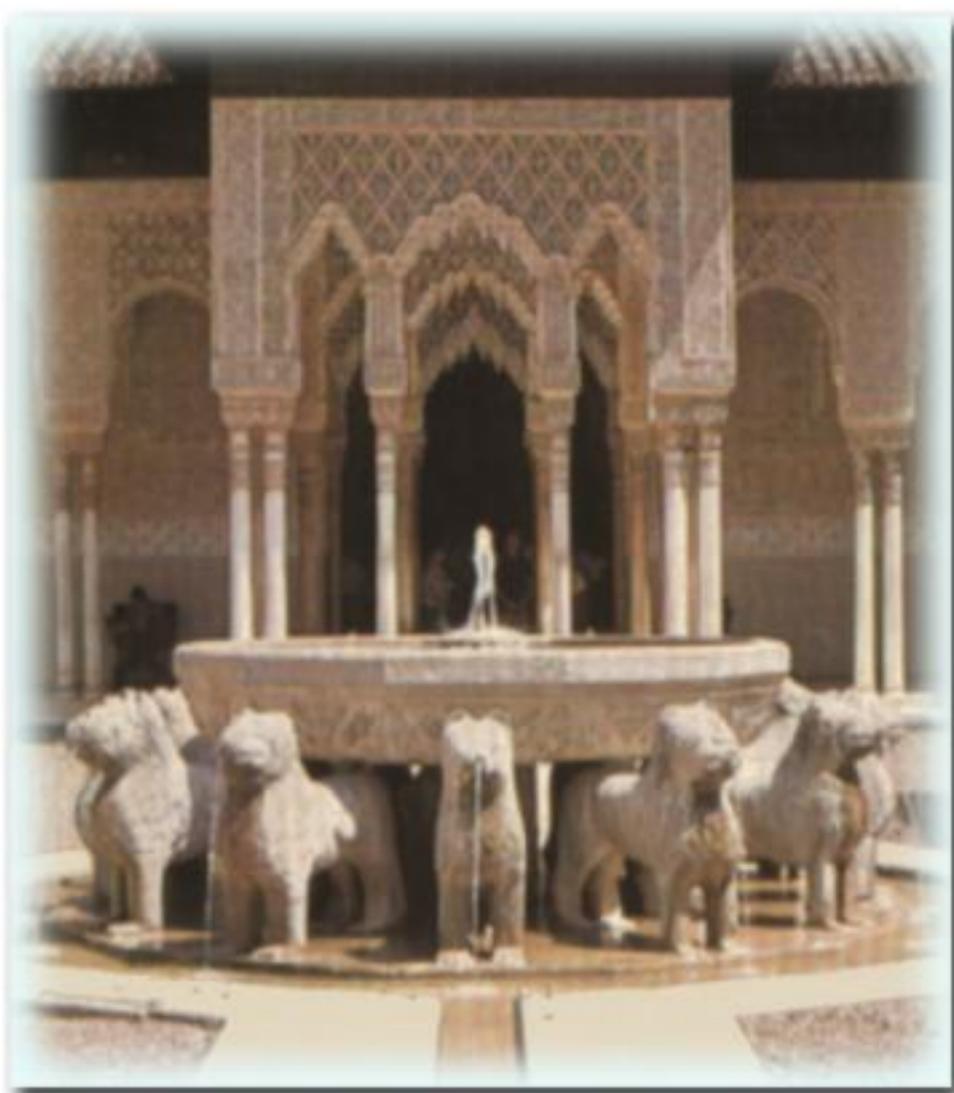


– 15 –

On the opposite hill, where rises the Alhambra Palace, is a street, called "Callejón del Perro", which could be considered the antithesis of the ones I have just described. A residence can actually be found there on the facade of which have been sculpted heads of dogs that are barking aggressively. This is indeed a frightening place

for cats, and the mere mention of it could always make any insolent Tom swallow his pride and the most mischievous kitten behave like a little angel.

But as an antidote to the dreaded spot just referred to, let it be known that the main attraction in the city of Granada is the Patio of the Lions in the Alhambra. Here stand twelve noble felines, each spouting water from its mouth, surrounding the basin of a lovely fountain, in an enchanting, fairy tale courtyard.



It is worth mentioning as well that the supreme artistic giant, Leonardo da Vinci, affirmed, "The smallest feline is a masterpiece." And anyone who still doubts our well-

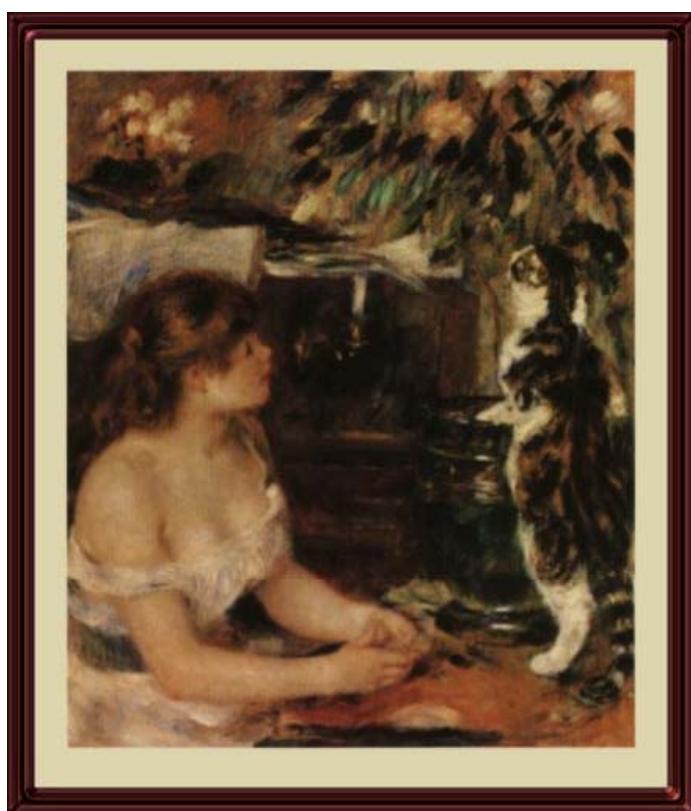
deserved world-renown has only to think of the ancient Egyptian civilization and its remaining monuments, the highlight of which is unarguably the sphinx. Suffice it to say that the feline's position of mythical stature, as king (or queen) of beasts, and as the figurative symbol of the pinnacle of culture persists unchallenged.



the Egyptians ... endowed goddesses with feline heads

Part IV

– 1 –



[Painting by Auguste Renoir]

From this time forward, my context was one of belonging. I might say that I began to enjoy novel feelings of security, pleasure, and, yes, happiness. I even started to purr, the involuntary sound of which—a softly vibrant erupting rumble—astonished me and evoked exclamations of delight from my lady, as she summoned the man to experience this new wonder.

And one day, during the execution of some complicated electrical operation by the man involving cables, I pounced in a playful manner, following the movement of the wires in jumps and leaps just like a cavorting kitten.

