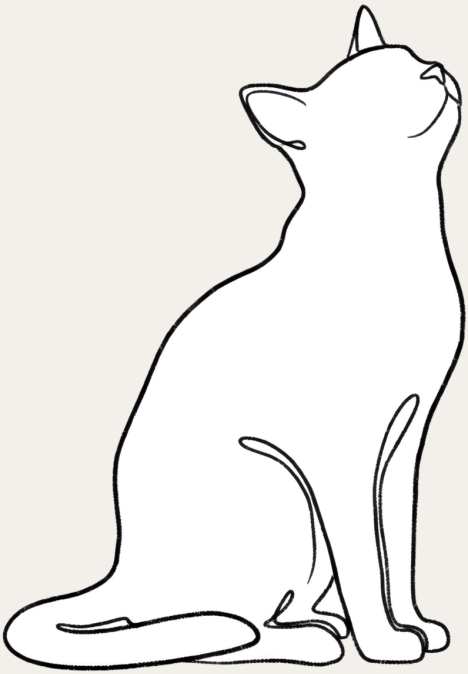
NOCTURNE FOR NINE LIVES



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Nocturne for Nine Lives

By Marcin Wojdyna

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Dedicated to everyone who's ever been quietly watched by a cat and wondered what it was thinking.

Prologue: The Vet's Office

They always say cats hide pain. Like it’s noble. Like it’s brave.

It’s not.

It’s instinct. And pride. And the hope that if you just curl tight enough, the world might not notice you're breaking.

It’s the only thing I’ve ever been good at.

—

I couldn’t keep my head up. It sagged against the cold steel of the table. The light above me buzzed faintly, flickering like it couldn’t make up its mind. I hated it. I hated the smell. I hated the sound of voices trying too hard to appear calm. I hated the sharp cold press of the thermometer and the plastic crinkle of gloves.

But most of all, I hated that I couldn't hide it anymore.

The soft one held my paw. Called me brave. Her face was all red and wet and shaking. The tall one kept pacing. He pretended he wasn’t scared. He always does that.

They were talking about my thyroid. About how it had gone rogue. About surgery. Anaesthetic. Risk. Monitoring. Cost.

No one asked me.

—

I felt the jab. It didn't hurt. Not really. It was the kind of needle you only feel for a second before it makes everything else feel far away.

The world slowed.

Sound stretched. Colours dulled. My heart thumped somewhere deep, steady and thick like a drum underwater.

This is it, I thought.

This is the last one.

—

I didn't panic. Cats don't do that. Not really. We leave that to you lot.

I just watched. Let the lights smear into long white lines. Let the voices blur. I thought about the jumper on the armchair at home, still warm. I thought about my bowl. I thought about the dogs. Idiots, all of them. But mine.

And I thought... if this is the end, then maybe I should take stock.

Nine lives, wasn't it?

Let's see how I spent them.

—

And just like that, the first one came rushing back.

The stink of bin fires. The sting of rain. The crunch of bones beneath soft grass.

No name. No home. No rules. Just claws and teeth. Always something chasing and something running, and never knowing which one you were.

The first time I died, I didn't understand it.

But when I came back, I did.

I understood *too well*.

—

So go on, then.

If I'm going out, I might as well remember how I got here.

Let's start from the beginning.

———

Life One: The Street Cat

It was dark.

Not the comforting kind of dark. Not the sort you settle into. This was the kind that pressed down from every angle. Cold. Wet. Endless.

Something moved beside me. Or maybe it didn't. My world was heatless and shifting, all noise and scent and urgency. I didn't know what I was. I didn't know where I began or what it meant to begin at all.

All I knew was that I was hungry. And I cried.

No one came.

—

The first few days were chaos. At least, I think they were days. Light and noise arrived and vanished without warning, sometimes in tandem, sometimes not at all.

My body was slow and soft. My limbs betrayed me often. My eyes opened when they shouldn't have. There were other shapes once. Briefly. Warm things that made noise like me, and then didn't.

