

Ken's Cat

By C. Jade Wyton

It has been a few years since his daughter moved out to start a family, and Kenneth Bloom can't help but feel lonely. He misses the hectic sounds that his excitable daughter brought into his home.... So when a very talkative stray cat decides to move in, Ken can't help but fall in love with her.

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It was a freezing, wet, miserable night.

If it hadn't been for Becky, Ken would have never left his house. Not in this weather. But she'd needed an emergency babysitter; as her car had broken down in the city and she had to wait over an hour for a mechanic.

He was so proud of her for going back to study! He would have never guessed his daughter, the girl who once deliberately flooded the high school science rooms so they had to call off class early, would have gone to university. Not by choice.

He wanted to make the experience as smooth as possible for her— So of course he'd made time to swing by and pick up his grandchildren from school and watch them until their parents got home.

Jareth had shown up about ten minutes before Becky to find Ken on the floor, covered in napping children. He had, of course, taken the opportunity to steal time for his own nap and had fallen asleep on the couch nearby.

And then, when Becky had gotten home and seen the vibe, she'd climbed on top of Jareth and fallen asleep.

And they'd laid like that for two hours before the children had finally woken up and begged for their father to play with them; leaving Ken and Becky together to talk.

And talk.

And talk.

And *talk*.

Until Isa had called and asked Ken if he was planning on coming home or not, and Ken had realised it was twelve at night and said his goodbyes.

And now he was driving home.

Though, he wasn't sure if he should be....

He was wondering, with how much trouble he was having making out the road, if he should perhaps consider giving it up.

Or at least getting a stronger prescription for his glasses....

Ken sighed, turning into his street, and—

*Hit the brakes!*

The car jolted to a stop as a cat ran in front of it, freezing as it was caught in the headlights and Ken slammed his foot on the brakes.

'Hey!' he exclaimed, sticking his head out the window. 'What are you doing?! You silly thing! I almost hit you!'

The cat meowed in response, twitching the little white tips of its ears, before

bolting into some nearby bushes.

'Putain d'enfer. Créature stupide,' Ken muttered, shaking his head and continuing home.

He pulled into his driveway and, after gathering up the bags of clothes he'd offered to repair for Becky, he headed into his house.

He didn't bother struggling to close the door behind himself. Becky had taken Mimi with her when she'd moved out, and now the only reason to close the door was to keep the heat in; which he didn't have to hurry on. He had time to deposit the bags in the lounge before heading back to—

*'Mreow!'*

Ken turned, eyes wide, to the cat that was now standing in the connecting arch between his front hall and his lounge room.

It was almost a completely solid black little animal, except for the very tips of its ears and its front paws, which were snow-white.

*'Mrwour!'* it meowed loudly, again, and Ken hurriedly deposited the bags and made to shoo the animal out of his house. *'Maow!'*

'No! Non, you cannot be in here,' Ken told it, bending down to usher the animal towards the door. 'You have to go home. Go home.'

*'Maow!'* the cat meowed loudly again, before lifting itself onto its hind legs so it could slam its head into Ken's outstretched hand and rub against him.

It purred loudly as it did and Ken felt his shoulders sag as he looked at its lithe form.

'It is very cold out, isn't it?' he observed, feeling the chill of the air outside hit him. 'Hm.... Okay. You can stay tonight. We will find your owners in the morning, oui?'

*'Mrow!'* the cat responded, trotting after Ken as he shut the door. *'Maow! Mrow! Mreow! Maow!'*

'Hm? Mh,' Ken couldn't help but smile as he headed for the stairs. 'You're a talkative one, aren't you?'

*'Maow!'*

'Hm!' Ken gave the cat a smile as it trailed behind him up the stairs.

*'Maow! Mrow! Mowl!'*

'Is that so?'

*'Mrorw!'*

'Oh my.'

*'Myow!'*

'Is that a *cat*?' Isa asked, and Ken looked up to see his girlfriend standing, arms crossed and confused look on her face, at the top of the stairs. 'You didn't get that from Becky, did you?'

'Oh, non. Sh... he?' Ken cast a glance behind the cat to confirm its sex. 'She followed me inside. It's too cold and wet to make her go back outside, I think. Don't you think?'

Isa didn't answer, she just gave Ken a tired-but-affectionate look, and turned around and headed for the bedroom. 'Don't forget to give it some water before you come to bed.'