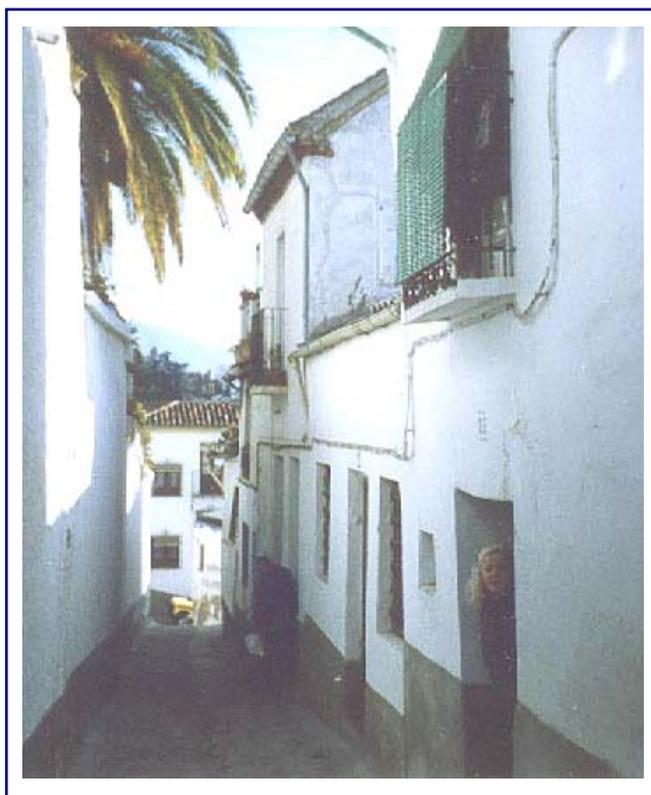
The surprised man and my lady, who came quickly, suspended all signs of labor for quite a while and simply played with me, slowly moving the cords to and fro

in snake-like fashion, as I danced about in mock capture. This was an entirely new game for me and one that would continue, developing into many different forms, for the years to come. These antics, plus my more and more frequent purrs, were certainly an expression of the carefree demeanor that was becoming an attribute of my evolving house-cat personality.

– 2 –

Let me briefly sketch out some landmarks in the backdrop against which, during those days, my drama was played.

I forgot to mention that there was a Japanese artist, with a pleasant temperament, who resided a few doors down. He owned a black Doberman, a thin morose animal, whose nasty disposition contrasted sharply with that of his



master. In his sly, stealthy stalking of us cats, he was really more of a menace to me than the German shepherd introduced earlier in my narrative.

I always believed that this dog had a somewhat psychopathic nature and would show himself to be a killer of cats, if given the opportunity. And yet, he was never tied

up, let alone locked up; indeed, the Doberman was permitted to freely roam the streets. When engaged in pursuit, he would accelerate to savage speeds and could lurch around corners in the blink of an eye—quite a formidable adversary was this animal, even for me.

It so happened that the old motorcycle, which had been my previous place of shelter, was chained to a barred window next to the Japanese artist's house. While I am on the subject of the motorcycle, it appears that this antique vehicle harked back to the days of World War II, or even the Spanish Civil War. Many were the sightseers who stopped to gawk and snap photos of it—especially those who made the harsh, guttural sounds I had heard in the house before the arrival of my lady and the man. This naturally was quite irritating to me, as it intruded on what little privacy I could then claim.

— 3 —

I'm not sure exactly when, but sometime after I had gained the official status of house-cat, a stray dog appeared on the scene and planted himself stubbornly in front of the door of the Japanese artist's house, barking furiously at anyone or anything that came his way.

As the dog was rather small, the Japanese artist, whose amiable attitude I have already noted, designated him Perro and tolerated his presence. So did the Doberman for some reason. This mind-set of charitableness, plus a minimum quantity of table scraps, caused Perro to attempt to take control of our street—that is, by assuming a

malevolent mien and pugnacious pose, to bar passage. He also set up a loud threatening noise, which increased to a frenzied uproar, if one neared him.

During this period of Perro's reign, many people avoided our street altogether, while some were obliged to return in the direction they had come. Other braver souls simply stood their ground and passed by, seemingly unafraid, amid the clamorous cacophony.

The man was to be numbered among the latter, recognizing instinctively that Perro's vicious bark was worse than his bite. But my lady found herself quite irrationally intimidated, which enabled Perro to seize the advantage and behave with the bearing of a bully whenever she went into the street. The problem escalated to the point that my lady had only to open the door for Perro to begin barking with all his might and try to scare her back inside.

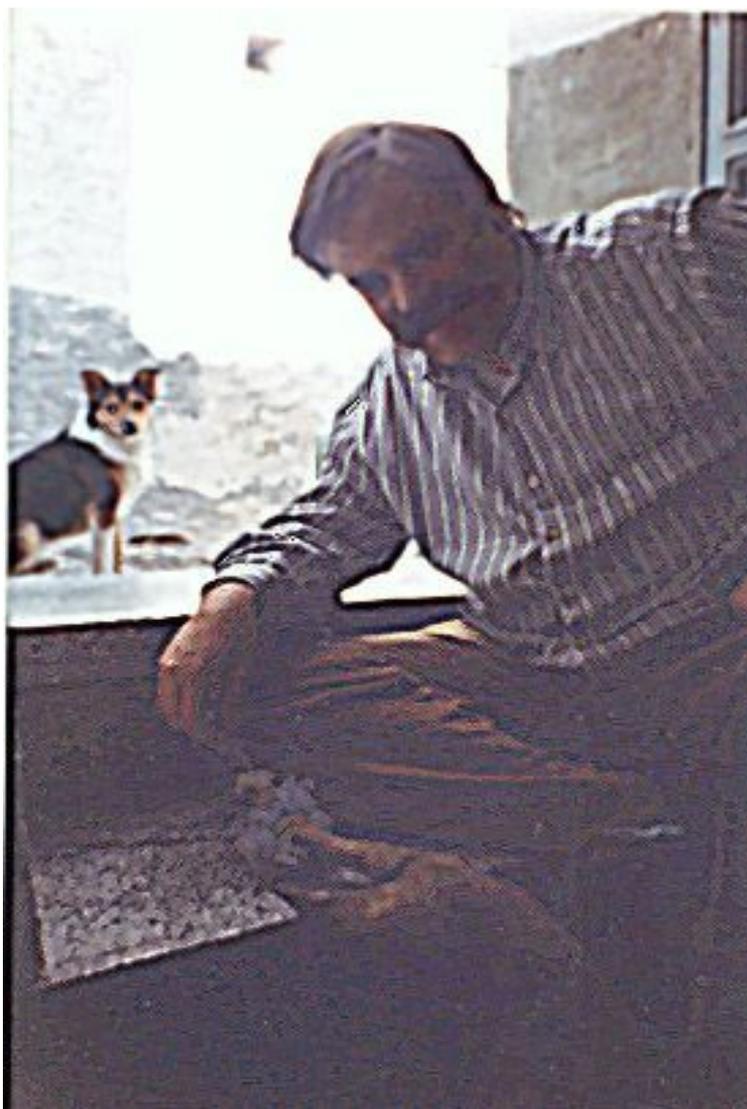
That was too much for me. I simply could not tolerate seeing my beloved lady treated in this fashion, and by a creature such as Perro who was just an ill-mannered, ugly-tempered stray. So one day, when my lady was being menaced by him, I strode into the street and positioned myself, in my most challenging stance, between Perro and my lady. My face bore its fiercest grimaces and my body posture clearly stated, 'Stay away, or else!'

This did the trick. Coward that he really was, Perro retreated and never again acted aggressively toward my lady, who was so impressed with my defense of her that she showered me with eulogistic accolades.

In truth, my lady was positively thrilled by my 'heroism', which came to assume nearly epic magnitude as my lady unstintingly extolled my exertions in her behalf over

and over, in more and more laudatory terms, each time embellishing them a bit. Nevertheless, all modesty aside, I did risk life and limb and put myself in harm's way when I saw my lady's safety in jeopardy. And I would have done it again in a minute, if the situation required.

