The Slum Cat

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Category: Short Stories

Submit by: JonWittwer November 2011

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LIFE I

"M-e-a-t! M-e-a-t!" came shrilling down Scrimper's Alley. Surely the Pied Piper of Hamelin was there, for it seemed that all the Cats in the neighborhood were running toward the sound, though the Dogs, it must be confessed, looked scornfully indifferent.

"Meat! Meat!" and louder; then the centre of attraction came in view--a rough, dirty little man with a push-cart; while straggling behind him were a score of Cats that joined in his cry with a sound nearly the same as his own. Every fifty yards, that is, as soon as a goodly throng of Cats was gathered, the push-cart stopped. The man with the magic voice took out of the box in his cart a skewer on which were pieces of strong-smelling boiled liver. With a long stick he pushed the pieces off. Each Cat seized on one, and wheeling, with a slight depression of the ears and a little tiger growl and glare, she rushed away with her prize to devour it in some safe retreat.

"Meat! Meat!" And still they came to get their portions. All were well known to the meat-man. There was Castiglione's Tiger; this was Jones's Black; here was Pralitsky's "Torkershell," and this was Madame Danton's White; there sneaked Blenkinshoff's Maltee, and that climbing on the barrow was Sawyer's old Orange Billy, an impudent fraud that never had had any financial backing.--all to be remembered and kept in account. This one's owner was sure pay, a dime a week; that one's doubtful. There was John Washee's Cat, that got only a small piece because John was in arrears. Then there was the saloon-keeper's collared and ribboned ratter, which got an extra lump because the 'barkeep' was liberal; and the rounds-man's Cat, that brought no cash, but got unusual consideration because the meat-man did. But there were others. A black Cat with a white nose came rushing confidently with the rest, only to be repulsed savagely. Alas! Pussy did not understand. She had been a pensioner of the barrow for months. Why this unkind change? It was beyond her comprehension. But the meat-man knew. Her mistress had stopped payment. The meat-man kept no books but his memory, and it never was at fault.

Outside this patrician 'four hundred' about the barrow, were other Cats, keeping away from the push-cart because they were not on the list, the Social Register as it were, yet fascinated by the heavenly smell and the faint possibility of accidental good luck. Among these hangers-on was a thin gray Slummer, a homeless Cat that lived by her wits--slab-sided and not over-clean. One could see at a glance that she was doing her duty by a family in some out-of-the-way corner. She kept one eye on the barrow circle and the other on the possible Dogs.

She saw a score of happy Cats slink off with their delicious 'daily' and their tiger-like air, but no opening for her, till a big Tom of her own class sprang on a little pensioner with intent to rob. The victim dropped the meat to defend herself against the enemy, and before the 'all-powerful' could intervene, the gray Slummer saw her chance, seized the prize, and was gone.
She went through the hole in Menzie's side door and over the wall at the back, then sat down and devoured the lump of liver, licked her chops, felt absolutely happy, and set out by devious ways to the rubbish-yard, where, in the bottom of an old cracker-box, her family was awaiting her. A plaintive mewing reached her ears. She went at speed and reached the box to see a huge Black Tom-cat calmly destroying her brood. He was twice as big as she, but she went at him with all her strength, and he did as most animals will do when caught wrong-doing, he turned and ran away. Only one was left, a little thing like its mother, but of more pronounced color--gray with black spots, and a white touch on nose, ears, and tail-tip. There can be no question of the mother's grief for a few days; but that wore off, and all her care was for the survivor. That benevolence was as far as possible from the motives of the murderous old Tom there can be no doubt; but he proved a blessing in deep disguise, for both mother and Kit were visibly bettered in a short time. The daily quest for food continued. The meat-man rarely proved a success, but the ash-cans were there, and if they did not afford a meat-supply, at least they were sure to produce potato-skins that could be used to allay the gripe of hunger for another day.

One night the mother Cat smelt a wonderful smell that came from the East River at the end of the alley. A new smell always needs investigating, and when it is attractive as well as new, there is but one course open. It led Pussy to the docks a block away, and then out on a wharf, away from any cover but the night. A sudden noise, a growl and a rush, were the first notice she had that she was cut off by her old enemy, the Wharf Dog. There was only one escape. She leaped from the wharf to the vessel from which the smell came. The Dog could not follow, so when the fish-boat sailed in the morning Pussy unwillingly went with her and was seen no more.

II

The Slum Kitten waited in vain for her mother. The morning came and went. She became very hungry. Toward evening a deep-laid instinct drove her forth to seek food. She slunk out of the old box, and feeling her way silently among the rubbish, she smelt everything that seemed eatable, but without finding food. At length she reached the wooden steps leading down into Jap Malee's bird-store underground. The door was open a little. She wandered into a world of rank and curious smells and a number of living things in cages all about her. A negro was sitting idly on a box in a corner. He saw the little stranger enter and watched it curiously. It wandered past some Rabbits. They paid no heed. It came to a wide-barred cage in which was a Fox. The gentleman with the bushy tail was in a far corner. He crouched low; his eyes glowed. The Kitten wandered, sniffing, up to the bars, put its head in, sniffed again, then made toward the feed-pan, to be seized in a flash by the crouching Fox. It gave a frightened "mew," but a single shake cut that short and would have ended Kitty's nine lives at once, had not the negro come to the rescue. He had no weapon and could not get into the cage, but he spat with such copious vigor in the Fox's face that he dropped the Kitten and returned to the corner, there to sit blinking his eyes in sullen fear.

The negro pulled the Kitten out. The shake of the beast of prey seemed to have stunned the victim, really to have saved it much suffering. The Kitten seemed unharmed, but giddy. It tottered in a circle for a time, then slowly revived, and a few minutes later was purring in the negro's lap, apparently none the worse, when Jap Malee, the bird-man, came home.

