

A Midnight Snack

Hunger was a constant companion to Moira. It was like acid dissolving her stomach, hurting her so incessantly that she'd grown numb to it. Her hunger was the *ouroboros*, the self-devouring snake, and that night, the pain spiked as if the snake bit a major organ, urging her to hunt. Dragging herself from her den, she meandered the Scottish Highlands, searching for some unlucky soul. A cool breeze caressed her ebony fur like a mother soothing an unsatisfied child. Claws pierced the soft dirt while fur absorbed all light, blending into the night-hugged grass. Only a small circle of white fur intimated the creature's presence. The beast slunk through the hills, stomach flattening every blade of grass as she trekked towards the rippling river touched by Death's cold hand. As usual, Death's lingering scent had galvanized the Cat Sìth with the promise of food, only for her to find nothing except the rhythmic lapping of water onto a stony shore. Head low, she started sulking back towards her den when Death's aroma drifted up to her nose. The scent tugged her downstream where she found Death lurking behind the closed doors of a receding ambulance. Like a dog chasing a friend it hasn't yet met, the Cat Sìth chased the vehicle left and right, up and down.

Beyond the hills, small lights appeared like will-o'-the-wisps. The ambulance vanished into the town as it rounded a curve, leaving the spectral cat alone while she paused at the town's doorstep. Human interaction was, above all other things, a nuisance to the Cat Sìth; it was like peas, spoiling every meal it married which was why she'd avoided the vale for centuries, opting to prowl the desolate Highlands, scavenging for food like a vulture. Unfortunately, the Highlands had a history of famine and like many before her, the creature was forced to forage for food elsewhere. Creeping in the shadows, she trudged her way into the small town.

"Kittyyyy!" squealed a pair of voices.

The Cat Sìth turned around, growling at the two tiny people trying to touch her. Tail twitching, she sauntered away, imagining the fun she would've had if she hadn't shifted into a cat for the ninth time. If she hadn't shifted, if she'd remained a witch, if people still knew her mercilessness, then she would've helped the kids take up a new hobby: dancing. Perhaps, the witch pondered, they would've enjoyed whirling into a herd of riled horses or twirling across a sea of broken glass.

At last alone, Moira realized how much the streets had changed. Smooth cement replaced dirt roads; rumbling engines replaced clip-clopping hooves; and tall, close-knit, stone buildings replaced scattered shanties. The most significant change, however, was the musky scent that coated everything like a generous layer of invisible paint. The smell from the river vanished, becoming the drop in a sea of Death. The scent sullied the air with its burnt, slightly decayed scent. Death cocooned the whole town in its dark cloak and dripped from the metal pipes connected to the strange beetle-like vehicles.

What is this? wondered the witch, investigating. Wrinkling her nose at the pungent odor, she turned away. She needed something fresh to eat, not whatever that was. The smell was intoxicating to her, though, like fermented death. It wouldn't satiate her hunger, but she turned back, examining the car, enraptured by its aroma and shiny exoskeleton. The slamming of car doors snatched Moira out of her reverie. Crouching down, she attempted to melt into the shadows when large hands snaked around her torso. Panicked, she thrashed, chomping down on fingers and slashing at wrists.

Your soul will be delicious once I steal it from your cold, dead body, the Cat Sith seethed.

Even as beads of blood paraded and glistened from new bites and scratches, the hands did not let go.

"What's your problem, kitty? You could've been squished by the car."

Moira squirmed, still trying to slip through the stranger's grasp. *I will end you.*

"Calm down, kitty. I know all the cats who live here—" *Stalker.* "—but I've never seen you before, either the Murrays got a fourth cat or you're livin' on your own."

If the Murrays are morons like you, I'll be sure to end them, too.

Once the Cat Sith stopped struggling, the man began strolling down the street. Apart from the cars, Moira decided, the town was unimpressive. There were so many souls to potentially steal, but that also meant there were so many annoying people to encounter (like the man carrying her). As they neared a stone cottage, the man stopped, knocking on the door. A tall brunette opened the door. Her eyes widened as her gaze landed on the man's arms.

"Did that cat beat you up, Conall?" she asked.

Well at least somebody acknowledges my hard work.

"Aye. I found her investigatin' a car, coulda got run over. I came to see if she was yours.

"She's not. I—"

"Kitty!" exclaimed two distinct voices.

Ugh.

The two children she'd growled at earlier shambled towards her, arms outstretched. She was about to growl again when one of them spoke.

"Can we keep her?"