Some time later, Perro must have repented of his former maliciousness and decided to try to befriend humanity, because he stopped being scrappy and became almost obsequious in a desperate effort to join our household. He haunted our door, begging my lady and the man to adopt him. I must admit that his evident envy of my happy home-life was quite touching, but I never would have consented to living under



Perro ... always on the outside, looking in
[The man is playing with me]

the same roof with the former enemy of my lady. I'm not sure how Perro's story ended, but he was apparently destined to be always on the outside, looking in. Finally, he disappeared from our vicinity.

– 4 –

My lady and the man possessed the rare capacity of being able to see beyond the usual movie stereotype presented of cats. They recognized our true nature – that of nearly all living creatures, we are the most sincere.

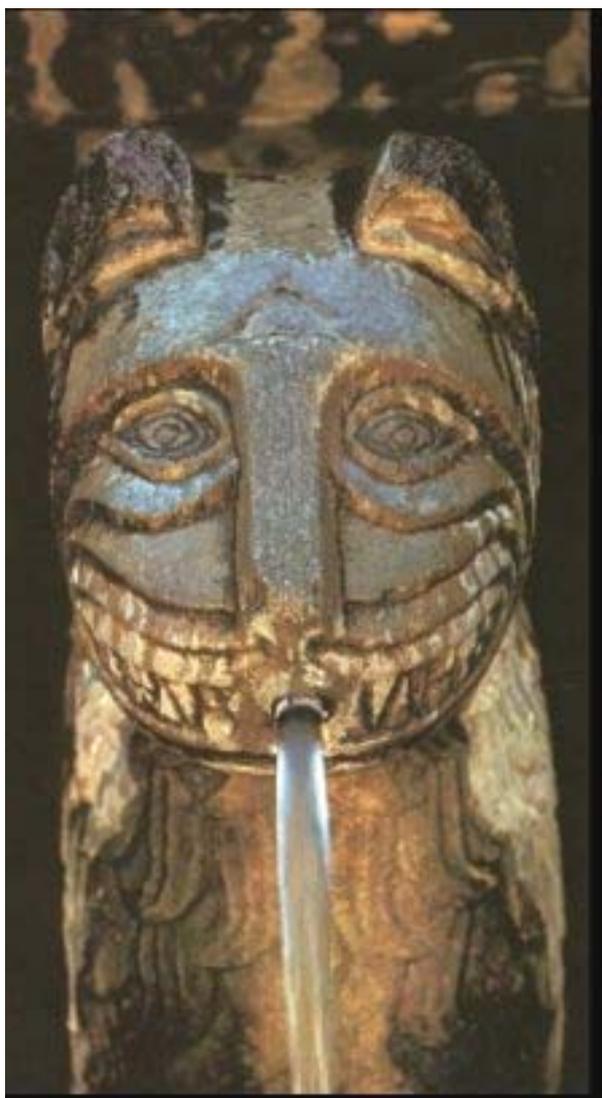
To honor this commendable character trait, shared by all but a few of us cats, they cherished their own singular saying, which, I feel, should be elevated to the level of a proverb. The expression they invented (at least I think it was they) was, "Cats don't lie." And they were fond of repeating this phrase whenever the occasion called for it.

Their favorite video sequences on television were those involving animals, in particular, with cats as protagonists, and one could hear them chuckling (she) and chortling (he) with glee, meanwhile commenting on the superiority of the ability of a cat to amuse and entertain by simply being him or herself. These conversations would be spiced with their expression about our lack of mendacity.

And since I am complimenting the insight of my lady and the man, let me add that their fury knew no bounds when they saw an animal – any animal! – being mistreated or even dealt with in a degrading manner. They would always speak out in defense of us and denounce all intrusions on our natural heritage. The fact is, my lady and the man would invariably turn against even members of their own species who behaved with insensitivity – not to mention cruelty – toward any creature great or small. They often went so far as to judge the merits of a person on the basis of whether

or not he or she had a liking for cats. If the human race were peopled with more of their kind, the world would surely be a different place!

– 5 –



[Alhambra lion] ...spouting water
from its mouth

There was, however, a difference in the way the man and my lady reacted to seeing us hunt for ourselves and our young. Although my lady admired the elegant style of all felines, she could not watch any animal capture and kill another. If viewing a documentary, she would turn the channel or leave the room when the first slinking strides occurred. She seemed to identify and empathize with our prey, rather than with us. But this trait in her I have described before.

The man was able to come to grips with—to incorporate, appreciate, and accept—this essential aspect of our

natural existence. He could relish its skill, when looking at one of the great felines in the wild stalking, pursuing, in general outwitting and outrunning what was to become

its meal. He had a lot of respect for our legendary speed, agility, and gracefulness, and recognized that felines were hunters and that was that.

But not my lady, she could never reconcile herself to these basic laws of nature. And yet, despite the fact that I certainly couldn't espouse her point of view, somehow this shortcoming endeared her all the more to me.

In truth, from my present state, in which I have momentarily merged with the universe, I can better grasp my lady's sense of compassion that caused her to suffer the pain of every living creature. After all, perceptions change, our senses can purify, and perhaps things will be different for me the next time around. But what seems immutable—impervious to winds of impermanence—is that, while alive, I grew to adore my lady and cannot imagine ever feeling otherwise. To me, she was, and always will be, sublime.

— 6 —

But I must leave this lofty plane in order to continue recounting my mundane yarn, which may, after all, contain that glimpse of truth which, I believe, everyone is inadvertently seeking. Elevating, awe inspiring, my tale is not (awful rather, for the most part) but if one finds a sigh, a smile, a moment of vision, then maybe my lady's efforts and mine in relating this chronicle (which is not coming out chronologically) will not have been in vain.

Thus far I have mainly praised my domesticated circumstances, but there were also indignities to which I was exposed, almost never by my lady, occasionally by the man, but more often by other people who entered the house.

In one infamous instance, I was presented with an aberration of nature for inspection—that is, a freakish creature was thrust in my face—which moved as though alive, but resembled no animal, human or otherwise, I had ever seen.

Though normally intrepid, I was quite taken aback by this bizarre being, which sentiment found expression in my eyes and bewildered responses of aggressive defense. This monstrosity, as I later discovered, was called a hand puppet. But it was their laughter that dismayed and humiliated me the most. The hilarity of the young woman who manipulated it, even the guffaws of the man I could stomach, but when my lady burst out in irrepressible mirth and merriment, with giggles that persisted in echoing crescendos for a long time later, I, in my refined state of cultivation, felt betrayed beyond belief. To receive pleasure through my discomfiture was an offense practically unpardonable, though in the end, I, of course, forgave them.

— 7 —

I have to admit that my growing healthy youngsters could have been slightly vexing to those with only a person's perceptions, although I certainly had to tolerate my share of human foibles, too. For example, one day, while practicing darting wildly here and there (important exercises, I might add), my kittens managed to knock over

and break a huge potted plant. For some reason, this upset my lady considerably, which I still regard as an over-reaction on her part.

Another nearly insufferable incident occurred when someone who was reputed to have phobic reactions to small animals (since when are cats considered small?!) was permitted to enter my home. Actually, at that time my kittens were in their stage of exploration and were roving about the upstairs of the house.

On catching sight of me and especially my youngsters, this woman proceeded to shriek like a banshee, in absolute hysteria, which nearly frightened us all to death. If she was terrified, my little ones and I were all the more thrown into a state of shock, for what on earth had we done to deserve such appalling, repellent responses? My kittens, after all, were utterly charming.