Jap was not an Oriental; he was a full-blooded Cockney, but his eyes were such little accidental slits aslant in his round, flat face, that his first name was forgotten in the highly descriptive title of "Jap." He was not especially unkind to the birds and beasts whose sales were supposed to furnish his living, but his eye was on the main chance; he knew what he wanted. He didn't want the Slum Kitten.

The negro gave it all the food it could eat, then carried it to a distant block and dropped it in a neighboring iron-yard.

III

One full meal is as much as any one needs in two or three days, and under the influence of this stored-up heat and power, Kitty was very lively. She walked around the piled-up rubbish, cast curious glances on far-away Canary-birds in
cages that hung from high windows; she peeped over fences, discovered a large Dog, got quietly down again, and
presently finding a sheltered place in full sunlight, she lay down and slept for an hour. A slight 'sniff' awakened her,
and before her stood a large Black Cat with glowing green eyes, and the thick neck and square jaws that distinguish the
Tom; a scar marked his cheek, and his left ear was torn. His look was far from friendly; his ears moved backward a
little, his tail twitched, and a faint, deep sound came from his throat. The Kitten innocently walked toward him. She did
not remember him. He rubbed the sides of his jaws on a post, and quietly, slowly turned and disappeared. The last that
she saw of him was the end of his tail twitching from side to side; and the little Slummer had no idea that she had been
as near death to-day, as she had been when she ventured into the fox-cage.

As night came on the Kitten began to feel hungry. She examined carefully the long invisible colored stream that the
wind is made of. She selected the most interesting of its strands, and, nose-led, followed. In the corner of the iron-yard
was a box of garbage. Among this she found something that answered fairly well for food; a bucket of water under a
faucet offered a chance to quench her thirst.

The night was spent chiefly in prowling about and learning the main lines of the iron-yard. The next day she passed as
before, sleeping in the sun. Thus the time wore on. Sometimes she found a good meal at the garbage-box, sometimes
there was nothing. Once she found the big Black Tom there, but discreetly withdrew before he saw her. The water-
bucket was usually at its place, or, failing that, there were some muddy little pools on the stone below. But the garbage-
box was very unreliable. Once it left her for three days without food. She searched along the high fence, and seeing a
small hole, crawled through that and found herself in the open street. This was a new world, but before she had
ventured far, there was a noisy, rumbling rush--a large Dog came bounding, and Kitty had barely time to run back into
the hole in the fence. She was dreadfully hungry, and glad to find some old potato-peelings, which gave a little respite
from the hunger-pang. In the morning she did not sleep, but prowled for food. Some Sparrows chirruped in the yard.
They were often there, but now they were viewed with new eyes. The steady pressure of hunger had roused the wild
hunter in the Kitten; those Sparrows were game--were food. She crouched instinctively and stalked from cover to
cover, but the chirpers were alert and flew in time. Not once, but many times, she tried without result except to confirm
the Sparrows in the list of things to be eaten if obtainable.

On the fifth day of ill luck the Slum Kitty ventured forth into the street, desperately bent on finding food. When far
from the haven hole some small boys opened fire at her with pieces of brick. She ran in fear. A Dog joined in the chase,
and Kitty's position grew perilous; but an old-fashioned iron fence round a house-front was there, and she slipped in
between the rails as the Dog overtook her. A woman in a window above shouted at the Dog. Then the boys dropped a
piece of cat-meat down to the unfortunate; and Kitty had the most delicious meal of her life. The stoop afforded a
refuge. Under this she sat patiently till nightfall came with quiet, then sneaked back like a shadow to her old iron-yard.

Thus the days went by for two months. She grew in size and strength and in an intimate knowledge of the immediate
neighborhood. She made the acquaintance of Downey Street, where long rows of ash-cans were to be seen every
morning. She formed her own ideas of their proprietors. The big house was to her, not a Roman Catholic mission, but a
place whose garbage-tins abounded in choicest fish scrapings. She soon made the acquaintance of the meat-man, and
joined in the shy fringe of Cats that formed the outer circle. She also met the Wharf Dog as well as two or three other
horrors of the same class. She knew what to expect of them and how to avoid them; and she was happy in being the
inventor of a new industry. Many thousand Cats have doubtless hung, in hope, about the tempting milk-cans that the
early milk-man leaves on steps and window-ledges, and it was by the merest accident that Kitty found one with a
broken lid, and so was taught to raise it and have a satisfying drink. Bottles, of course, were beyond her, but many a can
has a misfit lid, and Kitty was very painstaking in her efforts to discover the loose-jointed ones. Finally she extended
her range by exploration till she achieved the heart of the next block, and farther, till once more among the barrels and
boxes of the yard behind the bird-man's cellar.

The old iron-yard never had been home, she had always felt like a stranger there; but here she had a sense of
ownership, and at once resented the presence of another small Cat. She approached this newcomer with threatening air.
The two had got as far as snarling and spitting when a bucket of water from an upper window drenched them both and
effectually cooled their wrath. They fled, the newcomer over the wall, Slum Kitty under the very box where she had
been born. This whole back region appealed to her strongly, and here again she took up her abode. The yard had no more garbage food than the other and no water at all, but it was frequented by stray Rats and a few Mice of the finest quality; these were occasionally secured, and afforded not only a palatable meal, but were the cause of her winning a friend.

IV

Kitty was now fully grown. She was a striking-looking Cat of the tiger type. Her marks were black on a very pale gray, and the four beauty-spots of white on nose, ears, and tail-tip lent a certain distinction. She was very expert at getting a living, and yet she had some days of starvation and failed in her ambition of catching a Sparrow. She was quite alone, but a new force was coming into her life.

She was lying in the sun one August day, when a large Black Cat came walking along the top of a wall in her direction. She recognized him at once by his torn ear. She slunk into her box and hid. He picked his way gingerly, bounded lightly to a shed that was at the end of the yard, and was crossing the roof when a Yellow Cat rose up. The Black Torn glared and growled, so did the Yellow Tom. Their tails lashed from side to side. Strong throats growled and yowled. They approached each other with ears laid back, with muscles a-tense.