"We already have three cats."

"But we already know her. We're already best friends!"

"Yeah," chimed the other kid, "we met her earlier, but she ran away."

Stupidly, the kids began petting Moira.

"See? She *loves* us."

Normally, Moira would have bitten their tiny hands off. But they were dafter than Conall, and thus would be easier to escape, so she started purring as she imagined herself maiming all of them.

"Maybe she just doesn't like me," suggested Conall as the woman glanced curiously at the purring cat who'd shredded Conall's arm.

He tried to pet Moira but froze at her growl.

Touch me and I will slice your jugular. These two touching me is already torture enough.

Hesitantly, the woman reached out her hand to pet Moira. She wanted to growl, she really did. Trying to suppress her growl was like trying to submerge a balloon beneath water.

Unfortunately, she had to make this woman “adopt” her so she could escape later. As the woman pet her, she remained still and pictured herself slapping the woman with her own cut-off hand.

“Well, I guess it is just me.”

It’s not, but please get lost.

“Are you goin’ to keep her or should I take her to a shelter?”

“Can we keep her, mom?”

“Pretty pleaseeee.”

The woman sighed, “She can stay for now.”

“YAYYY! YOU’RE STAYING WITH US, KITTY!”

Someone kill me now.

After losing half of her fur to the kids’ overzealous petting, she was deposited in a small bedroom where she quickly fell asleep, relieved to be left alone. Her peaceful solitude was broken as footsteps clicked against the floor and the door creaked open. The woman entered and dropped a bowl in front of Moira. Disgust filled her as she saw the food: hard, dry pellets. Somehow, humans managed to turn the delicate flesh of fish into stones. Once the woman left, she tapped the food, incredulous then curled up and slept. A bowl of water appeared in the middle of the night, and the food taunted her when she woke up again. In the daylight, it was even more repulsive. Peeved, she put all of her weight onto the edge of the bowl, tipping it over with a *CLANG!* The hard food scattered everywhere, covering the floor. Gracefully, she jumped up onto the window sill to survey her work. If only she could completely trash the room...

She heard footsteps approaching and calmly waited for the door to open, preparing her best mask of innocence. The woman opened the door, glanced at the floor and sighed. She picked up every single food pebble on her knees.

Peasant, snorted the Cat Sìth, pleased that the woman was working for her like a maid. *This is much better.*

Ignoring the woman, the witch turned her attention to the window. Even if she could flip the latches, she’d still have to slide the window up and get the netted screen out of the way. Or if she could turn the doorknob, she could escape. She sighed as she realized that opposable thumbs would be just as useful as magic right now. She’d have to slip out of the bedroom door and the front door somehow. The best chance she had was befriending the humans even though she’d rather see them working for her or leaving her alone.

The woman re-entered the room with a new bowl. *She better not have that vile food.* She set the food down on the floor. It actually smelled good like tuna. The woman left; Moira jumped down from her perch. It was tuna. Hungrily, she scarfed it down. At least, the woman knew now to give her good food.

Apparently, the woman was not as smart as Moira had originally credited her to be. After several more instances of refusing to eat and spilling the cat food all over the floor, the woman finally served her fresh meat every single meal. Weeks went by without Moira leaving the room which was a curse because she couldn't escape and the kids always knew where she was. They were annoying, always trying to pet her. But luckily, Moira was often able to hide from them under the bed, in the closet, or on top of a bookshelf.

Months later, Moira remained stuck in the house. She could now roam the whole house, but the woman and her husband always kept an eye on Moira as if they knew she was planning on leaving. Several times, the three other cats that lived there tried to approach Moira. In front of everybody, she just growled and hissed at them. But behind their backs, she gave the other cats swift swats and pushed them down until they learned to leave her alone. Months faded into years, Moira began resembling a bowling ball, and the kids became even more annoying adults. The parents found Moira's long lifespan odd, especially because she didn't look any older, but they shrugged it off. Everybody pet Moira now, even Conall who occasionally visited. Initially, she hated it, but the family learned to bribe Moira with fish.

Moira still lived with the family after several decades. The father died in a car accident while the mother died at home in her sleep. Moira nearly felt bad when she stole the woman's soul, but as it was the first soul she'd stolen in decades, she really didn't care. The Murrays knew their cat was peculiar with her unnatural age, but every generation cared for her, making sure to feed her fish. Moira did not mind, especially not once they let her roam outside. She was able to eat fish every day, be warm, and steal the occasional soul. Life was good.