But what particularly galled me was that instead of being ejected from our dwelling, as her screaming fits certainly merited, this young woman's rights were apparently being defended over ours. Nevertheless, all things pass, and at length this incomparably disagreeable happening came to an end.

Still, I have often wondered what lasting effects could have remained in my impressionable toddlers' hearts, from their traumatic exposure to such an extreme personality disorder. At their tender ages, such events leave traces, perhaps altering the delicate development of little personalities for life (or so the theory goes). This I was never to know. But enough of exasperating episodes.

– 8 –

Having undertaken the task of telling my story, from which I have deigned to digress undoubtedly overmuch, let us proceed to speak of an inordinately troublesome aspect of the Albaicín, which, directly or indirectly, precipitated what I prefer to designate the forced flight. This latter event, by the way, triggered terrors more intense than any I had ever encountered, due to my helplessness and the unexpectedness of the experience.

But to return to the matter at hand, I here refer to the absolute sovereignty of the thieves in our area.

It was common knowledge among most of the residents in our hillside neighborhood that the robbers had made secret maps (for their own use) of all the streets, on which they charted the daily habits and activities of the unwitting inhabitants, so as to find out with precision the optimum moment to enter any dwelling without being discovered. They also put specially coded marks, lines, and crosses on the walls and doors of our abodes, in order to alert one another to distinguishing characteristics and other items of information, to which they alone were privy, of particular importance to their excursions. Additionally, muggings were constant occurrences. Indeed, the man was attacked – accosted with a knife – nearly in front of our house, on the night before Christmas Eve one year.

Very few domiciles, excluding the luxurious ones with sophisticated modes of detection, escaped incursions, often again and again, by the numerous burglars, who

specialized in stealthy raids and survived on the stolen goods. In the Albaicín, the robbers reigned supreme, ruling with gloved hand (so to speak). Their dominion was



virtually undefied by any authority, though hopefully that lamentable lack of protection, leading to such a deplorable state of affairs, has changed somewhat since I lived there. My lady and the man found themselves feeling fed up with that robbers' haven, there seeming to be no way, in the locality of the Albaicín, for them to hold on to the few meager possessions they valued.

Among the various and sundry occupants of this quarter was one exasperated victim who put a sign on his front door with a message that said, in effect, 'Please' (I think he even said that!) 'don't break my door again. If you want something just knock and ask. It will be given to you.' Thus, you can see the

extremes to which some desperate dwellers were driven, in this case simply to keep their doors in repair. For, as often happens, it was the houses of the poor that were broken into most frequently.

– 9 –

My lady and the man had installed burglar bars completely covering the upstairs balcony, after an adroit robber had entered one hot summer afternoon (while my lady was napping down-



My lady and the man had installed burglar bars

stairs!) and stolen all her jewelry. It was not that my lady had been possessed of diamonds, rubies, or emeralds, but she had collected, during the years before relocating almost half way around the world in Spain, several special boxes of necklaces, rings, earrings, and countless other keepsakes, given as gifts or carefully selected, and (to her) priceless mementos of incalculable sentimental value, including some of worldly worth as well. The burglarized items also consisted of the man's wedding ring, which had needed resizing, some large strands of amethyst beads, and other memorabilia of former times, too numerous to mention. In fact, the only jewels remaining to her were the thin gold wedding band and a pair of bead earrings which she had been wearing that day.

My lady is definitely not a materialist. Nevertheless, these irreplaceable losses had depressed her for a rather long period and unhappily not one item was ever recovered. (The police had proved totally unhelpful.) I myself felt very fortunate that

no harm had come to my lady, since, being in the house, she might have been assaulted or stabbed (perish the thought!), and it was she who was the dearest treasure to me.

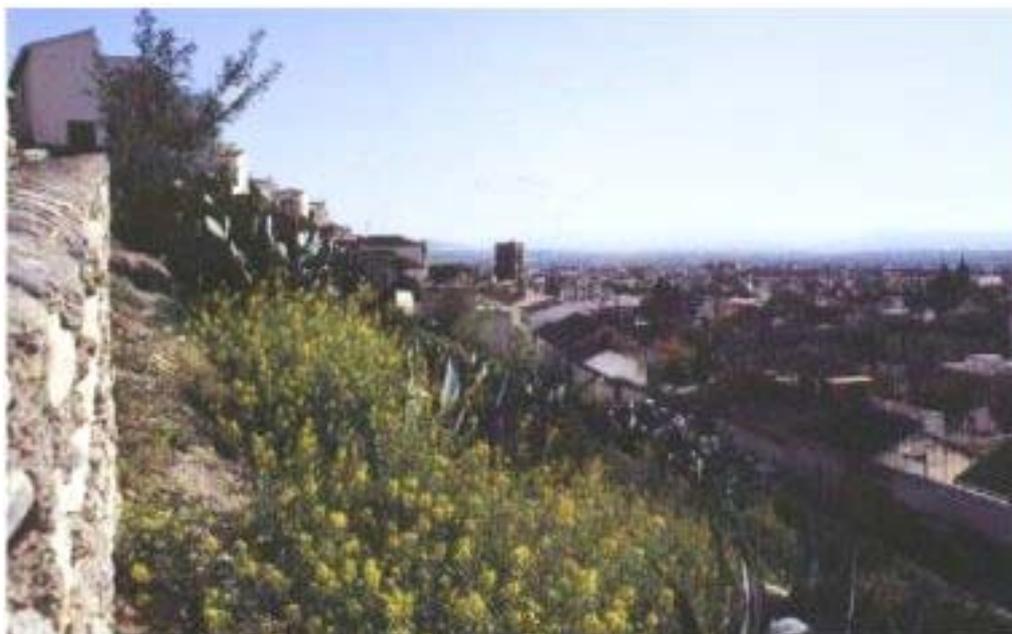
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In the aftermath, the iron grating mentioned above had been cemented across the balcony, and then they both had been able to rest easier. But as my lady and the man were later to discover with dismay, this simply served as a temporary impediment to the shameless thieves in the Albaicín (who, as often as not, would even stoop to stealing food from the refrigerators of old ladies). These housebreakers began loosening the lock on the front door—my unsuspecting lady and the man thought only that it was getting old—and one day succeeded in unscrewing it off, leaving only a hole where the lock had been.

This time I was the one in the house. On the entry of these brazen lawbreakers, who had not the slightest concern for my presence, I bolted, in alarm, out of what now seemed to be the house of the robbers. I tore up the street to a lookout point where I could seclude myself in tall weeds and wild grass.

When my lady and the man returned, as I was informed later, their major worry (bless their souls!) was over my whereabouts. My lady, in desperation, ran around the house frantically calling my name. But it was the man who spied me first. I, in my horror and panic over the invasion of my first real home, was by now frenziedly chomping away on the vegetation in my hideout. Believe it or not, my emotions had so reverted to their former state that, in my fright and insecurity, I let the welcome

arms of the man pick me up and carry me back home. My lady was beside herself with relief and joy over my reappearance and would not let me out of her sight for the rest of the day.



To their everlasting credit, my lady and the man were much more perturbed about my absence and possible loss than that of a new watch of hers, a compact disc player, and other items that had been pilfered.

– 11 –

Little did I know that I was soon to say goodbye to the region of the Albaicín, whose familiar ambience had been my world, and had offered, up to very recently, the only sense of safety and security I was heir to. But before I depart from it in my narrative I would like to speak of one of its major deficiencies, which was an extreme

dearth of trees. There were, as I have stated, an abundance of walls and dovetailing rooftops to ascend and descend, but these were not the same as trees.