"Yow-yow-ow!" said the Black One.

"Wow-w-w!" was the slightly deeper answer.

"Ya-wow-wow-wow!" said the Black One, edging up half an inch nearer.

"Yow-w-w!" was the Yellow answer, as the blond Cat rose to full height and stepped with vast dignity a whole inch forward. "Yow-w!" and he went another inch, while his tail went swish, thump, from one side to the other.

"Ya-wow-yow-w!" screamed the Black in a rising tone, and he backed the eighth of an inch, as he marked the broad, unshrinking breast before him.

Windows opened all around, human voices were heard, but the Cat scene went on.

"Yow-yow-ow!" rumbled the Yellow Peril, his voice deepening as the other's rose.

"Yow!" and he advanced another step.

Now their noses were but three inches apart; they stood sidewise, both ready to clinch, but each waiting for the other. They glared for three minutes in silence and like statues, except that each tail-tip was twisting.

The Yellow began again. "Yow-ow-ow!" in deep tone.

"Ya-a-a--a-a!" screamed the Black, with intent to strike terror by his yell; but he retreated one sixteenth of an inch. The Yellow walked up a long half-inch; their whiskers were mixing now; another advance, and their noses almost touched.

"Yo-w-w!" said Yellow, like a deep moan.

"Y-a-a-a-a-a-a!" screamed the Black, but he retreated a thirty-second of an inch, and the Yellow Warrior closed and clinched like a demon.

Oh, how they rolled and bit and tore, especially the Yellow One!

How they pitched and gripped and hugged, but especially the Yellow One!

Over and over, sometimes one on top, sometimes another, but mostly the Yellow One; and farther till they rolled off the roof, amid cheers from all the windows. They lost not a second in that fall to the junk-yard; they tore and clawed all the
way down, but especially the Yellow One. And when they struck the ground, still fighting, the one on top was chiefly the Yellow One; and before they separated both had had as much as they wanted, especially the Black One! He scaled a wall and, bleeding and growling, disappeared, while the news was passed from window to window that Cayley's Nig had been licked at last by Orange Billy.

Either the Yellow Cat was a very clever seeker, or else Slum Kitty did not hide very hard; but he discovered her among the boxes, and she made no attempt to get away, probably because she had witnessed the fight. There is nothing like success in warfare to win the female heart, and thereafter the Yellow Tom and Kitty became very good friends, not sharing each other's lives or food.--Cats do not do that way much,--but recognizing each other as entitled to special friendly privileges.

September had gone. October's shortening days were on when an event took place in the old cracker-box. If Orange Billy had come he would have seen five little Kittens curled up in the embrace of their mother, the little Slum Cat. It was a wonderful thing for her. She felt all the elation an animal mother can feel, all the delight, and she loved them and licked them with a tenderness that must have been a surprise to herself, had she had the power to think of such things.

She had added a joy to her joyless life, but she had also added a care and a heavy weight to her heavy load. All her strength was taken now to find food. The burden increased as the offspring grew big enough to scramble about the boxes, which they did daily during her absence after they were six weeks old. That troubles go in flocks and luck in streaks, is well known in Slumland. Kitty had had three encounters with Dogs, and had been stoned by Malee's negro during a two days' starve. Then the tide turned. The very next morning she found a full milk-can without a lid, successfully robbed a barrow pensioner, and found a big fish-head, all within two hours. She had just returned with that perfect peace which comes only of a full stomach, when she saw a little brown creature in her junk-yard. Hunting memories came back in strength; she didn't know what it was, but she had killed and eaten several Mice, and this was evidently a big Mouse with bob-tail and large ears. Kitty stalked it with elaborate but unnecessary caution; the little Rabbit simply sat up and looked faintly amused. He did not try to run, and Kitty sprang on him and bore him off. As she was not hungry, she carried him to the cracker-box and dropped him among the Kittens. He was not much hurt. He got over his fright, and since he could not get out of the box, he snuggled among the Kittens, and when they began to take their evening meal he very soon decided to join them. The old Cat was puzzled. The hunter instinct had been dominant, but absence of hunger had saved the Rabbit and given the maternal instinct a chance to appear. The result was that the Rabbit became a member of the family, and was thenceforth guarded and fed with the Kittens.

Two weeks went by. The Kittens romped much among the boxes during their mother's absence. The Rabbit could not get out of the box. Jap Malee, seeing the Kittens about the back yard, told the negro to shoot them. This he was doing one morning with a 22-calibre rifle. He had shot one after another and seen them drop from sight into the crannies of the lumber-pile, when the old Cat came running along the wall from the dock, carrying a small Wharf Rat. He had been ready to shoot her, too, but the sight of that Rat changed his plans: a rat-catching Cat was worthy to live. It happened to be the very first one she had ever caught, but it saved her life. She threaded the lumber-maze to the cracker-box and was probably puzzled to find that there were no Kittens to come at her call, and the Rabbit would not partake of the Rat. Pussy curled up to nurse the Rabbit, but she called from time to time to summon the Kittens. Guided by that call, the negro crawled quietly to the place, and peering down into the cracker-box, saw, to his intense surprise, that it contained the old Cat, a live Rabbit, and a dead Rat.

The mother Cat laid back her ears and snarled. The negro withdrew, but a minute later a board was dropped on the opening of the cracker-box, and the den with its tenants, dead and alive, was lifted into the bird-cellar.

"Say, boss, look a-hyar--hyar's where de little Rabbit got to wot we lost. Yo' sho t'ought Ah stole him for de 'tater-bake."

Kitty and Bunny were carefully put in a large wire cage and exhibited as a happy family till a few days later, when the
Rabbit took sick and died. Pussy had never been happy in the cage. She had enough to eat and drink, but she craved her freedom--would likely have gotten 'death or liberty' now, but that during the four days' captivity she had so cleaned and slicked her fur that her unusual coloring was seen, and Jap decided to keep her.

