

5 Glossop Cats

By

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5 GLOSSOP CATS

SCENE: 1: HELIOS, THE BALLOON CAT

Daytime in park

SOUND: BIRDS ETC

HELIOS:

Nearly there. After decades of Doggist propaganda, we will finally have a corrective. I, Helios have volunteered to be the airborne hero for all cat-kind. The balloon is ready, the insulation foaming produced by Glossop's finest (Kooltherm Insulation if you must know). Richard Branson himself has inspected. All is well. I'm sure Branson will not mind one feline passenger. You must understand the weariness of the cat nation, listening for so long to the exploits of Laika, that fool dog the Russians launched in their Sputnik 2. We need our own hero. Since Laika, there has been Ham the Chimp, Horsefield's Tortoise, the Japanese tree frogs. (SIGH) Enough already. Yes yes yes we have had cats in space before, but the PR was terrible. Who knows their name? Yes yes yes, this is only a flight across the Atlantic not into space, but it is flight. And our zero publicity is a scandal. I, Helios will change all that. I will sneak into the basket with Branson, that Master of Promotion, and, lo, when we go up in the balloon and he discovers me, I will become famous. "Glossop Cat Breaks Transatlantic Balloon record". "Branson Praises Glossop Cat Co-Pilot". "Branson Changes Will, Leaves All To Heroic Cat... "

Now of course you may think the contrary, he will throw me out of the balloon: Why carry the extra weight? Why share the rations? Publicity, that's why. He loves the limelight and I make his story bigger. I get him into the weekly mags, the Cat Monthlys, the Waiting Room glossies. Which newspaper would refuse a story like that? Modesty aside, I have been chosen for this job from among Glossop's glorious feline species because of my incredible beauty, I'm ready for my close-ups. And I have my speech buffed for the landing. No doggerel this. Listen, it will have you purring: 'One soft step for a cat, one giant pounce for catkind'. You like? Here he comes.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS, GENERAL COMMOTION OF A CROWD. TREE BRANCHES SWAYING.

This field is windswept and wide open. From my tree here I will have no problem rushing up and my glossy black coat merges purrfectly with these thundery Glossop clouds. Ah. The man himself arrives. Richard, all swaddled and smiling. Flash photography. His

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HELIOS: (cont'd)  
entourage. People milling. The balloon canopy spreading out. The burners in place. Now is the time. Let's do this.

SOUND: BARK OF A DOG, HISS OF A CAT

MALE HUMAN VOICE:  
What's going on, here?

SOUND: GROUP LAUGHTER OF HUMANS

MALE HUMAN VOICE:  
Sorry about this, Mr Branson. You almost had an extra passenger.

SOUND: GENERAL LAUGHTER OF HUMANS

HELIOS:

Get off me! Hands off my paws! I'll take your eye out! This is an affront! Get me the Cat Embassy! No, you don't understand, I am meant to be on board! Richard! Richard! You'll get more publicity with a cat!

SCENE 2: FIRESTARTER

FIRESTARTER:

Don't get vertigo. Do you like the view from here? Special isn't it? Did you know Teak Oil can spontaneously combust? Mirror glass can concentrate the sun's rays, positioned correctly, and ignite stuff? Fire. The Great Chicago Fire. The Great Fire of London. Great fires bring great things. Spin round on all paws. See the fields? Farmers burning stubble - adds potash to the soil. Caesar burnt his bridges coming to England. Fire. Glossop is a wet place. The mills are all by the waterside. Water everywhere. Floods. When the mills were done, dying their watery death, the only way forward was to invoke fire, its opposite element. Any alchemist will tell you. Ask the Old Grey Lady of Howards Town Mill; ask the metals guys at Glossop Superalloys; ask the Glossop Chemicals crew. Heat. Fire. The solution was beaming down at us, that great burning orb up there, Sun. Fire. Waterside Mill burnt down. Wrens Nest burnt down. Howards Town Mill burnt down. Chicago blamed Old Lady Leary's cow. London blamed the bakers. Glossop blames me.

Tabula Rasa. Fire has set us free. They knew, the forefathers. Ouch! My feet are getting hot, this chimney's tin-capped. OK jump! Now walk, use all four paws on claw, keep your tail up. Look across. These mill chimneys bursting the clouds. The highest buildings represent your Gods, right? There. See? Chimneys built higher than church steeples, higher

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FIRESTARTER: (cont'd)

than office blocks, not even the looping viaduct that spans the valley gets close for grandeur. These temples to heat, built by the Victorian seers: seek fire, they're telling us, fire will redeem you. Around fires Glossop will gather once more. Fire is the origins of civilisation, the harnessing of flames. It heralds renewal.... Have a look down there. You see it? Fire. Once again, I have set them free.