'Oh, yes! Oui! Good idea!' Ken exclaimed, turning around and hurrying back downstairs to make his way to the kitchen.

The cat was at his heels the entire time, chatting away as if Ken could understand it.

*'Maow! Mrrow! Mrow! Myow! Mreow!'*

'Mhm,' Ken nodded. 'Don't worry. Yes. I will get you something to eat, too.'

*'Mreow!'*

Ken chuckled at the animal as he searched the kitchen for a suitable set of bowls to use— Ah! They still had some of Mimi's old bowls! Perfect!

Just perfect!

He was sure this little thing wouldn't mind using the hot-pink bowl with PRETTY GIRL written on the side; so he filled it with water and placed it gently on the ground.

The cat drank happily; still letting out mumbled meows as it lapped up the water.

Then, when Ken retrieved a tin of tuna and tugged on the pull-tab with a metallic *scrrk*, the animal's head shot up and it let out a loud, excited cry.

*'MAAAAAAAAAOOOOOWW!'*

'Yes, this is for you,' Ken confirmed as it began weaving around his legs, purring and meowing and rubbing its head into his leg.

*'MAOOOW!'*

'Be patient, now,' Ken couldn't help but laugh as he emptied the tuna into a bowl and put it on the floor. 'Ooh, you *are* hungry!'

The cat devoured the tuna like it hadn't eaten in days (which, given how thin it was, Ken was starting to think may have been the case); purring and giving muffled meows as it swallowed down the food and licked the plate completely clean.

Then, it looked back up at Ken with its big, grey-yellow eyes and stared at him.

'Is that better?' Ken asked.

*'Mrow! Maow! Prrow!'* the cat replied, pressing its head into Ken's leg and curling around him affectionately.

'Ah, good. Good,' Ken reached down to pet the animal. 'Now, you are welcome to sleep on any of the couches! But please don't scratch them. There is a scratching post in the corner that you can use instead.... It used to belong to my daughter's mimic, but she moved away.'

*'Maow!'*

'Good girl,' Ken cooed, petting the cat one last time before heading out of the kitchen and to the stairs.

The cat followed him closely as he did. Even after he explained to it that the most comfortable spot was downstairs, it didn't leave his side— And when he opened his bedroom door it bolted inside and leapt up to stand on poor Isa, who gave a jolt and turned to stare at the cat as it mewled loudly at her.

*'PRRRROW!'*

'Oh, Isa, I'm sorry!' Ken gasped. 'I will take her out!'

For a moment, Isa was stunned. But then she let out a sigh and reached up to pet the cat; her hand hovering over it in an unsure way before she slowly and carefully gave it a scratch under the chin.

'Well now isn't this a familiar feeling?' she chuckled. 'You know. I've kind of

missed Don sneaking in to sleep with us.... Just for tonight, okay?’

‘*Mrow!*’

‘Oh, she’s talkative, isn’t she?’ Isa chuckled.

‘Very,’ Ken agreed, climbing back into bed. He paused halfway through pulling the blanket up as the cat hurried over to him so it could *bonk* their foreheads together. ‘Oh, yes. Hello. Are you going to let us sleep?’

‘*Maow!*’

‘Mhm? I see,’ Ken ran his hand over the cat’s back before it wandered down to the foot of the bed.

It padded in a circle, purring loudly, before settling down and closing its eyes.

Ken couldn’t help but watch as it did; it reminded him of....

Ken’s smile fell at the memory.

*Eloise....*

The stray cat he had cared for in his childhood; that his father had hated and one day taken away so that Ken could never see her again....

‘Ken?’ Isa asked, softly, and Ken felt her shift closer so she could wrap her arms around him. ‘Are you alright?’

‘Oh, uh... yes,’ Ken gave a nervous chuckle. ‘It is... I used to have a cat. When I was very young.’

‘Really? You never told me that,’ Isa said.

‘No? Hm...’ Ken gave a hum, before rolling over so he could pull Isa into his chest. ‘Ah, well.... Goodnight, mon amoureuse.’

‘Goodnight, Ken.’

‘*Mrow!*’

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Ken had spent the morning knocking on his neighbours’ doors; the little black cat following at his heels and meowing at him the entire time.

He was looking for her owners. But so far he’d had very little success. Nobody in the street recognised her or knew of anyone missing a cat. So he widened his search to two streets over.

He couldn’t just throw her out; she was too much of a sweetheart for that. But he couldn’t just take her— She *clearly* had an owner somewhere; she was so friendly and recognised what a can opener was. It was just a matter of finding them....