I crawled until I could walk. I walked until I could run. Not for fun. Not for play. For cover.

Every smell meant something. Piss. Meat. Danger. Blood. Bread. Oil.

Every sound might end me. Every space might shelter me.

I lived beneath a rusted shelving unit wedged behind a barely surviving bakery. The dripping pipe above me sang lullabies I didn't ask for. A rat twice the size of me claimed the opposite corner. We never fought. He knew I wouldn't win.

—

In the mornings, the humans dropped things.

Food, sometimes. Rubbish, mostly. They laughed loudly and left quickly.

Once, a woman saw me and made a noise like she pitied me. She didn't stop walking.

Another time, a boy lobbed a bottle in my direction. It shattered against the wall behind me. I didn't flinch. I'd already learned that movement often made things worse.

I scavenged. Bread with mould. Chips soaked in vinegar. Half a sausage roll I dragged three streets over and defended for two days before vomiting up the foil I hadn't noticed was still attached.

I didn't know what I was doing. I just knew I was still doing it.

—

Winter came and didn't go. The wind cut deeper. The rain felt personal.

I tried sleeping on warm engine hoods. Got chased off twice, burned once.

I chewed plastic when there was nothing else. It tasted of dust and disappointment. I learned that hunger tastes like everything if you let it.

I saw my reflection once in a puddle behind the chicken shop. I stared at it for a long time. I wasn't looking at myself. I didn't know what that meant yet. But I was looking.

—

There was a fox. Or maybe a dog. Or maybe just the sound of something dying loudly. I stayed still. Stillness was safety. Stillness made me invisible. I knew this without learning it.

A man walked past and nearly stepped on me. He didn't notice. I didn't move.

I didn't mind being unseen. Sometimes I think I preferred it.

—

It was a Tuesday when I died.

I don't know how I know it was Tuesday. It just felt like one.

There was a piece of meat in the road. Greasy. Shiny. A miracle. I stepped out, belly low, nose high. The world was too quiet.

Headlights came around the corner. I saw them. And I didn't move.

There wasn't time to be afraid.

—

Darkness again.

But different this time.

Not pressing. Not cruel.

Still. Like breath held in a long hallway.

Then, a thought.

Not a word. A *thought*.

“Oh.”

Then another.

“That’s going to be a pattern, isn’t it?”

Life Two: The Magician’s Cat

I woke up to sequins. It only got weirder from there.

He called himself The Amazing Wandrick Jamony. Wando, for his friends. I don't think he had many.

He had a cape. A real one. Purple. Lined with stars and hope.

The first time I saw him, he was practising in front of the mirror with a deck of cards so warped they looked like they’d been salvaged from a shipwreck. His assistant, a moth-eaten rabbit puppet called Geoff, watched silently from the mantelpiece, one eye missing, the other judging.

I don’t think he noticed me for three days.

When he did, he dropped a saucer of milk on the floor like it was a sacred offering.

“Name’s Wando,” he said, as if I’d asked. “I’m working on a new finale. Want in?”

I didn’t.

—

The days were... quiet.

Birthday parties. Pub back rooms. Retirement homes with flickering strip lights and lukewarm squash. Sometimes I went with him, stuffed into a carrier shaped like a treasure chest. He said it added mystique.

I once pissed in it. He didn't notice. Thought it was the dry ice machine leaking again.

He spoke to his props more than people. Rehearsed full routines to the toaster. Gave pep talks to Geoff. Sometimes I'd catch him staring out the window at nothing, lips moving, trying to remember the difference between misdirection and outright lying.

There was a sadness in him so thick it had corners.

—

I hated it.

The noise. The loneliness. The cheap, brittle hope that clung to everything like glitter after a failed trick.

I knocked over his top hat once just to watch him flinch.

I shredded the playing cards out of spite.

He bought new ones and told me I was "adding real chaos energy to the act".

