

WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

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FELINE

A Whimsical Storiette

By Bruce Grant

MYRA looked up from her writing.

"David," she said, "I am positive I heard a cat outside."

The man only growled, settled himself deeper in his comfortable chair, and continued to read.

The giant breath of the blizzard rattled the windows. The snow flung itself wrathfully against the panes. Outside it was bitter cold.

"I can't bear to think of a cat outside on a night like this," continued Myra.

"Forget it!" exclaimed David, arousing himself. "You are continually thinking of cats. All that I hear from you is *cats*. You dream of cats, you oc-

cupy your mind with cats. I heard no cat crying outside. It is only your imagination."

"No; I heard a cat—I am sure," insisted Myra.

It was warm inside. David sat beneath a green-shaded reading lamp. The pyramid of light fell on his tall figure, attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, slouched comfortably in the chair.

Myra sat at a desk, scribbling in a book, now and then tapping her lips with her penholder. She wore a clinging, yellow negligée, and her hair was done back tightly on her head. In her sleek, brown coil of hair at the back there was a large Spanish comb.

"David; I *know* I heard a cat then!" she cried, throwing down her pen. "You surely must have heard it, too."

David laid down his book.

"When you are through dreaming of cats," he said, "I'll be able to read."

Myra rose.

"I cannot bear to think of a cat out on a night like this—a little homeless cat."

Then she walked from the room.

David mused. *Cats!* Nothing but cats! She had gone insane on the subject of cats. He had never known her to be so unreasonable about cats. She seemed worse since their cat, Rodolpho, had died. Her mind seemed now occu-

pied with nothing but cats. He was sure she had been writing something about cats in her book.

To prove his contention he walked to the desk. He picked up the small, leather-bound book. He read:

"THE SNOWSTORM.

*"Against the pane the snow
flakes press
Like dainty kitten paws.
Outside the chill wind stings
and cuts,
Like angry kitten claws."*

David laid the note-book down. There! He had been right. He strode back to his chair. Myra returned to the room.

"I looked out of the dining-room window," she said. "I could not see the cat. It is awful outside."

She paused.

"Cats are such unfortunate creatures. In fact, all animals are unfortunate—animals domesticated by man. They never know when their masters are going to turn against them, or at least ignore them."

"People treat cats that way because cats are good for nothing," David put in. "Cats enter your home, eat your food, roll up on your bed, and do nothing. Rat traps are better for catching rats and mice. You don't need cats in the scheme of things. They are worthless."

"Yes," added Myra softly, in a passionless voice. "A woman comes into your home, and eats your food, and spends your money, and curls up on your bed. A cook and a housekeeper can do better work than she."

"There is no comparison," cried David. "A woman at least shows you some affection—a cat never."

"A woman shows affection when she knows that it is wanted," Myra said in a distant voice.

There was an awkward silence. These arguments never came to anything.

Why did they indulge in them? They always led to disagreeable subjects, or touched on the fatuity of marriage. No, such arguments never did any good. Far better if both remained silent. David picked up his book.

"Cats are very intelligent animals," Myra continued, half aloud. "They know instantly when they are not wanted. If anyone in a household hates a cat, there is no need of that person speaking gruffly or striking the cat. The cat will know. Cats have powers of divination which are denied most humans. They are such sensitive creatures. They respond to the least touch, the least kind thought. They slink away at the least unkind word, at the least unkind thought."

She hesitated, trifling with her pen.

"They know when they are not wanted. I should not be surprised if a cat would go out into the cold—on a night like this—if it knew it was not wanted."

"Stop such darn foolishness!" growled David.

Myra looked at him, raising her eyebrows quizzically.

"Please don't talk that way," she said.

For an instant there came over him a surge of hatred. Would she ever leave him alone! Alone for a few minutes of peaceful reading. Wasn't she contented to live quietly and peacefully without continually worrying herself about cats, and whether or not her husband still loved her.

She was talking:

"It is true I love cats. I have loved them all my life. They are the most beautiful and graceful of animals. But please forgive me if I hurt you by talking about them. They show me affection. They seem to know that I love them."

But David was not listening. He was thinking. She was like a cat. Her movements were catlike. Truly, she was every inch a cat. Come into your home, absorb your warmth, eat your food,

taunt you, insist on being stroked and petted at every turn—truly a remarkable woman, as remarkable as those small animals she adored, David scowled.

Events tumbled over themselves in his mind. She was susceptible to men. When one caressed her with his voice she almost purred with pleasure. She loved those who flattered her. He had flattered her most and had won her. She now still expected all the flattery and little attentions which he had given her before. She could not "settle down." He felt that he exuded hate at that moment. He felt that at last his eyes were opened.

Myra got up from her desk again.

"I'm going out into the back yard and see if I can find that kitty," she announced.

David could not read now. He sat silently in his chair, repressing the wrathful things that tried to force themselves from his lips. He heard Myra putting on her shoes.

She peeped in finally and smiled wistfully. He sat in the same spot. The back door closed softly.

David gradually began to grow calmer. He sat and waited. In the silent house, the quiet broken only by the rattling of the windows and the thudding of the snow against the glass, he began to look back over his married life.

They had been more or less happy during the three years. It would be hard to find another woman who would put up with his idiosyncrasies. What a fool he was! Myra was a wonderful woman, after all, the most wonderful in the world!

He walked to the back door and called out into the night. He rushed through the snow and the cutting wind. He returned and waited. The clock told off the long hours.

Then it came to him—Myra's words, "I should not be surprised if a cat would go out on a night like this—into the cold—if it knew it was not wanted. . . ."