LIFE II

VI

Jap Malee was as disreputable a little Cockney bantam as ever sold cheap Canary-birds in a cellar. He was extremely poor, and the negro lived with him because the 'Henglish-man' was willing to share bed and board, and otherwise admit a perfect equality that few Americans conceded. Jap was perfectly honest according to his lights, but he hadn't any lights; and it was well known that his chief revenue was derived from storing and restoring stolen Dogs and Cats. The half-dozen Canaries were mere blinds. Yet Jap believed in himself. "Hi tell you, Sammy, me boy, you'll see me with 'orses of my own yet," he would say, when some trifling success inflated his dirty little chest. He was not without ambition, in a weak, flabby, once-in-a-while way, and he sometimes wished to be known as a fancier. Indeed, he had once gone the wild length of offering a Cat for exhibition at the Knickerbocker High Society Cat and Pet Show, with three not over-clear objects: first, to gratify his ambition; second, to secure the exhibitor's free pass; and, third, "well, you know, one 'as to know the valuable Cats, you know, when one goes a-catting." But this was a society show, the exhibitor had to be introduced, and his miserable alleged half-Persian was scornfully rejected. The 'Lost and Found' columns of the papers were the only ones of interest to Jap, but he had noticed and saved a clipping about 'breeding for fur.' This was stuck on the wall of his den, and under its influence he set about what seemed a cruel experiment with the Slum Cat. First, he soaked her dirty fur with stuff to kill the two or three kinds of creepers she wore; and, when it had done its work, he washed her thoroughly in soap and warm water, in spite of her teeth, claws, and yowls. Kitty was savagely indignant, but a warm and happy glow spread over her as she dried off in a cage near the stove, and her fur began to fluff out with wonderful softness and whiteness. Jap and his assistant were much pleased with the result, and Kitty ought to have been. But this was preparatory: now for the experiment. "Nothing is so good for growing fur as plenty of oily food and continued exposure to cold weather," said the clipping. Winter was at hand, and Jap Malee put Kitty's cage out in the yard, protected only from the rain and the direct wind, and fed her with all the oil-cake and fish-heads she could eat. In a week a change began to show. She was rapidly getting fat and sleek--she had nothing to do but get fat and dress her fur. Her cage was kept clean, and nature responded to the chill weather and the oily food by making Kitty's coat thicker and glossier every day, so that by midwinter she was an unusually beautiful Cat in the fullest and finest of fur, with markings that were at least a rarity. Jap was much pleased with the result of the experiment, and as a very little success had a wonderful effect on him, he began to dream of the paths of glory. Why not send the Slum Cat to the show now coming on? The failure of the year before made him more careful as to details. "T won't do, ye know, Sammy, to henter 'er as a tramp Cat, ye know," he observed to his help; "but it kin be arranged to suit the Knickerbockers. Nothink like a good noime, ye know. Ye see now it had orter be 'Royal' somethink or other--nothink goes with the Knickerbockers like 'Royal' anythink. Now 'Royal Dick,' or 'Royal Sam,' 'ow's that? But 'owld on; them's Tom names. Oi say, Sammy, wot's the noime of that island where ye wuz born?"

"Analostan Island, sah, was my native vicinity, sah."

"Oi say, now, that's good, ye know. 'Royal Analostan,' by Jove! The onliest pedigreed 'Royal Analostan' in the 'ole sheow, ye know. Ain't that foine?" and they mingled their cackles.

"But we'll 'ave to 'ave a pedigree, ye know." So a very long fake pedigree on the recognized lines was prepared. One dark afternoon Sam, in a borrowed silk hat, delivered the Cat and the pedigree at the show door. The darkey did the honors. He had been a Sixth Avenue barber, and he could put on more pomp and lofty hauteur in five minutes than Jap Malee could have displayed in a lifetime, and this, doubtless, was one reason for the respectful reception awarded the Royal Analostan at the Cat Show.
Jap was very proud to be an exhibitor; but he had all a Cockney's reverence for the upper class, and when on the opening day he went to the door, he was overpowered to see the array of carriages and silk hats. The gate-man looked at him sharply, but passed him on his ticket, doubtless taking him for stable-boy to some exhibitor. The hall had velvet carpets before the long rows of cages. Jap, in his small cunning, was sneaking down the side rows, glancing at the Cats of all kinds, noting the blue ribbons and the reds, peering about but not daring to ask for his own exhibit, inly trembling to think what the gorgeous gathering of fashion would say if they discovered the trick he was playing on them. He had passed all around the outer aisles and seen many prize-winners, but no sign of Slum Kitty. The inner aisles were more crowded. He picked his way down them, but still no Kitty, and he decided that it was a mistake; the judges had rejected the Cat later. Never mind; he had his exhibitor's ticket, and now knew where several valuable Persians and Angoras were to be found.

In the middle of the centre aisle were the high-class Cats. A great throng was there. The passage was roped, and two policemen were in place to keep the crowd moving. Jap wriggled in among them; he was too short to see over, and though the richly gowned folks shrunk from his shabby old clothes, he could not get near; but he gathered from the remarks that the gem of the show was there.

"Oh, isn't she a beauty!" said one tall woman.

"What distinction!" was the reply.

"One cannot mistake the air that comes only from ages of the most refined surroundings."

"How I should like to own that superb creature!"

"Such dignity--such repose!"

"She has an authentic pedigree nearly back to the Pharaohs, I hear"; and poor, dirty little Jap marvelled at his own cheek in sending his Slum Cat into such company.

"Excuse me, madame." The director of the show now appeared, edging his way through the crowd. "The artist of the 'sporting Element' is here, under orders to sketch the 'pearl of the show' for immediate use. May I ask you to stand a little aside? That's it; thank you.

"Oh, Mr. Director, cannot you persuade him to sell that beautiful creature?"