I vomited in his shoe.

He called it a message from the spirit realm.

I began to suspect he might not be well.

—

But then something strange happened.

I started to watch him. Not in that bored cat way. I sat front and centre, like a proper audience member. And I realised… he wasn't good. Not by any measure. But he believed in something. Not success. Not fame.

Wonder.

He believed wonder still had a place in the world, even if no one was asking for it.

Even if no one clapped.

Even if the dove never came out of the sleeve and the kid at the party shouted, "It's up his bloody jumper, mate!"

—

One night, he tucked me into a silk-lined box and made me vanish in front of six pensioners and some guy who just came for the buffet.

When he opened the box again, I was still there.

I hadn't moved.

The crowd clapped. He beamed.

And I realised I didn't hate him anymore.

—

He died in his sleep. Just stopped.

One minute I was curled on his cape, and the next… he was gone.

I sat with him until morning. No fuss. No theatrics.

The rabbit puppet stared on from the mantel, slightly less smug than usual.

The next magician who moved in wasn't a magician at all.

He threw out the cape, the cards, and Geoff.

I left the same night.

—

I don't remember how I died that time. It wasn't dramatic. I think it just stopped too.

The light. The sound. The need.

And before the black could settle in, I heard myself think:

"Still not my final trick."

———

Life Three: The Ship

The first few weeks were noisy.

Feet clattered overhead. Radios crackled through every room. There was always someone laughing too loud, always someone swearing about a broken something. I didn't care much. I liked the fish guts and the sunbeams through the porthole.

I slept on a folded tarp in the lab. Warm. Stank of brine and bleach. Not bad.

They didn't name me. Not properly. Just "the cat" or "Oi, piss off" depending on how many sandwiches I tried to nick that day. It was fine. I wasn't here for the fame.

At night, the ocean rocked the ship like a tired lullaby. I listened to the sea slap the hull and the rats scurry in the vents. They weren't like the rats on land. These ones were harder. Meaner. Saltier.

I liked them.

—

Then the noises started changing.

Less chatter. More muttering. Then less of that too.

People got quiet. People got tired. And then people got *gone*.

At first, someone didn't come to breakfast. Then, someone else didn't show up for a shift. The captain said it was fine. Said they'd turned in. Said to mind our own business.

Then the doctor locked himself in his cabin and never came out again.

Someone tried to pry the door open. They found the lock fused shut from the inside. I don’t know what that means. I’m a cat.

But it didn’t feel right.

—

The crew numbers kept shrinking.

I stopped seeing the woman with the braids. Then the lad who always sang while mopping. One by one, their mugs stayed clean. Their bunks stayed made.

The lights flickered more.

The radio started picking up static. No voices. Just the kind of humming that makes you feel like you're being watched. But there’s no one to do the watching.

Except me.

—

I started walking the corridors at night.

I don’t know why. Maybe I was looking for something. Maybe I just wanted to know I wasn’t the only one left.

Sometimes I saw shadows that didn’t match any crew member I remembered. Too slow. Too smooth. Too many legs. Sometimes no shadows at all.

I found the mess deck deserted. Plates still warm. Cutlery on the floor. A fork had landed upright in a slice of toast. That seemed wrong somehow.

The freezer door hung open. Something inside had claw marks. Deep ones.

I didn't go in. I'm a cat, not an idiot.

—

I saw the last man standing jump overboard.

He didn't scream. Didn't hesitate. Just dropped his clipboard, walked to the railing, and slipped into the dark like it called his name.

I didn't watch him go under. I turned away.

There are some things even I won't stare at.

—

The engines died eventually. No power. No lights.

I lived on dried sardines and rainwater for weeks.

I sat on the bridge and watched the sun rise over nothing. Sea in every direction. Silence below deck.

I started talking to myself. Little mutters. Just to check I still could.

"Still here," I'd whisper. "Still here."