SCENE 3: THE BLUE LAGOON, TOLD BY SLATE, THE QUARRY CAT

SLATE:

I saw this pool build. I saw them come. This *boca*, this gape gouged out of the hills, the stone hacked, hammered, lathed, the lumps lorried off. Like Glossop itself, the landscape mauled, the people still feeling the blasts that dynamited their future, left them in this hole of despair.

Time slid. Hope seeped in. The town cat-licked itself, and saw the gape had been filling, slowly, with water. And by some divine intervention, the waters of this gape were the bluest blue. The miracle of the Blue Lagoon was born.

Yes these waters blue as the Riviera, blue as Sunny Spain. Viva la blue lagoon! All those far, foreign places where the deck chairs spread, the brilliant soaking sun, the paellas, the flights with singalongs starting soon after takeoff for the Canaries. All this had arrived here in Glossop at the blue lagoon. Take a lilo, some sun-cream, lie back, imagine sun. Welcome to the Blue Lagoon.

I watched them gather. In vain, the local busybodies told them, Beware! There are cars, dead cows, unknown abandoned objects lurking in those waters, your swim could be your last. The Glossop lads didn't care. They dived in, splashed around. Still the warning voices: "It's not the Mediterranean, its Ph. is close to bleach. The limestone leaks this stuff, this alkaline, that's why the water's blue. C'mon, this is Glossop for heaven's sake! Think about it: would God really have plucked a piece of clear blue sky and flung it down here into these freezing, fog-filled, rain-sodden hills? You'll get a dodgy tummy. Your skin will peel - if you don't freeze to death first with the shock of the icy water."

In vain. In vain. This Blue Lagoon, this little piece of heaven made them come. "We'll take the risk, give it one of our nine lives," the boys said.

Till finally, some clever killjoy came up with the idea of turning the water black. The

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SLATE: (cont'd)

aldermen squirted black dye into the lagoon and it turned soot black. The lads turned away at the bilious sight, and the Blue miracle died.

Yet hope is just displaced. The lads slipped away to another quarry. And if you listen carefully, some summer nights, you will hear the sound of summer raving. The Northern lads, sunk deep in a bone-dry quarry. Yes, the spirit of the blue lagoon lives on...

SCENE 4: NIGHT DIARY OF

SHANGRI-LA

SHANGRI-LA:

Moon Cycle 1  
Humans are bald almost everywhere.

The entire species exhibit strange behaviours. They wash so much that have no smell. Even after they fuck, they wash. What is with that? Why sluice away the best scent? Listen... Hear that upstairs? These two fuck properly. They fuck like cats. I'm not sure why they don't eat us but I remain wary. They have a very weak kill instinct and are often forced to eat vegetables and grasses.

Moon Cycle 2  
So here we all are. Glossop. It's a sorry story. We moved from Manchester - we were slum clearance cast-offs, ordered to an overspill estate in Glossop. The humans didn't want to move but what could they do? The change was hard for them. They found the neighbours cold, the country air cold and there were fields all round. Nobody liked them, nobody welcomed them, they were beneath the locals. Townies.

Mum-human wore that worried look on her face, busy arranging things - the school for the kids, what day the rent collector came. Dad-human was out looking for work. There were plenty of mills around but not many of them taking on labour, and even when they did, they kept it in the family, Dad-human said.

Moon Cycle 3  
My contract with them has always been simple: find mouse, catch mouse, deliver mouse, keep mice away. I have two or three contracts on my Glossop patch now but this family is best. That said, they put out this shit that I'm meant to eat, but it's the warmth I'm after more than anything, and the old lady of course. I gave them some proper food one morning, a mouse - its head off so they could tell it was dead - dropped it in the middle of the carpet. The commotion they struck up! Last time I give them anything. It was a

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SHANGRI-LA: (cont'd)

fat, outdoor, grass-fed one as well, not a town-bred, floorboards eek. It was a delicacy. Wasted. When we first moved here, the old lady -Nan- sat on the settee, crying. I used to sit on her, try to cheer her up but it had no effect, She'd be stroking me, and crying morning and night "why did we have to leave? I don't know anybody here. They don't even sell the right food! Even the cat's stopped purring. Even Shangri La is unhappy!'

The old lady sometimes has me on her knees, when she wears perfume and powders her face, puts on a little black hat with a veil.

In family fights , she likes me by her shoulder, so I can nudge her when I spot someone's lying.

She likes me on top of the television when the TV's on the blink, I have to curl my tail round the wires to act as a signal booster.

As for me being unhappy, the Old Lady was exaggerating, I was OK. She was right about the snow here though. Lethal it was, so high it got up, I had to leap, not walk.