"Hm, I don't know," was the reply. "I understand he is a man of ample means and not at all approachable; but I'll try, I'll try, madame. He was quite unwilling to exhibit his treasure at all, so I understand from his butler. Here, you, keep out of the way," growled the director, as the shabby little man eagerly pushed between the artist and the blue-blooded Cat. But the disreputable one wanted to know where valuable Cats were to be found. He came near enough to get a glimpse of the cage, and there read a placard which announced that "The blue ribbon and gold medal of the Knickerbocker High Society Cat and Pet Show" had been awarded to the "thoroughbred, pedigreed Royal Analostan, imported and exhibited by J. Malee, Esq., the well-known fancier. (Not for sale.)" Jap caught his breath and stared again. Yes, surely; there, high in a gilded cage, on velvet cushions, with four policemen for guards, her fur bright black and pale gray, her bluish eyes slightly closed, was his Slum Kitty, looking the picture of a Cat bored to death with a lot of fuss that she likes as little as she understands it.

VII

Jap Malee lingered around that cage, taking in the remarks, for hours--drinking a draught of glory such as he had never known in life before and rarely glimpsed in his dreams. But he saw that it would be wise for him to remain unknown; his "butler" must do all the business.

It was Slum Kitty who made that show a success. Each day her value went up in her owner's eyes. He did not know
what prices had been given for Cats, and thought that he was touching a record pitch when his "butler" gave the director authority to sell the Analostan for one hundred dollars.

This is how it came about that the Slum Cat found herself transferred from the show to a Fifth Avenue mansion. She evinced a most unaccountable wildness at first. Her objection to petting, however, was explained on the ground of her aristocratic dislike of familiarity. Her retreat from the Lap-dog onto the centre of the dinner-table was understood to express a deep-rooted though mistaken idea of avoiding a defiling touch. Her assaults on a pet Canary were condoned for the reason that in her native Orient she had been used to despotic example. The patrician way in which she would get the cover off a milk-can was especially applauded. Her dislike of her silk-lined basket, and her frequent dashes against the plate-glass windows, were easily understood: the basket was too plain, and plate-glass was not used in her royal home. Her spotting of the carpet evidenced her Eastern modes of thought. The failure of her several attempts to catch Sparrows in the high-walled back yard was new proof of the royal impotency of her bringing up; while her frequent wallowings in the garbage-can were understood to be the manifestation of a little pardonable high-born eccentricity. She was fed and pampered, shown and praised; but she was not happy. Kitty was homesick! She clawed at that blue ribbon round her neck till she got it off; she jumped against the plate-glass because that seemed the road to outside; she avoided people and Dogs because they had always proved hostile and cruel; and she would sit and gaze on the roofs and back yards at the other side of the window, wishing she could be among them for a change.

But she was strictly watched, was never allowed outside--so that all the happy garbage-can moments occurred while these receptacles of joy were indoors. One night in March, however, as they were set out a-row for the early scavenger, the Royal Analostan saw her chance, slipped out of the door, and was lost to view.

Of course there was a grand stir; but Pussy neither knew nor cared anything about that--her one thought was to go home. It may have been chance that took her back in the direction of Gramercy Grange Hill, but she did arrive there after sundry small adventures. And now what? She was not at home, and she had cut off her living. She was beginning to be hungry, and yet she had a peculiar sense of happiness. She cowered in a front garden for some time. A raw east wind had been rising, and now it came to her with a particularly friendly message; man would have called it an unpleasant smell of the docks, but to Pussy it was welcome tidings from home. She trotted down the long Street due east, threading the rails of front gardens, stopping like a statue for an instant, or crossing the street in search of the darkest side, and came at length to the docks and to the water. But the place was strange. She could go north or south. Something turned her southward; and, dodging among docks and Dogs, carts and Cats, crooked arms of the bay and straight board fences, she got, in an hour or two, among familiar scenes and smells; and, before the sun came up, she had crawled back--weary and foot-sore through the same old hole in the same old fence and over a wall to her junk-yard back of the bird-cellar--yes, back into the very cracker-box where she was born.

Oh, if the Fifth Avenue family could only have seen her in her native Orient!

After a long rest she came quietly down from the cracker-box toward the steps leading to the cellar, engaged in her old-time pursuit of seeking for eatables. The door opened, and there stood the negro. He shouted to the bird-man inside: "Say, boss, come hyar. Ef dere ain't dat dar Royal Ankalostan am comed back!"

Jap came in time to see the Cat jumping the wall. They called loudly and in the most seductive, wheedling tones: "Pussy, Pussy, poor Pussy! Come, Pussy!" But Pussy was not prepossessed in their favor, and disappeared to forage in her old-time haunts.

The Royal Analostan had been a windfall for Jap--had been the means of adding many comforts to the cellar and several prisoners to the cages. It was now of the utmost importance to recapture her majesty. Stale meat-offal and other infallible lures were put out till Pussy, urged by the reestablished hunger-pinch, crept up to a large fish-head in a box-trap; the negro, in watching, pulled the string that dropped the lid, and, a minute later, the Analostan was once more among the prisoners in the cellar. Meanwhile Jap had been watching the 'Lost and Found' column. There it was, "$25 reward," etc. That night Mr. Malee's butler called at the Fifth Avenue mansion with the missing cat. "Mr. Malee's compliments, sah. De Royal Analostan had recurred in her recent proprietor's vicinity and residence, sah. Mr. Malee
had pleasure in recuperating the Royal Analostan, sah." Of course Mr. Malee could not be rewarded, but the butler was open to any offer, and plainly showed that he expected the promised reward and something more.

Kitty was guarded very carefully after that; but so far from being disgusted with the old life of starving, and glad of her ease, she became wilder and more dissatisfied.

VIII

The spring was doing its New York best. The dirty little English Sparrows were tumbling over each other in their gutter brawls, Cats yowled all night in the areas, and the Fifth Avenue family were thinking of their country residence. They packed up, closed house and moved off to their summer home, some fifty miles away, and Pussy, in a basket, went with them.