—

I think something else was on board. Or maybe it got on after.

Maybe it wore their faces. Maybe it peeled them off.

Maybe it was just the sea.

I never found out. I never wanted to.

I died curled up in the captain's chair. Facing east.

Waiting for land that never came.

That wasn't my last crew. Just my last ship.

—

This time, as the dark crept in, I thought:

"I hope someone finds the ship."

Then I added:

"Not for them. For me. I want someone to open the door and say, 'Oh thank God, the cat's alright.'"

I don't know if they did.

But I like to think someone remembered to check.

———

Life Four: The Student Flat

Four humans.

No plan.

One flat.

Zero cat food.

They didn't adopt me. They didn't even remember how I got there.

One of them swore I'd arrived with an ex-girlfriend. Another claimed I was a tax write-off. A third just called me "mate" and asked if I wanted crisps.

No one questioned me staying. I was just… part of the vibe.

—

The flat stank of weed, noodles and ambition that had gone mouldy. Everything was either sticky or broken. Or both.

The kitchen was home to an ecosystem of sentient leftovers. The kettle screamed when you plugged it in. The bathroom door didn't lock but everyone knocked anyway, out of a vague sense of shared trauma.

One of them once made pasta using vodka instead of water.

He claimed it was "edgy".

I watched him eat it. I never respected him again.

—

I lived on pot noodle runoff and toast crusts. They fed me glitter accidentally more than once. I shat rainbows for a week. The girl in the flat called it “performance art”.

Another lad tried to enter me into his final project as “the ghost of routine”. I walked through his canvas with wet paws the night before assessment.

He got a 2:2 and called it “found chaos”.

—

Sometimes I hated them. Their smell. Their noise. Their loud, drunk hugs. Their sticky floors. Their total inability to remember to buy the bin bags.

But sometimes, usually late at night, when the hallway was lit by lava lamp glow and the air was heavy with spliff smoke and sincerity, they were alright.

One of them cried because he missed his mum’s lasagne.

Another fell asleep next to me and murmured, “You’re the best flatmate, you know that?”

I didn’t answer.

But I didn’t leave either.

—

One of them tried to bathe me. Once.

I shredded a pillow and pissed in his shoe. He got the message.

Another one made me a tiny party hat on my “birthday” and fed me ham.

I wore the hat. Just long enough for him to take a blurry photo and shout “Legend!”

That was a good day.

—

I died under the sofa.

They were watching *Shrek*. Laughing too loud. Quoting every line. One of them flicked a cigarette that bounced off the coffee table and rolled near me.

I thought it was food.

It wasn’t.

I coughed. Once. Then again.

Everything tilted.

They didn’t notice for hours.

Eventually the girl spotted me and screamed. They all froze.

The big one said, “Oh mate. Oh no.”

The one with the moustache took his hat off.

They wrapped me in a hoodie and carried me to the garden out back.

They buried me next to the barbecue.

One lit a candle. The girl cried. The lad with the pasta idea said, “He was proper chill, though.”

I forgive him for the pasta thing.

—

It wasn’t a meaningful life.

But it was full of warm laps, stupid games, and once an entire roast chicken they forgot they’d left on the counter.

I got three paws into it before they noticed.

Worth it.

———

Life Five: The Farm

I woke up in straw.

Not the nice kind from storybooks. Not golden or soft or fresh-smelling.

This was the splintery kind. Damp. Musty. Mould chewed the corners of the barn. The walls wept in winter. And the man who fed me, if you could even call it that, didn't blink often enough to seem normal.

He never spoke to me. Just nodded like we shared some secret understanding. We didn't.

He smelled like formaldehyde and resignation.

—

The farm wasn't a working one. Not really.

There were no chickens. No pigs. No cows to chase or hide beneath. Just long grass, rusting tools, and silence that went too deep.

Inside the main barn, every shelf was lined with glass eyes. Every cabinet filled with fur that had been shaped into smiles.