I must admit to having twinges of regret that—in what could otherwise be considered the longest, fullest possible earthly span—I never climbed a single tree. In none of my remembered 'nine lives', cultivated or otherwise, have I experienced the elation of scaling a tall (or short, for that matter) tree. I went from the Albaicín to a third floor apartment, around the corner from Granada's city hall, where the only climbing feasible, within my new, more circumscribed spatial reference points, was up the stairs to the terrace and perhaps higher up an adjacent roof, though nothing like what I had done before.

There is reputed to be an Aesop fable, which has evolved to become a folktale motif, even finding its way into the writings of the Grimm Brothers, about the cat's deftness at tree-climbing. Sometimes found under the headings of 'the cat's only trick' or 'the cat and the fox', it tells a tale of a fox remarking to a cat that whatever danger might impend, he could save himself by means of one hundred tricks. The cat responded that she (many people call all of us 'she') would use only one. At that moment they were attacked by a pack of hounds. While the fox tried each of his stratagems, the cat darted up a tree, and the fox was finally caught. Thus, this feline predisposition won out even over an animal considered invincible in its cunning.

– 12 –

I can no longer delay relating my relocation across town, the reconstruction of which in my memory still has the disquieting potential to make me shudder.

It began with unsettling signs of inevitable departure. Boxes were packed with household items, and pieces of furniture vanished from sight. My apprehension of impending doom mounted. These ominous omens had always preceded my prior abandonments, and I could not help being filled with dread. I had believed things would be different this time, but everything appeared to be happening as before.

I tried to brace myself for the coming horror, but I was not able to muster any emotional defenses to suppress my pangs of anxiety. I had come to love and depend on these people and simply could not bear the thought of another painful rejection.

My meows, which became more frequent, were charged with my heart-felt pleas that I not be left all alone again to fend for myself in a world that now seemed much colder and more hostile.

My lady stroked me, spoke in sweet tones to me—and yet, no matter how engaging were her vocal inflections, I could not convince myself that all would be well. Never before had there ever been a human being that I could genuinely trust.

Day after day, more furniture was hauled away—couches, chairs, the stove and refrigerator, even the bed disappeared—until there was nothing left except my pitiful place to eat, spread with newspaper, and my litter box. As my lady and the man went through the door with the last load, I realized that I had really been left behind. Gloom

overwhelmed me, as I sunk into the deepest depression I had ever known. In spiritless dejection, I mournfully faced the truth. My lady had abandoned me and broken my heart.



[*Young Girl Weaving a Garland*, painting by A. Dürer]

— 13 —

Completely devastated, I tried to make myself as small as possible and curled up in a corner, of the now empty kitchen, near the newspaper with my food. I was so forlorn I couldn't even fall asleep.

Then, after what seemed an eternity of wretchedness, I heard the usual sounds of the door opening and they returned, calling my name, 'Mama-cat, Mama-cat'. The man had brought a large cardboard box.

But now occurred the most harrowing journey of my life—across Granada—away from my territory, my only actual stability up to the present. As I said previously, at that moment, my terror was greater than ever before or since.

In the darkness of the box, I felt myself being transported who knew where. I screamed out my panic, alternated with shrill cries of distress, and frenetically tried to escape. The only thing that saved me from expiring on the spot from fright—which even caused me to relieve myself in the box—was the ceaseless sound, sturdy and staunch, of my lady's voice, gently yet firmly murmuring that she was there and aware of my misery.

When at last we arrived at our destination and I was let out, wonder of wonders awaited me! There were my familiar furnishings, my food, my litter box, most importantly, my lady and the man!

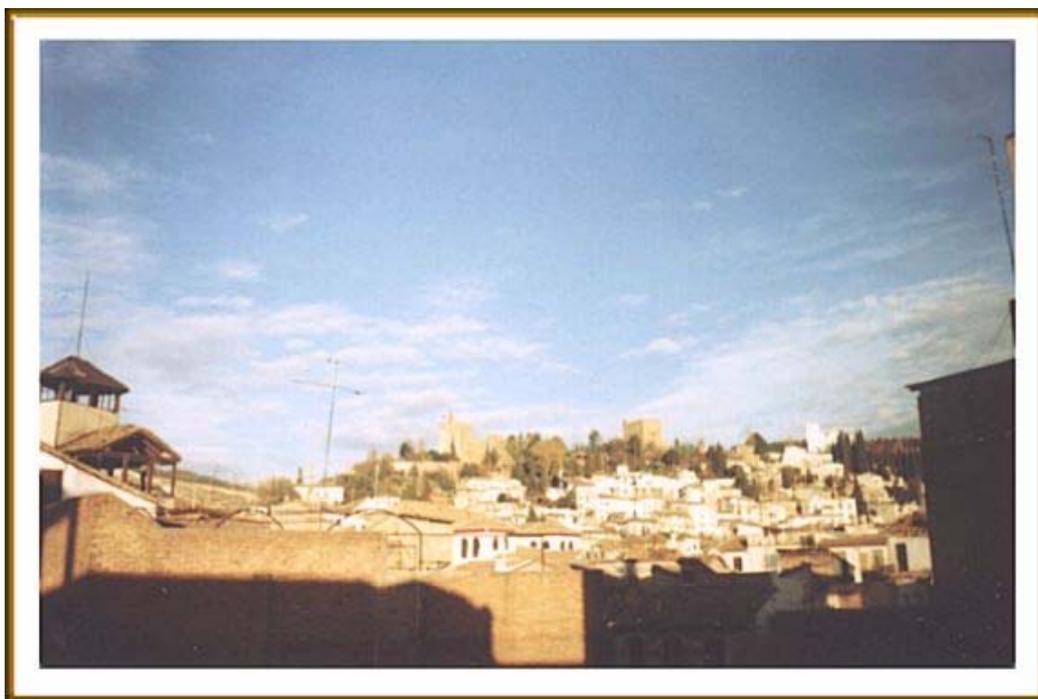
I began to purr immediately and incessantly, perhaps for the longest time in my life—a purring that emanated from deep inside. I had survived the most agonizing ordeal imaginable. I had not been abandoned again! In truth, I was made to feel important, wanted, cared for, loved. Never could I have envisioned such an exalted state of existence to be possible for me. My destiny had definitely changed for the better.

This shift in my circumstances brought to a close the climactic ups and downs of my earthly passage. As I was to discover, my street-cat days were permanently over.

Now commenced what I regarded as a glorious state of retirement, in which I occupied the prime position in our household. An atmosphere of calm reigned in my new location, though looming ahead were the final universal afflictions, still to be suffered—old age, sickness, and death.

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As luck would have it, my lady and the man had chanced upon a third floor apartment, as noted before, in an old building just around the corner from city hall square. From the front window of this flat,



there was an even better view of the Alhambra, especially the Tower of the Nightwatch, or Candle (*Torre de la Vela*), that is, until a newly constructed building blocked it. But from the terrace, one story

above, the view was, and continued to be, spectacular-on the left, the Cathedral; straight ahead, the Alhambra, which was lit up at night; and to the right, a panorama of the Sierra Nevada mountains, in all their snow-capped pride. Completing this near picture postcard were layers of the quaint tile roofs that are so characteristic of Old World towns.