My first time out in Gamesley, I did a spray census: light on mouse, heavy on cat. Poor mouse to cat ratios out here in Glossop. I sniffed and sprayed around. That got the locals agitated: "This is an area of great olfactory deprivation. Terrorised by canines, sans cat flaps, sans pigeons, full of swirling fast waters. With no fish." Sad, the local cats' scaremongering. I ignored them. A few fights later, they let me be.

Moon Cycle 4

Nan was miserable but I did what I could for her, brushed against her legs when she got up, encouraging her to try stepping outside some time. She said the air was biting. Of course she was used to the Manchester smog, she hadn't ever known clean air, poor girl.

First time the kids came back from school and they were bawling, totally bawling - it was a house of tears. The teacher had sat them at the back, they said, called them scum and rubbish and thick and they should go back to the town where they belonged. Nobody would sit with them at lunchtime. That got Mum fired up and she went down there and had a fight with the teachers.

I will tell you this secret. The Old Lady, she is the last Representative in Glossop of the Great Whiskered Cat Man: The Anointed. She alone of the

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SHANGRI-LA: (cont'd)

humans will be born again in higher form, as Cat. She alone keeps the Covenant. Allow me a brief explanation. Please, bear with me, this is not a cult: Under the Covenant of Bastat, High Priest-Cat of Egypt, the world will end unless we of Glossop observe the Cat Passover. This message was brought to Glossop by the Great Whiskered One in 1975 and was the reason I moved here. Every year, we the cats hold off the Apocalypse of Humans - their complete annihilation - by our observation of the Passover. Do we get appreciation for this? Is Dog an intelligent species?!

We have requested a sign from Bastat because we are puzzled: what is the purpose of Dog? Why is Dog put on earth? This slobbery, arse-licking stupidity on four paws? And why is Dog not eaten by the bipeds and made into carpets? Dog, sliced, garnished properly with rat eyes for succulence. Why not?

Moon Cycle 5

Everyone else is in bed, it's time for our ritual, me and Nan. The old lady puts two drops of the libation into my bowl. She drinks the glass while I lap mine. She recites the catechism: 'bottoms up!' A second glass, then we do the dance, me rubbing my scent into her trousers to protect her from Dog Evils, she wriggling her bottom to tell how she wants to mate, same time holding her hands up in praise of the Great Whiskered One, Divine Interpreter of Bastat. We do the song. When it's over, she sets me free into the mushrooming night.

I got back in the small hours and Nan was still up. She was crying. Crying and crying. Mum-Human tried to cheer her up. "They've got a sprung dance floor at the Norfolk Arms. Come dancing Nan, it will do you a world of good. That's it, I'm arranging it now, we'll go tomorrow!" Nan refused unless she could take me.

Moon Cycle 6

They've got a wicker basket, sent the kids off to their Aunty back in Manchester. They forced me into the basket. I bit and scratched - I hate baskets, I could have walked! But it was no use. Off I went with the Old Lady and everyone to the Norfolk Arms. Anyway, if she's going, it's best I go to look after her.

A right good time Nan had. Of course all the locals gawped as Mum, Dad and Nan made sweet work of that sprung floor. And gawped at me in the basket. I only suffered this indignity for the Old Lady's sake. Later that night in the pub, when the family were resting their feet, the locals sent a delegation to their table. "We would kindly ask you to desist from

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SHANGRI-LA: (cont'd)

cavorting on our local dance floor in your Manchester manner which is lascivious to us upstanding citizens of Derbyshire. And also for causing commotion with the incessant rows what you are having in your house, there have been complaints. We being townsfolk of Glossop are not used to these uncouth ways and can you also tighten the bolts on your bed as in the night it is squeaking over-loudly when you are procreating like the wild cats of Manchester, we presume. These are not our ways. Thankyou."

Mum went red. She'd thought the walls of Glossop were thicker than Manchester ones. Dad would have punched them, it would have been total mayhem. "The humiliation, the indignity," Mum said. "But we must take the higher moral ground," Nan weighed in, "always take the higher ground." So we walked out of the No Fuck Arms, with our heads high. Mum said, "ha ha the hoity-toity citizens of Glossop what make their money knocking up the nations knickers" "The Bottom Coddlers of Glossop Society." "The Bum Warmers of Derbyshire Institute." And the bed sang as noisily as ever that night and Mum and Dad laughed away. Even Nan cheered up. She sang this song:

NAN: (SONG)

If I was a pretty little maid  
I would marry any man I want  
If I could marry any man I want  
I would marry a jockey.  
For he would ride and I would ride  
We would ride together  
Oh what fun in the middle of the night  
Riding one another!

SHANGRI-LA:

"Ooo! Shangri La's purring," Nan called, out. "You two love birds up there, Shangri La's purring again!"