The man was a taxidermist.

Not a good one.

At night, he watched old VHS tapes of himself.

Younger, cleaner, speaking at some taxidermy convention in a suit that didn't quite fit. He muttered along with his own speech and laughed at the applause.

The telly was black and white.

So was the man, mostly.

—

He never tried to stuff me. Let's get that out of the way. Not while I was breathing.

But he did measure me once. With a look.

I started sleeping under the floorboards after that.

—

It wasn't a long life. Maybe eight years. Maybe less. Hard to tell out there.

I remember chasing field mice through corn that grew tall and then didn't.

I remember catching a bird once and feeling nothing at all.

And I remember watching the man work late into the night, muttering names for things that had no business being named.

He gave me a tin of tuna every Tuesday.

I didn't ask questions.

—

There was one spot in the barn I avoided.

Two glass cases, facing each other.

One held a raccoon. Stuffed. Standing upright like it had something to say but didn't care if you listened.

The other was empty.

It had a brass nameplate, unengraved. Polished to a shine.

I sat in front of it once for a long time.

Didn't touch it. Didn't blink.

I thought about how the raccoon must've felt, waiting for an opponent who never arrived.

I wondered who the box was for.

Then I stopped wondering.

I already knew.

—

The days stretched long and still. Sometimes I climbed onto the roof of the barn and watched the fields shiver under wind. Sometimes I chased shadows through the attic where the floorboards groaned like they were trying to confess.

Once, I caught something that looked like a garden hose but hissed like a kettle. I never caught another.

—

I stopped jumping up on windowsills. Stopped climbing. Everything took too much effort.

Still, I'd visit the barn sometimes, when he wasn't looking.

I'd sit in front of the raccoon.

It wouldn't blink.

I wouldn't either.

Sometimes I thought I saw its paw twitch.

But only when I turned away.

—

One day I stopped eating. Couldn't keep food down. Couldn't be bothered to move.

I curled into a dry patch in the hay and let it happen.

He didn't notice for two days.

When he found me, he just knelt beside me and said, "Knew you'd go quiet."

I wanted to slap him.

Instead, I blinked. Once. Then I was gone.

—

I woke up on the other side of the glass.

Opposite the raccoon.

It had a brass nameplate, engraved. Polished to a shine.

We stared.

Locked in it now.

Forever.

Life Six: The Full English

I came into this life face-first in a pile of laundry and disappointment.

The couple who brought me home were nice enough. Loud. Predictable. The man wore fleece. The woman hoarded mugs with slogans like *Wine O'Clock!* and *Paws and Reflect*.

They thought they were quirky. They bought me a collar with a bell and tried to feed me vegan cat food.

I ate their cheese plant out of spite. Twice. Big leafy bastard just sat there in the corner like it paid rent. Looked more peaceful than either of them. I fixed that.

They called it "a little accident." I called it an improvement.

—

Their schedule never changed.

She left for work at 7:45. Came back with TV dinners and stress. He worked from home in "publishing," which meant typing loudly on his computer and complaining about deadlines while rewatching *Keeping Up Appearances.*

Every morning, they kissed each other goodbye like they were in a toothpaste advert. Every night, they argued about whose turn it was to cook.

I liked sitting between them on the sofa during those arguments. It gave me a sense of balance.

—

My days were quiet. I stared out the window at pigeons. I sat on warm table tops. I shredded curtains. I knocked over a frame that said *Live Laugh Love* because it was asking for it.

I used to sleep on a shelf near the boiler where no one could reach me. The dust was thick. The silence was delicious.

The woman once tried to get me to wear a hat.

I bit her.

—

I died outside of Greggs.

It was raining, and I'd just escaped through the letterbox flap for one of my dramatic walks. I liked those. They made the neighbours talk. "There he goes again, the one with the attitude."

A bike messenger didn't see me.

I didn't see him.

He had his headphones on. I had dignity.

We both lost something that day.