‘Yeah, I recognise her.’

Ken’s ears flicked up as the young half-elf girl gave him a nod and pointed down the road. ‘I used to see her in a window just down the road, but....’

‘But?’ Ken asked, finding himself leaning forward with anticipation as the girl winced.

‘Her owner passed away a few months ago,’ she explained. ‘I thought his kids took her to a shelter when they sold the house, but... I guess they just left her.’

‘Oh...’ Ken’s heart sank and his ears folded down as the cat gave another loud meow. ‘I see.... What a horrible thing to do to her!’

‘Mm,’ the girl gave a sad nod. Then shrugged. ‘I can see about taking her up to the shelter in Warm Waters, sometime, if you don’t want to deal with her.’

For a moment, Ken considered the offer....

It would certainly make his life a lot easier to just give the cat to someone else and let them deal with rehoming her.

Easier, but....

Something about it didn't feel *right*.

It must have been a terrible time for the poor thing; after losing everything, she was abandoned by the people who were supposed to help her... and then she had come into *his* home, as if seeking out *him* to help her.... Pushing her onto someone else just felt... *wrong*.

'Maow!'

'Ooh... *no*,' Ken decided slowly, and shook his head. 'It uh... she shouldn't be too much of a problem. My daughter works with animals— She will know what to do! Perhaps we can put a little pamphlet in her shop window, and someone local will fall in love!'

'Ah, that's more than fair,' the girl gave a chuckle, and looked down at the cat affectionately. 'Her name is Catthrine, by the way.'

'What?' Ken's ear twitched. 'Did you say *Cathrine*?''

'No, *Cat*-thrine,' the girl corrected. 'It's a pun. Though I think the old guy used to just call her Cat.'

'Oh, that is a *marvellous* name!' Ken beamed, crouching down to pet Catthrine down the back. 'Catthrine! Hello, dear Catthrine.'

'Maow! Mrrrrrow! Prrow! Row!'

'Ah, talkative!' Ken chuckled. 'You are very talkative!'

'Yeah,' the girl grinned. 'Pretty sure her old owner knew Speak with Animals. So. Y'know.'

'Aw, that explains it,' Ken cooed, and then scooped Catthrine into his arms. 'You are trying to have a conversation with me!'

'Mrow!' Catthrine meowed, beginning to knead into Ken's chest and purr loudly.

'Mm.... Well, thank you very much for your time!' Ken said to the girl, taking a step down from her porch. 'I appreciate it. And I'll make sure Catthrine is looked after.'

'Alright, you have a good day.'

'You too.'

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It had been two weeks since Catthrine had weaved her way into Ken's home, and nobody had shown any sort of interest in adopting her.

Ken thought it was completely *crazy* of them!

Catthrine was such a wonderful cat! Sweet and polite. All she wanted was to sit with people and talk to them! Why, just yesterday she'd engaged Becky in a *three hour* conversation about different types of scratching post materials and their benefits....

Ken had, of course, gone out to buy a rope-wrapped post for her as soon as he was made aware that was her favourite scratching material.

Why wouldn't he? After all Catthrine had been through, she deserved

something nice!

'*Mreow!*' Catthrine's voice called from the other room, and Ken heard Isa turn off the vacuum.

'What?' she asked.

'*Mrow. Maow! Mreorw. Merrow.*'

'Mhm? Aaah,' Isa acknowledged Catthrine's meowing in a playful tone. 'Well, maybe you should go tell Ken that!'

Ken gave a chuckle at the suggestion.

'*Prrrap?*'

'He's in his study,' Isa said; her voice followed by the *pamp pamp pamp* of Catthrine's hurried footsteps as she hurried to Ken's door.

'*Maaaaaaooooooooow!*' Catthrine yowled loudly in Ken's doorway— And Ken was distinctly reminded of a time long ago when he'd forgotten he and Becky were going to the movies together, and his daughter had stood whining loudly in his doorway.

It was nice to have noise in the house again, he thought. He loved quiet; but the *silence* since his daughter had moved away had been driving him *insane*.... And he hadn't even noticed it until the void had been filled again.

'Yes?' Ken asked, turning in his seat to look at the white-toed cat.

'*Mrrrow! Maow! Mrowl!*'

'Ah! I see. Of course you can come in!' Ken motioned for Catthrine to come into the room, before tapping the empty chair next to him. He grinned as she leapt up and sat down. 'There we are!'

