



2021

The Cat

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Recommended Citation

Knoll, Madison (2021) "The Cat," *Floodwall Magazine*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/floodwall-magazine/vol2/iss2/4>

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The Cat

“Who the hell does she think she is?”

“Look at the Ice Queen go. Can’t even speak up to her *subjects*.”

Charlotte gritted her teeth and slammed her locker shut. God, she hated this town, this fucking school. Everyone looked at her like she was a freak, like she wasn’t human. Just because she wasn’t friendly, because she didn’t fucking *speak*. She couldn’t wait till graduation. She still had a year left at this godawful school; she wasn’t sure if she could make it through without losing her mind.

Charlotte pushed through the crowd that had formed around her and ran. She ran down the stuffed hallway, stumbled around a corner, and then burst out the back entrance. Her legs started to hurt but she pushed herself, running away from it all: from the sneers of her classmates, their hatred. Her breath caught as hiccups in her throat and her eyes stung with tears. She needed to get away, away from them, *away*.

After several streets, she turned down the alleyway next to her favorite bookstore and then collapsed against the brick wall. Once she was safely tucked away, the tears slid freely down her face. She pulled her legs to her chest—wincing, *Must be bruised*—and let go of a shaky breath. A headache rapped against her skull and her abdomen throbbed.

Could she really make it to the end of the year? Graduation was so close, but it wasn’t close enough. She could dream all she wanted about the freedom she would have after—college, moving away—but it didn’t matter if this hatred followed her. She couldn’t go through life like this, being tormented by everyone around her.

“Hey you.”

The hell? Charlotte lifted her head and was face-to-face with a tabby cat. Its fur was matted and dirty—clearly a stray—but its eyes, a sharp yellow, showed a hidden intellect.

God, I’m hearing things now.

“That’s rude, you’re not going to even acknowledge me?”

She blinked. The cat was glaring at her now. What the fuck?

I’m...sorry?

“Clearly you can understand me, so you’re not dumb. What’s a sad thing like you doing in my humble abode?”

All she could do was blink stupidly at the cat. Not only was the cat *talking*, but it could read her *thoughts*. She had to be dreaming, hallucinating, something! This wasn’t normal—maybe she had finally lost her mind.

The cat’s glare seemed to triple in its disapproval. It reached a paw out; she recoiled. It *hmped*. “Well, well. A human that’s afraid of an itty-bitty kitty. That’s a new one. Now, if you would kindly stop ignoring me, what are you doing in my home?”

Charlotte hesitated. She made to get up, but the cat rested a paw on her foot, the pressure featherlight. She could’ve brushed the cat aside, but couldn’t. This cat—a weird talking cat—seemed to have a pull on her.

A moment passed, then another. Finally: *I’m sorry, I don’t mean to intrude. I’ll leave.*

“That’s not what I meant, and I’m sure you knew that. From the looks of it, the other humans hurt you.” Her jaw twitched. They had cornered her, called her cruel names. Had pushed her to the ground, too. The cat didn’t wait for her answer. “It’s not every day that I meet a human that can understand me. I can help you with a bit of revenge if you’d like.”

I’m not looking for revenge...

“I find that hard to believe. So you’re O.K. with them getting away with harassing you? You’re just letting them win. They need to learn a lesson. And I can help you with that.”

Charlotte chewed on her lip. It’s true that she didn’t want them to get away with what they had done to her. A little payback would be O.K., right?

She nodded slowly.

The cat seemed to grin. “Perfect. You have my word: they won’t be bothering you anymore, Charlotte.”

Charlotte could barely sleep that night. She was too busy thinking about what kind of revenge the cat was planning. And how did it know her name?

She shook her head, hoping that would get rid of her worries. It was fine. The worst that could happen was that everyone would get a little scare, but then they would leave her alone. She’d finally have the peace she wanted.

The school grounds were empty. When did she leave her house? She checked her phone: 7:37am. She wasn’t that early, so where the hell was everybody?

The smell hit her before she was even close to the door. She scrunched her nose in disgust but went ahead and pushed open the doors.

She wished she hadn’t.

Dead bodies littered the entryway.

The walls seemed to be bathed in blood.

The stench...it was awful.

“Why aren’t you smiling?”

The voice echoed, rung in her ears.

“All of your problems are solved now, Charlotte. Why aren’t you smiling? Aren’t you *ecstatic* that all of those hate-filled creatures are gone?”

This isn’t what I wanted. Her head hurt.

“Did you really think they would have learned their lesson with a harmless prank? Think now, Charlotte. This was the only way.”

It’s not, they didn’t have to die!

The voice seemed to frown. “You don’t appreciate what I did for you? Do you have any idea how dirty my hands got? You should be grateful that I helped

you, Charlotte. I'm the only one that's ever showed they care for you, aren't I?"

It was hard to see anything, her eyes so full of tears. This isn't what she wanted. *This isn't what I wanted!*

"Now, now, Charlotte. Let's calm down."

A hand reached towards her, a pair of gleaming yellow eyes glinting in the dim lighting.

"Let's go home, shall we?"

About Madison Knoll

Madison Knoll is a senior at the University of North Dakota pursuing a Bachelor's in English with a minor in Chinese Studies and Certificate in Writing and Editing. She will graduate in the fall and then continue to pursue a Master's in English at UND in the spring.