When she finally sleeps, I rest at her feet. Every so often I nudge into her face, check her breathing with my whiskers, drag out her fake teeth, spray her room afresh, so she knows, even though she's sleeping, I'm here, protecting her, keeping the Covenant.

Scene 5: ONE THIRD, THE WAREHOUSECAT

ONE THIRD:

Zzzzzz. Zzzzzz. Did those children have no homework to do? I didn't want to be a pet anymore. To hell with them. To hell with naughty boys wandering about the streets all day chasing poor animals like me. So I came here. I was hardly alone two minutes when (God dammit) an alley cat stuck its head in. No, I don't need a partner. Hmmph. A few choice words and he went away.

Hunting river rats was easy compared with dodging kids. Two fat rats later, I curled up and let one and a half eyelids close. That's when the ghosts appeared. Slipping out of the walls, these six grey children in rags with mangled arms, lice hair, moon eyes, all six of them moving in cocoons of cotton dust. Just flickering, moving around, looking lost, occasionally calling out, "Mum!" They'd died in thsi place, I knew, and were stuck in here for some reason. They saw me but left me alone. I returned the favour.

More noise. It was dark now. A cat couldn't get any rest. I dragged myself off the warehouse floor and hid. Last time it was these men with yellow hats like sunflowers. They walked around measuring everything, talked about knocking down the warehouse and building a factory. They didn't think of a poor cat like me. Where was I going to live then? But that was daytime. This was night.

It wasn't them this time. Not enough boots and rustle. Yet some human was definitely walking. The sound went quiet. Maybe it had been my imagination. No, another sound. I sighed, picked my head up from my paws, turned my ears and listened fully. A clacking sound, echoing all over the building. Quamp quamp.

This was new. Who the heck was it? I crept up. There was a girl, walking on her toes in panic, trying to see in the dark with her useless human eyes. Laughable really but humans are tryers. What was she doing here? I watched from behind a pillar. Rain was splattering the warehouse walls, whipping in through the window spaces. Lightning lit the floor for a moment. The six cotton kids cringed at the sudden light. The girl looked right through them. She saw the floor and sat down where she was, in the middle of the wreckages. She burst into tears. That drew the kids to her. They sat down around her in a circle. Of course she didn't notice them, humans never do, she just kept on crying.

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ONE THIRD: (cont'd)

You came here all this way to cry? I left her to the cotton kids and went back into the walls to wait for mice. My eyelids shut again. I was devouring a fish, eating it up to my larynx. I realised it was just a dream, but it was a good one, my favourite, and I kept it going. I was about to bite into the fish-head when there was this scream. One long, girl scream. What the hell? I lifted an eyelid. It seemed there would be no sleep for me tonight.

I padded over. The girl was on the ground way below, holding her leg. She'd fallen down the big void where the stairs had been. The stairs had long gone and it was a pretty stupid thing to try step there, but that's humans for you. The girl looked at me and stopped crying. I sat above her, looking down, weighing up her dark eyes and silk hair, considering how mouse-like she was.

She began talking to me: "I'm so glad you're here. I've broke me ankle, I can't move. I'm so so stupid. I shouldn't of left home." She started crying again. "I loved this boy but me mum told me I was too young to have a boyfriend so we ran off. Well, he was supposed to meet me at the station but he wasn't there. I got the train to Manchester, only I think I caught the wrong train." More crying.

The six cotton kid ghosts had all climbed down into the stairwell and were sitting listening to her, sniffing at her story.

Hey! Hey, I got a sob story too! You know why my name is One Third? Because my mother didn't have enough milk for seven kitties. I stayed hungry all the time. I nearly died of starvation 'nuff times, but I survived. The girl fell asleep. The six ghost kids climbed up and left. Typical. Nobody wants to hear my story. It even bores me.

I was about to leave in the morning when I heard her crying again, calling out to me. "Kitty Kitty Kitty! Please don't leave me!" I showed her my face a couple of times but I was done with conversation. I waited for those yellowish hats to come. When they finally arrived, I stood in the middle of the big door and started meowing and screaming. Jeez! The effort it took to catch these hats' attention, I almost had to tear my throat out. Finally they came. I had them follow me, all the way to the stairwell void. Now the girl had stopped crying. Cry now, girl! Humans. Useless.

MALE VOICE 1:

Dumb cat. Making all that noise about nothing.

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ONE THIRD:

The hats were about to walk away. I jumped down onto her face and she screamed. The yellowish hats turned back and saw her, even with their dim eyes they could see her.

MALE VOICES MEDLEY:

Go get a rope! No, phone the ambulance! 999 now!

BUILDER 1:

What?

BUILDER 2:

Nothing... Just I thought I saw a ghost down there. Six ghosts actually.

ONE THIRD:

Humans. I've had enough of them. I need to find a new home.