'*Mrow! Mrew! Maow!*'

Isa's laughter broke through Catthrine's meows and Ken turned, his eyes bright and his smile wide, to watch as the drow came into the room and stood beside Catthrine.

'You certainly have a lot to say today, Cat,' she teased. She lifted her hand to pat Catthrine but paused, hovering her hand just above the animal's back.

Ken's ear twitched as Isa hesitated; clearly unsure how to pet this animal.... And he remembered something she'd told him once, some time ago, about surface-dwelling animals not being common in the Underdark where she'd grown up.

Isa's hand lowered, then, and she awkwardly pet Catthrine the wrong way.

'*Maow!*'

'Oh, mon amoureuse!' Ken reached out to take Isa's hand and guide it in the right direction. 'Cats are not like mimics. You must pat from head to toe; smooth the fur down, not work it up.'

Isa let out a sigh of relief as Ken gently showed her how to pet Catthrine properly. 'Thirty years on the surface, and I'm only now realising I've never pet a cat!' she chuckled, sheepishly.

'Aw, ma choupette, it's not a—' Ken cut off as his phone buzzed with a unique, familiar tone, and he turned in his seat with an excited fervour that made Isa laugh aloud as he answered the call. 'Becky!' he chirped. 'Hello! Oh, ma précieuse fille! How are you? Why are you calling? Is everything alright?'

'Hey, Dad!' Becky chirped back, and Ken heard some animal, high-pitched and loud, mewling in the background. 'I'm fine! I'm just calling because I, uh—'

Well. This might sound really stupid, but I was wondering if I could talk to Catthrine?’

‘Oh? Uh... yes, of course. I will put her on, now,’ Ken said, and moved the phone from his own ear to hold it up against Catthrine’s.

‘*Mreow?*’

Becky’s muffled talking came through, though Ken couldn’t make out what she was saying as she conversed with the animal.

‘*Maow! Mrow! Merow? Mreow! Maow. Maow. Mraow! Maow. Maow.*’

Ken and Isa cast each other a look as Catthrine stood up and shook herself down. She was clearly finished talking to Becky, so Ken slowly lifted the phone back to his own ear.

‘Uh, so... what was that about?’

‘Okay, so, I just needed to ask Catthrine if she’d be comfortable fostering a kitten that was handed in today!’

‘Kitten?’ Ken echoed. ‘*Fostering?*’

‘Yeah!’ Becky confirmed. ‘Like, they’re weaned and stuff, but still like. Need to learn some more proper social skills from another cat. So I was just asking Catthrine if she’d be okay doing that! She said it’s fine and stuff, so like. I can get in contact with the shelter to—’

‘You want to take Catthrine to a shelter?’ Ken interrupted, casting another—much more anxious—look to Isa.

‘Well, I wasn’t about to dump a whole kitten on you!’ Becky laughed, and Ken felt his heart sinking. ‘And I mean, I know you’ve been wanting to find Catthrine a new home and stuff and I’m thinking that if I like, take her up to Warm Waters, they can put her and the kitten up together and try again to find her a home and stuff. Like. You know! What do you think?’

Ken swallowed hard, and felt his jaw tense as he and Isa stared at each other.

*Give Catthrine to a shelter?*

He didn’t want Catthrine to go to a shelter. Shelters were.... *Catthrine* was.... He....

No, Isa mouthed, picking up Catthrine and holding her against her chest as Ken gave her a slow nod of agreement.

‘No,’ Ken said aloud.

‘Hm?’ Becky hummed. ‘No... what?’

‘We... don’t want to give up Catthrine,’ Ken admitted. ‘She has... grown on us.’

Becky let out a loud laugh, and Ken could practically *hear* her shaking her head at him. ‘Aw, Dad! That’s *great* news! She seems like such a special little lady!’

‘She is,’ Ken agreed, smiling up at Catthrine and Isa as Catthrine purred and rubbed her head into Isa’s collar. ‘I’m sorry about the kitten. Perhaps we could take them—’

‘We don’t need a *second* cat!’ Isa blurted, pursing her lips when Ken cast her a pleading look. ‘No! Ken! Do not make that face at— We shouldn’t! We’re barely used to *one* cat we can’t just get another— Don’t make that face at me— Don’t— Ken— *Ah!* Fine! But *I* get to name this one!’

—END—

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