—

I remember lying on the wet pavement, the smell of sausage rolls mixing with petrol.

Someone screamed. Someone ran over. Someone said, “Oh my God, Mr Whiskerson.”

And I thought, ”If I have to die with that name, I swear I’m coming back and haunting their kettle.”

—

The dark came quick.

But this time I didn’t resist it. I just whispered:

“At least I never wore the hat. That’s something.”

———

Life Seven: The Overworked One

We weren't close.

But we were constant.

He never even gave me a name, but he always left a space beside him on the sofa. The warm corner. The one without crumbs.

He didn't talk to me, not really. Just muttered around me. Lists, reminders, half-finished conversations meant for people who never answered.

The flat was always too quiet.

The kind of quiet that hums.

He'd stopped opening windows. The cat flap hadn't worked in weeks. Even the clock on the wall had given up, frozen at five to twelve, no one bothering to reset it.

He worked. Ate. Slept. Sometimes.

Mostly he just… endured.

—

He wasn't miserable, exactly. Just worn.

He laughed at old episodes of telly he'd already seen. Stared at to-do lists like they were written in a dead language.

Sometimes he'd reheat coffee three times before giving up and drinking it cold.

I watched from the windowsill.

Or the arm of the chair.

Or the space between his feet, where the warmth still lingered.

That was my spot.

—

The night before it happened, he stayed up clicking between tabs on his laptop for five straight hours.

Didn't type a thing. Just stared.

The glow lit his face from below, like he was telling ghost stories to himself.

At one point he whispered, "Tomorrow. Just do it tomorrow."

He didn't.

—

It started quiet.

No big moment. No drama.

He stood up. Walked to the kitchen. Put the kettle on.

I watched from the hallway.

He didn't speak. Didn't sigh. Didn't do that thing where he groaned at the floor like it was personally responsible for his pain.

He just stood there.

Completely still.

Like he was waiting for a thought to land.

The kettle clicked off.

He didn’t move.

The light caught him sideways, just enough for me to see his shoulders tense, ever so slightly.

Then –

He dropped.

Not like someone falling. Like someone letting go.

No cry. No twitch. Just the sound of a body hitting lino.

I padded over. Sat next to him.

Watched the kettle fade from red to dark.

Waited.

—

I didn’t panic. Cats don’t.

I stayed with him. Curled beside his ribs. Listened for a heartbeat that didn’t return.

Outside, people argued over parking. Inside, nothing moved.

—

The next day passed in shadows.

So did the one after.

I drank from a dripping tap. Ate what I could reach. Lay back down in the same spot.

He smelled different. But I didn't move.

By the third day, the flat felt abandoned by time itself. Like we'd fallen between the cracks.

Still, I waited.

—

When the door finally opened, the world came crashing back.

The woman screamed.

The man behind her swore and stepped back.

I didn't run.

I didn't flinch.

Someone whispered, "I think the cat's still alive."

For a second, I believed them.

Then everything went quiet again.

———

Life Eight: The Museum

The Museum of Failures wasn't a bad place to spend a life.

Warm floors. High ceilings. Plenty of hiding spots. Dozens of bored interns and underpaid staff who were just lonely enough to give out the good snacks.

I don't know how I got in.

One day I was prowling the bins behind a noodle bar. Next thing I knew, I was trotting between exhibits about broken utopias and corporate mascots that never took off.

No one stopped me.

Eventually, they stopped noticing altogether.

—

I lived between the air vents and the ceiling beams. Slipped through ductwork. Slept behind cabinets.

The best spots were always above the exhibits no one visited. There was one about a submarine that sank on its launch day. No foot traffic. Perfect nap zone.

Staff gave me names, but I never kept them.

To the cleaner, I was "Satan". To the teenage weekend guy, I was "Boss Cat" and once "King Prick" to the receptionist, after I knocked over a £200 mug stand.

—

People came and went. School groups. Tourists. Lonely weirdos. Dates that were going badly.