"Just what she needed: a change of air and scene to wean her away from her former owners and make her happy."

The basket was lifted into a Rumble-shaker. New sounds and passing smells were entered and left. A turn in the course was made. Then a roaring of many feet, more swinging of the basket; a short pause, another change of direction, then some clicks, some bangs, a long shrill whistle, and door-bells of a very big front door; a rumbling, a whizzing, an unpleasant smell, a hideous smell, a growing horrible, hateful choking smell, a deadly, griping, poisonous stench, with roaring that drowned poor Kitty's yowls, and just as it neared the point where endurance ceased, there was relief. She heard clicks and clacks. There was light; there was air. Then a man's voice called, "All out for 125th Street," though of course to Kitty it was a mere human bellow. The roaring almost ceased--did cease. Later the racket-yang was renewed with plenty of sounds and shakes, though not the poisonous gas; a long, hollow, booming roar with a pleasant dock smell was quickly passed, and then there was a succession of jolts, roars, jars, stops, clicks, clacks, smells, jumps, shakes, more smells, more shakes,--big shakes, little shakes,--gases, smells, screeches, door-bells, tremblings, roars, thunders, and some new smells, raps, taps, heavings, rumblings, and more smells, but all without any of the feel that the direction is changed. When at last it stopped, the sun came twinkling through the basket-lid. The Royal Cat was lifted into a Rumble-shaker of the old familiar style, and, swerving aside from their past course, very soon the noises of its wheels were grittings and rattlings; a new and horrible sound was added--the barking of Dogs, big and little and dreadfully close. The basket was lifted, and Slum Kitty had reached her country home.

Every one was officiously kind. They wanted to please the Royal Cat, but somehow none of them did, except, possibly, the big, fat cook that Kitty discovered on wandering into the kitchen. This unctuous person smelt more like a slum than anything she had met for months, and the Royal Analostan was proportionately attracted. The cook, when she learned that fears were entertained about the Cat staying, said: "Shure, she'd 'tind to thot; wanst a Cat licks her futs, shure she's at home." So she deftly caught the unapproachable royalty in her apron, and committed the horrible sacrilege of greasing the soles of her feet with pot-grease. Of course Kitty resented it--she resented everything in the place; but on being set down she began to dress her paws and found evident satisfaction in that grease. She licked all four feet for an hour, and the cook triumphantly announced that now "shure she'd be apt to shtay." And stay she did, but she showed a most surprising and disgusting preference for the kitchen, the cook, and the garbage-pail.

The family, though distressed by these distinguished peculiarities, were glad to see the Royal Analostan more contented and approachable. They gave her more liberty after a week or two. They guarded her from every menace. The Dogs were taught to respect her. No man or boy about the place would have dreamed of throwing a stone at the famous pedigreed Cat. She had all the food she wanted, but still she was not happy. She was hankering for many things, she scarcely knew what. She had everything--yes, but she wanted something else. Plenty to eat and drink--yes, but milk does not taste the same when you can go and drink all you want from a saucer; it has to be stolen out of a tin pail when you are belly-pinched with hunger and thirst, or it does not have the tang--it isn't milk.

Yes, there was a junk-yard back of the house and beside it and around it too, a big one, but it was everywhere poisoned and polluted with roses. The very Horses and Dogs had the wrong smells; the whole country round was a repellant desert of lifeless, disgusting gardens and hay-fields, without a single tenement or smoke-stack in sight. How she did
hate it all! There was only one sweet-smelling shrub in the whole horrible place, and that was in a neglected corner. She
did enjoy nipping that and rolling in the leaves; it was a bright spot in the grounds; but the only one, for she had not
found a rotten fish-head nor seen a genuine garbage-can since she came, and altogether it was the most unlovely,
unattractive, unsmellable spot she had ever known. She would surely have gone that first night had she had the liberty.
The liberty was weeks in coming, and, meanwhile, her affinity with the cook had developed as a bond to keep her; but
one day after a summer of discontent a succession of things happened to stir anew the slum instinct of the royal
prisoner.
A great bundle of stuff from the docks had reached the country mansion. What it contained was of little moment, but it
was rich with a score of the most piquant and winsome of dock and slum smells. The chords of memory surely dwell in
the nose, and Pussy's past was conjured up with dangerous force. Next day the cook 'left' through some trouble over
this very bundle. It was the cutting of cables, and that evening the youngest boy of the house, a horrid little American
with no proper appreciation of royalty, was tying a tin to the blue-blooded one's tail, doubtless in furtherance of some
altruistic project, when Pussy resented the liberty with a paw that wore five big fish-hooks for the occasion. The howl
of downtrodden America roused America's mother. The deft and womanly blow that she aimed with her book was
miraculously avoided, and Pussy took flight, up-stairs, of course. A hunted Rat runs down-stairs, a hunted Dog goes on
the level, a hunted Cat runs up. She hid in the garret, baffled discovery, and waited till night came. Then, gliding down-
stairs, she tried each screen-door in turn, till she found one unlatched, and escaped into the black August night. Pitch-
black to man's eyes, it was simply gray to her, and she glided through the disgusting shrubbery and flower-beds, took a
final nip at that one little bush that had been an attractive spot in the garden, and boldly took her back track of the
spring.

How could she take a back track that she never saw? There is in all animals some sense of direction. It is very low in
man and very high in Horses, but Cats have a large gift, and this mysterious guide took her westward, not clearly and
definitely, but with a general impulse that was made definite simply because the road was easy to travel. In an hour she
had covered two miles and reached the Hudson River. Her nose had told her many times that the course was true. Smell
after smell came back, just as a man after walking a mile in a strange street may not recall a single feature, but will
remember, on seeing it again, "Why, yes, I saw that before." So Kitty's main guide was the sense of direction, but it
was her nose that kept reassuring her, "Yes, now you are right--we passed this place last spring."