My lady and I established a pattern of ascending the stairs to the terrace together at least once a day. Here she would hang the laundry out to dry, or simply sit and brood over the ages-old cultural landscape, intoning her mystic phrase, while I explored adjacent rooftops, returning to my lady's side now and again to be stroked. In this way, we spent many memorable private moments together, my lady and I-before the advent of new neighbors across from us-in times of peace and happiness, as well as in times of great sorrow.

Our terrace was also visited by numerous birds. There were the ever-present pigeons, sparrows, and perhaps other small species that nested nearby. My lady was fond of feeding bits of bread to these various creatures, and I always sampled, indeed ate, the best mouthfuls, even though I no longer would have so much as licked a morsel of bread, had it been offered to me inside my home. I suppose that having once been a street cat for such a long time, there was a remaining reflex carried over from those days. Thus, I found myself gobbling up any edible substance that appeared outside, so that no one else would get it, I have to admit, and because I was still plagued by visceral memories of the perpetual hunger pangs I had

suffered in my past years of deprivation. Old habits, it seems, die hard.

Strange it is and rather humiliating to recall these lapses into debasement on my part. Thankfully, my lady neither judged nor censored whatever involuntary impulses impelled me. In fact, her tone of voice, as I munched away, bespoke affection, although mixed with amusement.

The birds, of course, never appeared for their meal, left over from my nibbling, until we had descended from the terrace, except, that is, where my lady had flung the bread to the lower rooftops which were inaccessible to me.

– 15 –

In addition, scarcely had we begun to settle into our new domicile, when variations on our domestic rituals started to emerge—a favorite of mine being our mealtime routine. My regular seat was on an arm of the sofa—there was a large one and a smaller couch—next to my lady, between her and the man, where I was at eye-level with the table and could inspect the various dishes. I would observe, as they ate, how they placed tidbits of the most appetizing foods on a Styrofoam tray, in preparation for my treat afterward. When my lady rose from the table, this was my cue to go to the kitchen and

receive my snack. Sometimes there were false starts, and I would have to reposition myself.



[*The Last Supper* (1618) by Sánchez Cotán, in Granada's Carthusian monastery]

In cold weather, as previously stated, I would poise, in precarious rest, on the supporting bars of the table, which was covered with the winter cloth-blanket, over the heater, with my tail dangling down. As soon as my lady took her place, I would glide smoothly onto her lap.



...the real action under the table
[Detail of Cotán's *The Last Supper*].

It was around this time as well that my daily brushings commenced. I now had special brushes of my own, and the sensation of the soft bristles gently scratching through my fur came to be extremely pleasing to me. Whether this activity was engaged in by my lady or the man (each had a distinct style), I looked forward to my grooming sessions, which often evolved into play periods. The brushings also benefited me, as was their purpose, since a great deal of hair would be shed onto the brush, instead of by means of my tongue.

These and other family ceremonies punctuated our tranquil days and nights—truly so serene that I can recall very few highlights worthy of special attention in my narrative, which is drawing to a close.

— 16 —

Let me conclude my story with the occurrences and domestic details which assumed singular importance to me, and which I feel deserve to be enumerated.

The normal intervals of sleep were twice daily, the mid-afternoon nap following lunch usually being short. The man went to bed, while my lady stretched out on the sofa, dozing to the drone of the television. Occasionally, I drowsed off into fitful slumber in an isolated room, only to find myself trapped in a nightmare trance of



[painting by Marc Chagall, 1887-1985]

having been forever abandoned. The heart-rending cries, as my lady described them, that issued from me in those instances always roused her. She would call me again and again, till her voice located me and I awoke from this shaky dream state and came to join her. Then once more I would be on the solid ground of her caring.

Each night, at bedtime, my lady again summoned me. In winter months, I would squiggle under the covers to snuggle next to her body, while, in warmer seasons, I would recline on the pillow just above her head.

Another pleasure I indulged in repeatedly was a simulated nursing and kneading with my paws, claws extended (the latter of which presented a problem for my lady), on certain of her clothes. This was a massaging type of movement, similar to playing a pedal organ. Though there are those who would attach a Freudian interpretation to these regressed impulses of mine, for me the sole significance of these motions lay in the sheer ecstasy this experience provided.

My favorite materials were soft sweaters, blankets, and a thick terry cloth robe, whose loopy weave was almost completely destroyed by my sucking and plucking it. I would become absorbed in this activity, as long as permitted, during which my ears lay flat against my head, my tail extended rigidly, and my eyes assumed a soft, dewy cast and a blissful look of rapture, so I have been told.

The most upsetting incident, following our move, that comes to mind was when I was chased away from my own building, after which the street door was closed,

barring my re-entry. I almost got 'lost'! The experience served as a stark reminder of my humble origins and desperate days before being adopted, and is indelibly etched in my recollections.

I was compelled to realize once again that others did not perceive me with the eyes of my lady and the man. You see, I was not able to wear a collar, due to the long scar on my neck which would open or become inflamed if chafed. Thus, there was no identification tag or insignia defining me as a member of a household.

To people who spotted me outside of my domestic context, I was nothing but a nuisance, an intruder, or what is thought of as the basest sort of alley cat. The episode I will now relate dramatically brought home to me the extremity of the perceptual gulf between those in my family and those who were not.

One evening, when I was feeling a bit bored and claustrophobic, I wandered all the way to the ground floor of our apartment, in order to explore the surroundings a bit. After a short while, just as I was about to return, a man I had never seen before, with a ne'er-do-well look and manner, walked up to our building and went inside. Giving me a perfunctory glance of contempt, he made irritating noises of 'psst' repeatedly, after which he shooed me away, shutting the entrance door behind him.

This was indeed a terrible moment, for which I was totally unprepared. Night was descending, and I found myself in a plaza, the likes of which I had hitherto never encountered in my life. Here people crossed back and forth, and police stood guard outside a formal-looking edifice, which I later heard referred to as the town hall in Plaza del Carmen. I had somehow ventured into hostile territory and I knew it.

I dared not roam too far from the scene, so I was reduced to dashing here and there, in search of a hiding place or any familiar spot. Desperation ruled my movements, and I began to slink in my former marginated fashion, trying to dodge the strangers who paid me only cursory attention. Once again I was flooded with the awful memories of my unhappy street days, with the degradation and stigma attached to being a homeless stray. I had been down that road and most decidedly did not want to travel it again.

At long, long last, I heard the ever so dear cry, loud and plaintive, of 'Mama-cat, Mama-cat, where's my Mama-cat?!' Needless to say, I came running to my lady's call! I was saved from the catastrophe of being shunned, safe and sound in my precious lady's love, restored to my now rightful role of family member into which she instantly reinstated me. Never again, was I to descend to the depths of the ground level – either figuratively or literally – where I might encounter whatever cold, callous specimens of humanity happened to be passing by. From then on, I stayed put in my own apartment, only ascending to the terrace, which at that time we did not have to share with anyone else.