Some petted me. Some ignored me. One tried to photograph me for a dissertation. I bit him. He cried. Called it immersive performance. Got a distinction.

The building hummed with awkward energy. Failed inventions. Abandoned blueprints. Photos of people who once said “This will change everything” and were wrong. It suited me.

—

Then there was the raccoon.

Bad taxidermy. Standing upright like it had something to say but didn’t care if you listened.

He lived in one of the glass cases near the gift shop. The case next to his held a triple-conjoined pearl. The plaque described it as not worth the oyster’s effort. And he stared.

Not looked. Stared. Like he knew something. Like he was daring the world to blink first.

I stared back. It became a ritual.

Me. Him. Tourists whispering, unsure if this was performance art or low-stakes madness.

Someone once said, “It’s like they know each other.”

We did.

—

One day, I watched a dog take a dump beside a bust of Mussolini.

He locked eyes with me the whole time. Tail high. Face neutral. Like he'd just completed a task of great moral clarity.

I respected it.

He passed me later, gave me a nod.

I didn't return it.

I was busy.

—

Opposite the raccoon, there was an empty case.

It had a brass nameplate, unengraved. Polished to a shine.

I sat in front of it one night.

Didn't move. Didn't blink.

Watched the raccoon watching me.

Thought about what it meant to be on this side of the glass.

I wondered who the box was for.

Then I stopped wondering.

I already knew.

—

I started sleeping more. Ignoring the food. Ignoring the interns.

The lights in the museum dimmed at night, but never went fully dark. It felt right. Like the place never truly wanted to rest.

Neither did I.

Until I did.

I curled up on top of the projector in the Broken Dreams exhibit. Watched the failure reel loop one last time. Half-lit faces. Bent prototypes. Men in suits pretending to believe things would work.

The projector hummed like a lullaby.

I didn't wake up.

—

When I opened my eyes, I was behind glass.

Opposite the raccoon.

He still hadn't blinked.

Neither did I.

———

Life Nine: The Current Life

The flat was full before I arrived.

Two humans. Four dogs. And a cat that preferred sinks to beds and once tried to chase the washing machine.

They didn't pick me on purpose. I was just a formality. A clipboard at the shelter. A half-hearted meow.

But when they brought me home, the chaos paused. For a moment, even the loudest dog just stared at me, head tilted like he'd seen a ghost. I liked that.

—

The other cat was wrong in the head.

Lovely. But wrong.

She'd sit in the bathroom sink for hours, pawing at the tap, utterly transfixed like water might eventually reveal its secrets. She had a fondness for cardboard boxes and chasing ghosts.

I taught her the important things.

Which human gave better snacks (the tall one). Which gave better scratches (the soft one). Which cupboard opened to heaven. Which dog you could climb. Which one would fart and run away.

She listened. Sometimes.

—

The dogs were chaos. Good chaos.

All muscle and mood swings. Heads like concrete blocks. Hearts like overripe fruit.

They weren't smart. But they were kind. The brindle one liked to nap with his nose buried in my fur. The little one had separation anxiety and needed to know where I was at all times.

I got used to being followed.

The humans called us "the lads". Even the girls. I didn't argue. I just accepted it and stole their crisps when they weren't looking.

—

I wasn't allowed out.

Neither was the sink cat.

The humans were too careful. Said we were "too precious". Said the world wasn't safe for cats like us.

So we only went outside when they did. Evenings in the garden. The sound of folding chairs and squeaky tennis balls. The smell of burnt sausages and someone always insisting the wasps weren't that bad.

It was fine.

I'd had worse.

—

They spoiled us.

Bedding on every windowsill. Treats “just because”. I got used to warmth. To comfort. To knowing that when I blinked, someone was still there.

Sometimes the soft one would whisper, “You’re safe now.”

And I’d pretend not to hear her.

But I always did.

—

It started small.

Not eating quite as much.

Sleeping longer.