At the river was the railroad. She could not go on the water; she must go north or south. This was a case where her
sense of direction was clear; it said, "Go south," and Kitty trotted down the foot-path between the iron rails and the
fence.

LIFE III
IX

Cats can go very fast up a tree or over a wall, but when it comes to the long steady trot that reels off mile after mile,
hour after hour, it is not the cat-hop, but the dog-trot, that counts. Although the travelling was good and the path direct,
an hour had gone before two more miles were put between her and the Hades of roses. She was tired and a little foot-
sore. She was thinking of rest when a Dog came running to the fence near by, and broke out into such a horrible
barking close to her ear that Pussy leaped in terror. She ran as hard as she could down the path, at the same time
watching to see if the Dog should succeed in passing the fence. No, not yet! but he ran close by it, growling horribly,
while Pussy skipped along on the safe side. The barking of the Dog grew into a low rumble--a louder rumble and
roaring--a terrifying thunder. A light shone. Kitty glanced back to see, not the Dog, but a huge Black Thing with a
blazing red eye coming on, yowling and spitting like a yard full of Cats. She put forth all her powers to run, made such
time as she had never made before, but dared not leap the fence. She was running like a Dog, was flying, but all in vain;
the monstrous pursuer overtook her, but missed her in the darkness, and hurried past to be lost in the night, while Kitty
crouched gasping for breath, half a mile nearer home since that Dog began to bark.
This was her first encounter with the strange monster, strange to her eyes only; her nose seemed to know him and told her this was another landmark on the home trail. But Pussy lost much of her fear of his kind. She learned that they were very stupid and could not find her if she slipped quietly under a fence and lay still. Before morning she had encountered several of them, but escaped unharmed from all.

About sunrise she reached a nice little slum on her home trail, and was lucky enough to find several unsterilized eatables in an ash-heap. She spent the day around a stable where were two Dogs and a number of small boys, that between them came near ending her career. It was so very like home; but she had no idea of staying there. She was driven by the old craving, and next evening set out as before. She had seen the one-eyed Thunder-rollers all day going by, and was getting used to them, so travelled steadily all that night. The next day was spent in a barn where she caught a Mouse, and the next night was like the last, except that a Dog she encountered drove her backward on her trail for a long way. Several times she was misled by angling roads, and wandered far astray, but in time she wandered back again to her general southward course. The days were passed in skulking under barns and hiding from Dogs and small boys, and the nights in limping along the track, for she was getting foot-sore; but on she went, mile after mile, southward, ever southward--Dogs, boys, Roarers, hunger--Dogs, boys, Roarers, hunger--yet on and onward still she went, and her nose from time to time cheered her by confidently reporting, "There surely is a smell we passed last spring."

X

So a week went by, and Pussy, dirty, ribbon-less, foot-sore, and weary, arrived at the Harlem Bridge. Though it was enveloped in delicious smells, she did not like the look of that bridge. For half the night she wandered up and down the shore without discovering any other means of going south, excepting some other bridges, or anything of interest except that here the men were as dangerous as the boys. Somehow she had to come back to it; not only its smells were familiar, but from time to time, when a One-eye ran over it, there was that peculiar rumbling roar that was a sensation in the springtime trip. The calm of the late night was abroad when she leaped to the timber stringer and glided out over the water. She had got less than a third of the way across when a thundering One-eye came roaring at her from the opposite end. She was much frightened, but knowing their stupidity and blindness, she dropped to a low side beam and there crouched in hiding. Of course the stupid Monster missed her and passed on, and all would have been well, but it turned back, or another just like it came suddenly spitting behind her. Pussy leaped to the long track and made for the home shore. She might have got there had not a third of the Red-eyed Terrors come screeching at her from that side. She was running her hardest, but was caught between two foes. There was nothing for it but a desperate leap from the timbers into--she didn't know what. Down, down, down-plop, splash, plunge into the deep water, not cold, for it was August, but oh, so horrible! She spluttered and coughed when she came to the top, glanced around to see if the Monsters were swimming after her, and struck out for shore. She had never learned to swim, and yet she swam, for the simple reason that a Cat's position and actions in swimming are the same as her position and actions in walking. She had fallen into a place she did not like; naturally she tried to walk out, and the result was that she swam ashore. Which shore? The home-love never fails: the south side was the only shore for her, the one nearest home. She scrambled out all dripping wet, up the muddy bank and through coal-piles and dust-heaps, looking as black, dirty, and unroyal as it was possible for a Cat to look.

Once the shock was over, the Royal-pedigreed Slummer began to feel better for the plunge. A genial glow without from the bath, a genial sense of triumph within, for had she not outwitted three of the big Terrors?

Her nose, her memory, and her instinct of direction inclined her to get on the track again; but the place was infested with those Thunder-rollers, and prudence led her to turn aside and follow the river-bank with its musky home-reminders; and thus she was spared the unspeakable horrors of the tunnel.

She was over three days learning the manifold dangers and complexities of the East River docks. Once she got by mistake on a ferryboat and was carried over to Long Island; but she took an early boat back. At length on the third night she reached familiar ground, the place she had passed the night of her first escape. From that her course was sure and rapid. She knew just where she was going and how to get there. She knew even the more prominent features in the Dog-
scape now. She went faster, felt happier. In a little while surely she would be curled up in her native Orient—the old junk-yard. Another turn, and the block was in sight.

But—what! It was gone! Kitty couldn't believe her eyes; but she must, for the sun was not yet up. There where once had stood or leaned or slouched or straggled the houses of the block, was a great broken wilderness of stone, lumber, and holes in the ground.