– 18 –

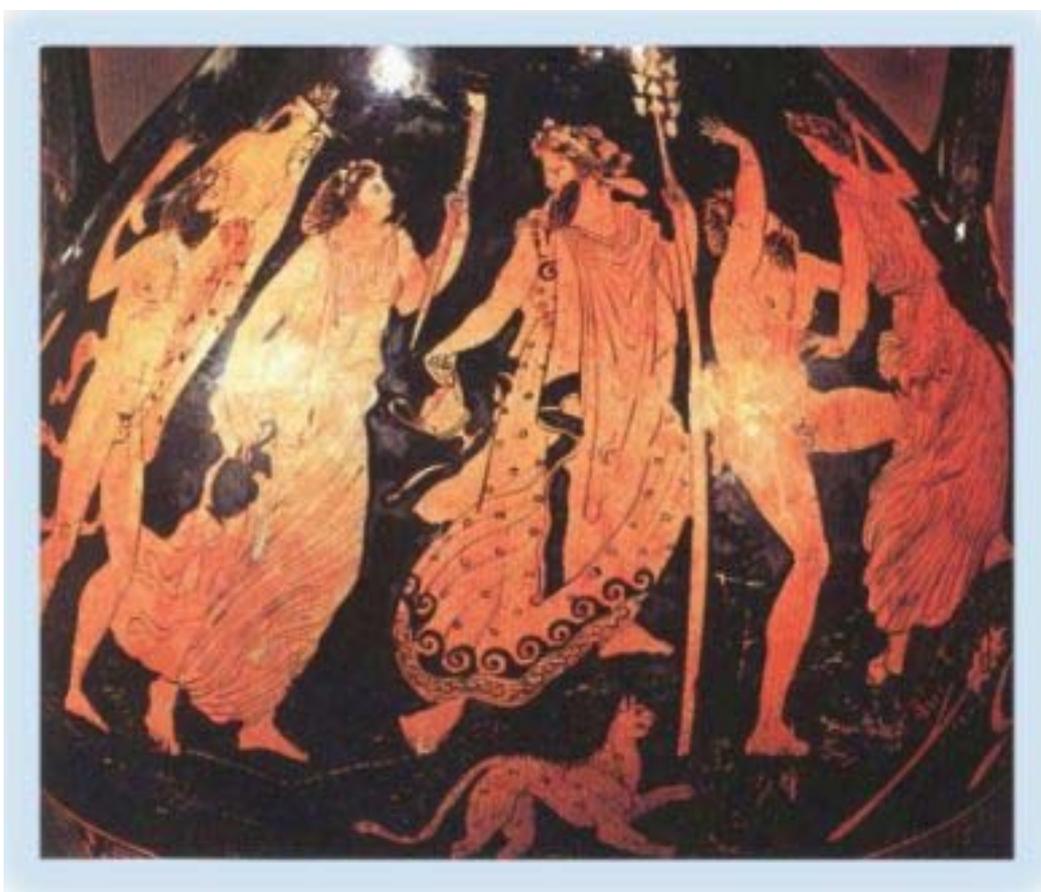
As a sort of coda to my chronicle, I would like to recount an occurrence which illustrated a more benevolent side of human beings.

I have already mentioned that the lot across from ours had been vacant when we moved in. All manner of shrubbery and rubbish filled this space, which had been fenced behind a high metal enclosure. From our front balcony, we could look down

into what had been adapted as a makeshift shelter by a number of the neighborhood cats, since people could not access it.

My lady, the man, and I (in my own manner) enjoyed watching these various felines. Encouraging messages would be called out to the cats below and chicken bones tossed over the wall to them, when no one was in the street.

The day came when there were indications that construction would begin in the future. As was customary, first arrived the archaeologists, who had priority over the area for three months or so. Daily they chipped and picked away at the ground, unearthing rock formations that might have been parts of interior structures of former cultures.



[Greek ceramic]

The man was, at that time, reluctant to continue flinging food to the local cats, who continued to appear nightly. For, as he explained to the lady, the bones, neatly cleaned by the cats by morning, might confound or confuse the archaeological excavations, in which the man was particularly interested. In other words, these mundane remnants could be mistaken for Moorish or Roman remains. So my lady and he more or less relinquished their custom of throwing things to the cats, though now and again they could not resist tossing bits and pieces of something edible to these creatures who often gazed up hopefully, expectantly, waiting for food to rain down on them from above.

But these showers of blessings had to stop abruptly when the archaeologists, having discovered nothing they considered extraordinary, packed up and left.

Then the laborers arrived, with their huge building machines and horrible noise makers, to begin the pounding, banging, jackhammering, and buzz sawing we had to endure for about a year thereafter.

But in the meantime, a mother cat had found a rocky tunnel in this lot, into which she had moved her feline family of four or five kittens. (My memory is a bit blurry as to the precise number.) When the jackhammering began, the workmen discovered this litter of kittens, hiding in the midst of the horrible racket, virtually frightened out of their wits.

The mother cat's ingenuity, as to how to solve this life-threatening dilemma, seemed to have failed her. At night she returned to her babies, only to be driven away by the machines early in the morning.

I must admit to having been quite impressed at the sequence of events that followed. My lady, the man, and I were witness to the rescue of this feline family, which occupied half a day of the construction workers' schedule.

I wanted to tell the desperate kittens that while it seemed the height of cruelty for them to be driven from their natal home with piped blasts of air and boards—these were the methods used, all less drastic ones having failed—and, further, to be carried out by the tail when they tried to return, I could observe from my balcony that these were acts of compassionate providence, designed to save the little ones from the destiny of being crushed to death as their tunnel shelter collapsed. But they were too young and panic-stricken to understand, and I was too high up to try to explain. Besides, they weren't my kittens anyway. When it was over, my lady applauded the men and shouted, 'Bravo!'.

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On that optimistic note, it seems appropriate to wind up my tale (no pun intended). I sincerely hope that I have not over-taxed anyone's patience and endurance in having undertaken and pressed on with the task of recording the reminiscences of such a one as I, the confessions of whom are, no doubt, considered triviality of the highest order by the majority of sentient beings.

Having run that risk, however, there is nothing left to say, except that I wish it to be borne in mind that being no more than a lowly feline creature, I have done the best I could with my limited talents, abilities, and resources to ramble through the

vicissitudes of my humble existence, without becoming utterly boring. Naturally, none of this labor would have been possible without the guiding pen of my lady and some help from the man.

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So I bid this world a fond farewell, with a few parting thoughts and a last remembrance or two of things past.

Thanks to the great love, magnanimity, and encompassing compassion of my lady—she insists such high praise is excessive—and the beneficence of her and the man, I was able to live out the last of my life in peace, security, and grace.

In the final month before my passing, I found a small uncooked flounder (also



[*Woman Fishmonger* (1713), by Willem van Mieris]

known as sole) under a counter on the kitchen floor, apparently dropped during the preparation of the evening meal. Instead of eating it on the spot, as I would have done in former times, I carefully placed the whole fish beneath the dining room table, where my lady, the man, and I always partook of our repasts— mine often being hand-fed dainties in these latter days. My unconscious intention, I suppose, was to express, through this offering, my profound gratitude for the good life I had been blessed with.

– 21 –

If there is any impression I would wish my autobiography to engender, with those readers who have remained throughout, it may be that there are deep dimensions of love (and spheres of its opposites) which resonate eternally— bonds of connectedness that even death cannot destroy.