The jump from the bed to the floor felt... optional.

I missed the cupboard once.

Played it off. Licked my paw. Stared at the wall like it had insulted me.

The sink cat gave me a look. The kind she’d learnt from me. Raised eyebrow. Slight head tilt. Mild concern hidden under mockery.

She was getting good.

—

One night, I didn’t come to dinner.

Not because I was angry. Not because I was plotting.

I just didn’t fancy it.

I sat in the hallway and stared at the door. Not for any reason.

I wasn’t waiting for anything.

I just wanted to sit.

The humans noticed. They always noticed.

Whispers. Rummaging. The sound of a vet appointment being booked.

I didn’t argue.

I was tired. Not the dying kind. Just… the tired kind.

The kind where your bones hum and your eyes don’t quite blink all the way.

So I let them put me in the box.

Didn’t protest.

Didn’t claw.

Just blinked at the soft one like I already knew the ending.

And then everything went dark.

Epilogue: The Bowl Was Full

The vet's lights were still far too bright.

I blinked one eye, then the other. My whole body felt like it had been unplugged and awkwardly reassembled by someone who had read the instructions backwards. My tail gave a twitch. Then a paw. Everything ached, but not in the dramatic sense. More like I'd been borrowed by death and then returned slightly scuffed.

Someone was stroking my back. Not in that rushed, pokey vet way. Proper strokes. Familiar.

"You're alright, Leon?" said a voice I knew. The soft one. The one who always smelt faintly of melon vapes and hairspray.

Leon.

So that's where we are in the story. Took a few lives to get here. But yeah, that's me.

I didn't purr. I'm not soft. But I let out something. A grunt, maybe. Or a wheeze of mild disappointment. Maybe a fart. It was hard to tell.

The tall one was nearby, fiddling with his phone like it might explain me. The vet was muttering something about blood sugar and hormone levels. Maybe a thyroid. Maybe moon magic. I wasn’t listening.

What mattered was this: I wasn't dead, just tired.

—

They wrapped me in that hideous towel. The pink one with the flamingo on it. It wore sunglasses like it had something to prove. Smelled of the sea and old suncream.

I hate that towel.

I love that towel.

—

They even picked up allergy pills from the GP last week.

The soft one said she'd rather sneeze her face off than let me sleep alone.

The tall one agreed, then muttered something about who was paying for the antihistamines.

Idiots.

Good ones.

Mine.

—

Back home, the dogs lost their minds. Barking, spinning, licking my face like I was a dropped chip. One of them brought me a stuffed sausage toy as an offering. I gave it a single swat and a look that said, "Try again."

I dragged myself into the kitchen.

The bowl was full.

I mean really full. Overflowing. Piled up like someone had panicked at the pet shop and decided love was measured in kilos. It was the good stuff too. The one that looked like chicken, smelt like a bin fire, and tasted like vengeance.

I stared at it. Then sat down. Didn't eat. Not yet.

—

Outside, the world hadn't stopped.

The sun slanted across the living room, painting lines on the floor like a barcode. Some idiot child was tearing down the pavement on a scooter. A bird was screaming abuse from the garden fence. Everything was exactly as it always was.

And for the first time, I didn't feel like I had to do anything.

Not climb anything. Not judge anyone. Not die.

I didn’t feel clever, or sharp, or tired.

I felt... here.

—

I curled up on the tall one's jumper, left in the armchair, still warm. There were crumbs in it. I forgave him.

I closed my eyes. Just for a bit.

And thought to myself:

“Maybe this is the life I get to keep.”

———

Author’s note

Thank you for reading *Nocturne for Nine Lives.*

This story began as a joke about a cat with nine lives and far too much sarcasm. It ended up being something else entirely.

To anyone who’s ever loved a pet, lost one, or whispered something daft to an animal and felt understood, this one’s for you.

Marcin Wojdyna

The lads return in *Everything That Fit in the Car.*

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