



Cat-A-Tonic

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"Meow," I protested.

But my tiny squeal of protest came to no avail as Anika handed me to a sullen-looking, lanky boy whose eyes were as tiny as my paws but certainly not as cute.

I struggled a bit in his bony arms that resembled those things Anika's dad used to pick food from his teeth. But surprisingly, the human was strong.

"I owe you a lot," Anika grinned at him, "Thanks again, bruh."

Bruh?

Oh, so that was his name.

Bruh gave Anika a plastic smile and shut the door quietly as Anika left after giving me one of those feather-like scratches near my ears. This girl loved me so much. Yet, I just couldn't comprehend why she couldn't take me with her to those aeroplanes she took pictures in. Didn't she know how lazy I am? Would I ever care to disturb other people there? No. Then why couldn't she just take me with her?

I let Bruh know that I'm dissatisfied by meowing in that odd way Anika finds adorable but still knows that something got me upset. Bruh however, I realised, wasn't as smart as Anika. Without a hint, he just dropped me into the nearest couch and slouched to the refrigerator.

And thus started my short life with Bruh.

All my life, whenever any human came across me, they would just go crazy over me. They would absolutely drool over my unblemished white fur, small, curling ears, padded pink paws and my beady ocean eyes. I, on the other hand, secretly enjoyed all their attention but still made a grumpy face. And they would love that too!

But this obnoxious, snarky Bruh didn't

even regard my existence. He didn't cuddle me or not once did he gush, "How cute!" In my attempt to get some compliments that I deserve, I even *co-incidentally* stayed where he stayed. But, Bruh's ever grumpy face beat mine. He would stay huddled in his room all day long, either listening to really loud songs that felt like people were scratching their walls instead of singing or burying his crooked nose and eyes over his smartphone. Sometimes he'd stare at nothing in particular and just think; his face like those rain-washed stones. But it would last only some minutes before he again got back to his boring routine.

Then one day something happened.

I was, as usual, lying majestically on the plush carpet in Bruh's room, contemplating whether Anika is paying Bruh to babysit me. The money she wasted. She could've got me a brand new fancy litter box. I would certainly have been happier. But even though I definitely didn't like Bruh, I had a thing for his room. Dark, with posters of horrifying men shooting invisible laser beams with their eyes and breathing invisible fire from their gigantic mouths splayed across the walls; furnished sloppily with wooden surfaces, his room was a total bop (I don't exactly know what it means but I hear Anika use it all the time). Though it was an oddly chilled room but the warm, fuzzy carpet on which I rolled merrily made up for it.

It was late at night when Bruh strolled into his room. He threw his monster of a bag onto his bed and then just plopped on the floor. I merely lifted my eyes at him. *Kids*.

Bruh crossed his legs, then again shifted and straightened them and then again curled into a ball. He got my attention then. Never had I seen Bruh

move so much in just a few seconds.

Then, without any warning at all, he broke into tears.

I was really horrified. If suddenly sirens sang, it would've been so much more realistic. But seeing Bruh crying with all that snot and huge droplets of tears was just too unreal for my cat eyes. Maybe I was losing my night vision.

Bruh cried, his body revving like an engine for about five minutes and then suddenly, stopped. It was like somebody just paused a movie and he froze. But I was so sure that out lives were real.

I sat up, testing whether I was frozen too. When I hefted myself up in a sitting position, Bruh also took the chance to impose that I was wrong: he wasn't frozen. He gained composure and then rocked back and forth. In that moment, though, I realised that during his whole episode, he didn't even notice me. This infuriated me. He needed to know I witnessed his sudden vulnerability, that he wasn't alone.

So I, the grumpiest cat I know, slowly made my way to him and said in the most condescending tone I could manage:

"Meow."

Bruh blinked a couple of times and mumbled, "Oh, you're here."

"Meow."

The next thing I knew, I was crushed inside Bruh's arms like the first day, and this ever-silent, morose kid started talking (and occasionally spitting) like those noisy rappers he listened to most of the time:

"I'm so tired. Like, I can't just go on anymore. It's so suffocating. Meeting everyone. Meeting everyone's expectations. I just-I don't know. I need to breathe but I can't. Why is life so difficult? I don't understand. Everyone around me has to just abandon me when I really

need them. I feel so... I don't know. I want to tell somebody, hug —"

"Meow." I intervened. Wow, Bruh has officially lost it.

"I feel so alone. I am alone.

LITERALLY"

"MEOW." I don't know why I said this. But the kid saying he was alone was just getting on my nerves. Who says they're alone when such a gorgeous creature like myself is around? Do only humans count as companions? Was I not there listening to his rant? Though I can't discern it properly but at least I'm LISTENING.

Bruh looked at me. No, gaped at me. If he was going to label me as the strange one here, then, well, I'd already worked out that he had gone bonkers.

"Wait. I'm not alone!" he gushed aloud all of a sudden, his eyes boring into my elegant frame, and again knocked the air out of me in his wire like arms. "I'm not. I'm not!"

I was glad that he finally took notice of my existence but could he just stop crushing me?

"Oh wow, I never knew it felt so nice to cuddle you," he awkwardly grinned at me when he let go. Of course, it felt nice to cuddle me. Did he not see my layers and fluffs of fur?

"Oddly, I feel better. No wonder Anika says you're a gem. Oh she's returning tomorrow. Wait why did you meow though?" he said now, slowly returning to his old paranoid self. Amidst that tear stained face and blotchy nose, the ripples of frowns were returning, the long face contorting to the usual mask of irritation.

"Meow," I said.

Maisha Nazifa Kamal doesn't understand why the black cats meow at everyone else except her. Send her ways to communicate with them at 01shreshtha7@gmail.com