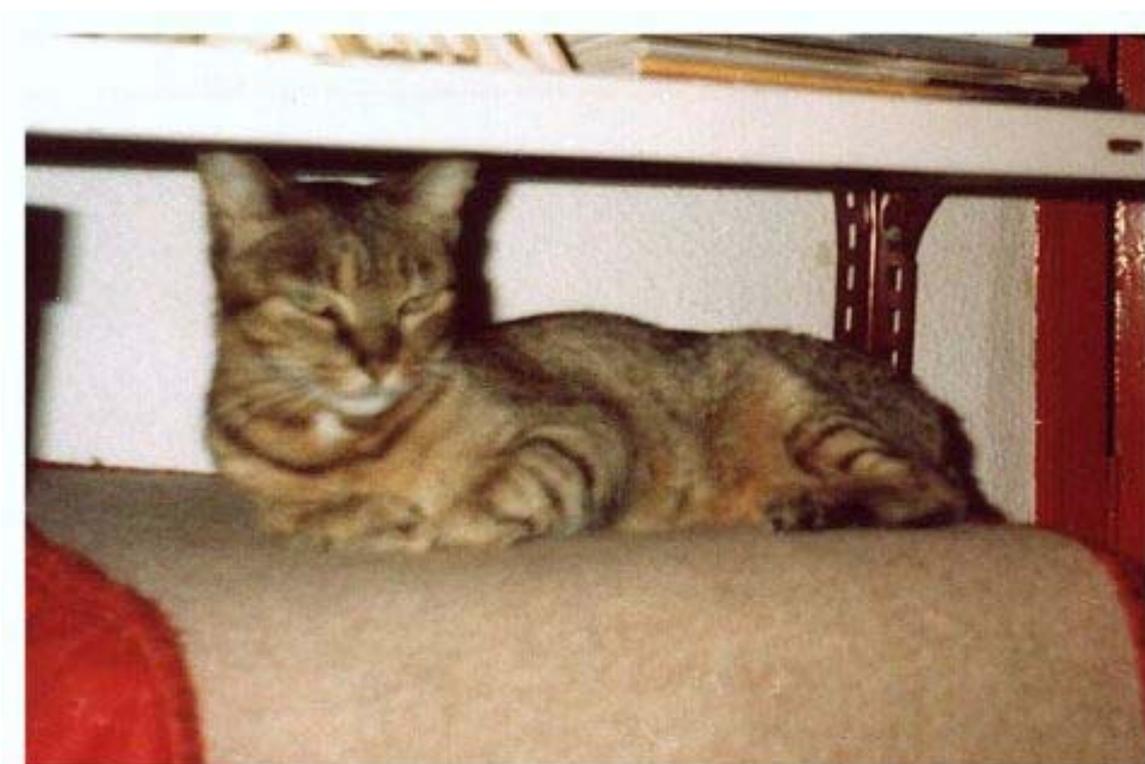
As my days dwindled down, my life force diminished. Seeking solace, in the ultimate weeks of my existence, for the one and only time, I stepped onto my lady's table, where she cherished her books of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, and lay down directly in front of what she calls the Gohonzon, which is enshrined because of its special significance for her. My lady likes to focus on this mandala of the Mystic Law—Nam-myoho-renge-kyo— when she chants that phrase.

She was astonished, astounded, amazed. My lady felt that I was striving toward enlightenment through that cause. She has said that those with faith, who practice, or voice, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo can enter the vast ocean of Buddhahood

within—that perhaps I, too, will attain this state in the future. I believe my lady. I hope I do.

— 22 —

At last I became too weak to climb to my lady's lap. So I rested atop her literary file, specially cushioned for me with a soft carpet, close to where she sounded the phrase that seemed to release me from my anguish. I drifted off to the reverberating tones. I could feel that my lady was chanting for me.



And the waves of life and death roll on, as they have for thousands of years and shall for thousands more ...

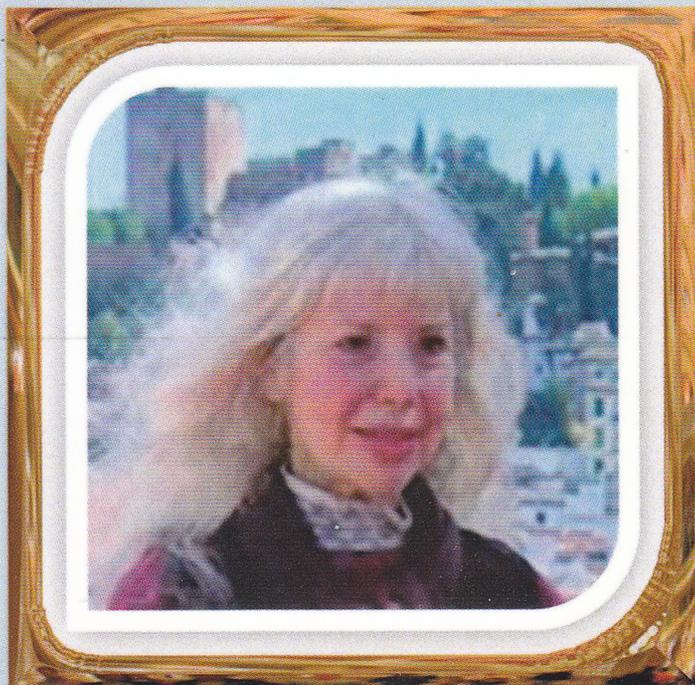
A Biographical Note

Born in California on June 17, 1942, Harley White has lived in Spain with her second husband Kirk Wangenstein since 1990. The tragedies referred to in the book are the deaths of her only two, adult children from her first marriage – her daughter in August 1994, followed by her son in March 1996.

Hi, I'm Kirk, the man. I wish to add some words to my wife's taciturnity (actually, she says it all, and much more, in her book). I met Harley in 1989, in Big Sur, California, among the redwoods, and proceeded to marry her —no sooner said than done— right there, in a redwood “cathedral”. She is a born word-lover; she has been called “the reincarnation of James Joyce”... by a reputed Joycean scholar! In fact, she is now well into her own *Finnegans Wake*, a monumental opus dealing in fairy tales, musical theater, poetry, and awakenings. Since her early twenties, she has been writing — among other “genres”, stream of consciousness, surrealist theater of the absurd, and mixed media works of interior “monologues”, “dialogues”... Ah, and, as you may have guessed, she has a special thing for cats.

Our e-mail is:

harleykirk@hotmail.com



"They call me Mama-cat and I answer to it, so I suppose that is my name, though it wasn't always. I was born in Andalusia, southern Spain, in Granada, an area that is hot in summer and cold in winter, and I survived thanks to the ingenuity of my mother, who hid me in a deserted house along with the brothers and sisters of my litter."

So begins the picaresque, picturesque tale, true in the telling by its feline protagonist, *The Autobiography of a Granada Cat*-- as told to Harley White.

She describes her neighborhood, of streets piled upward upon streets, the old city on the hill, with its labyrinth of narrow winding lanes, often sinister in their twists and turns, the Albaicín's spectacular vistas and crumbling old-style Arabic abodes, full of tourists and passers-by, thieves and outcasts, donkeys and dogs, inhabited by bohemians and longtime dwellers both rich and poor. Nonetheless, it has been supposed that on occasion she had been grudgingly allowed access to a human environment, albeit only marginally, and transitorily...

(...)

A worldly-wise versatile feline, Mama-cat is part philosopher and quite well-versed culturally besides, especially where cats are concerned. She enjoys quoting notables, such as...

"Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate.' So said Ralph Waldo Emerson."

Apropos of Emerson's statement, Mama-cat does indeed render her colorful world visible, depicting its grandeur and pettiness, portraying its various and sundry inhabitants, bringing its sounds and sensations to vivid life. We are Mama-cat. We suffer her sadness. Feel her fears and frustrations. Delight in her joys. And yet there is more here than meets the eye.

If one has ever looked in a mirror hung on a wall across the room from another mirror, the reflections issue from one another intriguingly, ad infinitum, in ostensible layers of reality. In a similar sense, Mama-cat not only relates her own chronicle, but that of her "lady" as well. Tragedies like the loss of her kittens and periods of deep despair echo those her mistress undergoes in seeming synchronicity. She plumbs her experiences for profounder meanings and reverberations, sharing her reflections and musings with those who care to see and hear, while never veering from her own particular perspective.

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