

A KITCHEN CAT SPEAKS

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There will be a cat that can speak. All the people of the town will be very proud of their speaking cat.

People will come every day to hear what it has to say.

It will be very cynical but never mean.

It will see everything and understand it all.

After a while people will only come on the weekends or drop by on the way home from work or school.

During quiet times people will come and read all the newspapers to the cat or surf the Internet and find good stories about world affairs that might be of interest.

One morning it will rain.

Things will have been very quiet in the world and the cat will have nothing to say. You might even think that the cat will be mildly depressed.

A young boy and girl will come to see the cat on the way to school. This kind of thing will make the cat nervous.

It will be sophisticated but it will betray its feelings through movements of its tail. The cat will like a degree of order. It will call this “natural order” – something that will imply that people can be trusted to do the right thing.

And coming to see the cat on the way to school will not always be the right thing to do because it will mean that the children will be late.

But as we will find out, the cat will be mildly depressed, suffering from ennui and even bored by its role as the only talking cat in the whole world.

The cat will want to know what is going on.

Only by feeding it information will it be wise, interesting or even funny. But on this day it will have no new stories.

It will hope that the children look on Google News or even Le Monde Diplomatique and feed its surprisingly agile brain.

But the children will just stand in the doorway. They will be slightly scared of the talking cat.

Something about it will make them nervous.

Something deep down in their psyche will know that there is evil in this building.

But they will like it when the cat coughs.

They will find it very sweet when the cat laughs.

But if the cat cries they will have nightmares for days – nasty nightmares that they won’t be able to control and that will come at the worst times.

Nightmares that will wake them up and make them think of machines in deserts doing terrible things.

So the children will just stand in the doorway.

Not moving.

And the cat will stay stuck on the top of the kitchen cabinets.

The cat will not speak.

The children will not speak.

The cat will be in the kitchen.

And the children will be in the kitchen.

To break the deadlock the cat will cough and shift its head.

It will speak but unlike other cats, it will no longer smile.

“Well, what are you doing here?”

The cat will say.

It won’t have spoken for a few days and whenever that happens it will have lost its accent and clarity and will have begun to speak with a cat accent.

The children will hear something like,

“Wheel waa aaa yew doo eng eer?”

They will move closer. Hoping to hear more clearly.

“What did it say?” the girl will say to the boy...

“Something about wheels and danger,” the boy will say.

“I don’t think it did.” The girl will say...

The cat will try to smile, but it will just screw up its face into an ugly grimace.

“I don’t like it,” the boy will say.

“I don’t like it,” the girl will say.

“I don’t like you,” the cat will think.

“Please come and tell me something,” the cat will say.

The boy and the girl will move even closer.

They will be curious to touch the cat’s fur and find out if it likes to be stroked. Once it starts to speak people will respect it more than love it.

But they will all stop touching the cat.

There will have been a point when it had been touched and loved and played with.

But now all people will want to know is its position on the history of totalitarian architecture or the restriction of credit within the context of failed models of globalization.

On this particular morning, after all this rain and all this mild depression the cat will feel its catness flooding back.

It will want someone to read to it but more than that it will want these children to play with it.

The boy will hold out his hand towards the girl.

She will take it in hers.

They will walk very slowly up to the cat.

“Good morning speaking cat,” the girl will say, because she will be quite brave during complicated social situations.

“Morning,” the cat will say, trying hard now to win back its voice and speak as clearly as a human.

“If it’s not too much trouble,” the cat will say, “you could update me on world affairs. I would love it if you looked through some Internet news aggregators for me.”

The children will look confused. They won’t know what an aggregator is.

This cat will have become a little pretentious over time.

“We were hoping you might tell us something,” the boy will say.

“We have no school today,” the girl will lie.

The boy will look nervous.

The cat will be wise and will know the school schedules.

The cat will know that school starts in five minutes and the children will definitely be late.

But today of all days, it won’t care.

It won’t mind if the children miss out on their lessons or their playtime.

It won’t care if they miss lunch or free-time in the library.

All it will care about is that someone is here on a dark day in a dark building.

It will sniff.

The breath of the children will be close.

It will have learnt that humans know that cats steal their breath.

The cat will know that this is nonsense.

It is buildings like this that steal people's breath.

Anyway. What's wrong with borrowing some child's breath for a while?

All cats know that it smells sweet and is full of intelligence and goodness and fun.

It will take a deep surreptitious suck of the children's breath and as they reel and swoon, glide and dream it will begin to tell them a true story about the wisdom of a kitchen cat...