Kitty walked all around it. She knew by the bearings and by the local color of the pavement that she was in her home, that there had lived the bird-man, and there was the old junk-yard; but all were gone, completely gone, taking their familiar odors with them, and Pussy turned sick at heart in the utter hopelessness of the case. Her place-love was her master-mood. She had given up all to come to a home that no longer existed, and for once her sturdy little heart was cast down. She wandered over the silent heaps of rubbish and found neither consolation nor eatables. The ruin had taken in several of the blocks and reached back from the water. It was not a fire; Kitty had seen one of those things. This looked more like the work of a flock of the Red-eyed Monsters. Pussy knew nothing of the great bridge that was to rise from this very spot.

When the sun came up she sought for cover. An adjoining block still stood with little change, and the Royal Analostan retired to that. She knew some of its trails; but once there, was unpleasantly surprised to find the place swarming with Cats that, like herself, were driven from their old grounds, and when the garbage-cans came out there were several Slummers at each. It meant a famine in the land, and Pussy, after standing it a few days, was reduced to seeking her other home on Fifth Avenue. She got there to find it shut up and deserted. She waited about for a day; had an unpleasant experience with a big man in a blue coat, and next night returned to the crowded slum.

September and October wore away. Many of the Cats died of starvation or were too weak to escape their natural enemies. But Kitty, young and strong, still lived.

Great changes had come over the ruined blocks. Though silent on the night when she first saw them, they were crowded with noisy workmen all day. A tall building, well advanced on her arrival, was completed at the end of October, and Slum Kitty, driven by hunger, went sneaking up to a pail that a negro had set outside. The pail, unfortunately, was not for garbage; it was a new thing in that region: a scrubbing-pail. A sad disappointment, but it had a sense of comfort—there were traces of a familiar touch on the handle. While she was studying it, the negro elevator-boy came out again. In spite of his blue clothes, his odorous person confirmed the good impression of the handle. Kitty had retreated across the street. He gazed at her.

"Sho ef dat don't look like de Royal Ankalostan! Hyar, Pussy, Pussy, Pu-s-s-s-s-y! Co-o-o-o-m-e, Pu-u-s-s-s-y, hyar! I 'spec's she's sho hungry."

Hungry! She hadn't had a real meal for months. The negro went into the building and reappeared with a portion of his own lunch.

"Hyar, Pussy, Puss, Puss, Puss!" It seemed very good, but Pussy had her doubts of the man. At length he laid the meat on the pavement, and went back to the door. Slum Kitty came forward very warily; sniffed at the meat, seized it, and fled like a little Tigress to eat her prize in peace.

LIFE IV

XI

This was the beginning of a new era. Pussy came to the door of the building now whenever pinched by hunger, and the good feeling for the negro grew. She had never understood that man before. He had always seemed hostile. Now he was her friend, the only one she had.
One week she had a streak of luck. Seven good meals on seven successive days; and right on the top of the last meal she found a juicy dead Rat, the genuine thing, a perfect windfall. She had never killed a full-grown Rat in all her lives, but seized the prize and ran off to hide it for future use. She was crossing the street in front of the new building when an old enemy appeared,—the Wharf Dog,—and Kitty retreated, naturally enough, to the door where she had a friend. Just as she neared it, he opened the door for a well-dressed man to come out, and both saw the Cat with her prize.

"Hello! Look at that for a Cat!"

"Yes, sah," answered the negro. "Dat's ma Cat, sah; she's a terror on Rats, sah! hez 'em about cleaned up, sah; dat's why she's so thin."

"Well, don't let her starve," said the man with the air of the landlord. "Can't you feed her?"

"De liver meat-man comes reg'lar, sah; quatah dollar a week, sah," said the negro, fully realizing that he was entitled to the extra fifteen cents for "the idea."

"That's all right. I'll stand it."

"M-e-a-t! M-e-a-t!" is heard the magnetic, cat-conjuring cry of the old liver-man, as his barrow is pushed up the glorified Scrimper's Alley, and Cats come crowding, as of yore, to receive their due.

There are Cats black, white, yellow, and gray to be remembered, and, above all, there are owners to be remembered. As the barrow rounds the corner near the new building it makes a newly scheduled stop.

"Hyar, you, get out o' the road, you common trash," cries the liver-man, and he waves his wand to make way for the little gray Cat with blue eyes and white nose. She receives an unusually large portion, for Sam is wisely dividing the returns evenly; and Slum Kitty retreats with her 'daily' into shelter of the great building, to which she is regularly attached. She has entered into her fourth life with prospects of happiness never before dreamed of. Everything was against her at first; now everything seems to be coming her way. It is very doubtful that her mind was broadened by travel, but she knew what she wanted and she got it. She has achieved her long-time great ambition by catching, not a Sparrow, but two of them, while they were clinched in mortal combat in the gutter.

There is no reason to suppose that she ever caught another Rat; but the negro secures a dead one when he can, for purposes of exhibition, lest her pension be imperilled. The dead one is left in the hall till the proprietor comes; then it is apologetically swept away. "Well, drat dat Cat, sah; dat Royal Ankalostan blood, sah, is terrors on Rats."

She has had several broods since. The negro thinks the Yellow Tom is the father of some of them, and no doubt the negro is right.

He has sold her a number of times with a perfectly clear conscience, knowing quite well that it is only a question of a few days before the Royal Analostan comes back again. Doubtless he is saving the money for some honorable ambition. She has learned to tolerate the elevator, and even to ride up and down on it. The negro stoutly maintains that once, when she heard the meat-man, while she was on the top floor, she managed to press the button that called the elevator to take her down.

She is sleek and beautiful again. She is not only one of the four hundred that form the inner circle about the liver-barrow, but she is recognized as the star pensioner among them. The liver-man is positively respectful. Not even the cream-and-chicken fed Cat of the pawn-broker's wife has such a position as the Royal Analostan. But in spite of her prosperity, her social position, her royal name and fake pedigree, the greatest pleasure of her life is to slip out and go a-slumming in the gloaming, for now, as in her previous lives, she is at heart, and likely to be, nothing but a dirty little
Slum Cat.

(The end)
Ernest Thompson Seton's short story: Slum Cat

By Ernest Thompson Seton