

ODE TO KITTY

by Harry Dunn
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This has nothing to do with the kitty familiar to lawn bowlers.
Cat-haters are advised to look away now.

There used to be the six of us,
But now we're down to three;
There's the Missus and the family cat
And last and least – there's me.
'And why's this cat included on your list?'
I just heard someone say,
'She's only just a cat' he hissed,
His disapproval to convey.

But those who share their house and home
With pets, will surely know
Why Kitty's name is in the count
At this three-bed bungalow:
In October Kit turns twenty -
That's a hundred human years;
She's deaf, arthritic and cantankerous,
Sometimes a bit confused,
Like all those poor old dears,
Who live on borrowed time
At the end of their careers.

But our old Kitty, dignified, fastidious,
Always grooming, primp and preening to ensure
That she remains splendidious,
As she always has before,
And of course she's absolutely useless,
As cats have mostly been;
She hasn't chased a rat in years
- She considers them unclean.

If thieves called round to rob us,
As they could and one day might,
She'd probably just yawn, invite them in
And point them to the light:

She enjoys a passing friendship
With the local birds and mice -
They nod to her and she to them,
They seem to think she's nice!

She has no time for foolish tom-cats
Who came skulking round our yard,
Howling, prowling, yowling,
They leave their calling card,
But Kitty lost all interest in those shameless scheming toms
Tho' she didn't know it at the time,
When we took her to the vet, when she was six months old
And not yet in her prime,
So she has nothing to regret

For years she lived outside the house
When she was young and active,
But in mid-life she moved in with us,
And found electric blankets most attractive.
My poor old parents, both now long deceased,
Believed that cats and dogs belonged outside,
With all the other beasts:
The family pets were treated well and always fed,
But they'd both turn in their graves if they were told
We had a cat *inside* the house,
Even worse – asleep upon the bed.

Our Kitty eats and drinks to rare excess
Despite old age and her condition –
Nothing but expensive brands, of course,
Taking full advantage of her privileged position;
No budget brands for our old cat,
-And she eats like any working horse -
She reads the labels on the cans, I swear,
And double-checks the source.
If it says 'Made in Timbuktu, Vietnam or China'
She sniffs, turns up her nose
And looks around for something finer.

That cat would rather starve to death
Than eat a budget brand
So, in matters of feline haute cuisine
She holds the upper hand;
Snobbish and selective, that old moggie queen
Plays us on a brake,
And if you have a fussy cat,
You'll know exactly what I mean.

All cats know well the power they wield
And Kitty's no exception,
And we humans mostly go along
With this harmless little Who-Owns-Who deception;
We treat them as we would our kids,
When they were young and fragile
Tho' Kitty's youth's a fading mem'ry
And she was never very agile;
These days, her belly seems bigger,
As she herself grows more feeble and decrepit,
And will we be sad when we'll one day have to part
With that canny old domestic Tigger?
Of course we will:
We'll really miss that lazy old up-start.

She's an outrageous old imposter,
Playing on our kindness and humanity;
She knows how a useless cat can learn to live and prosper
By always looking placid and relaxed,
That's the image that she sends -
A small island of sanguinity,
In an ocean of insanity,
And a joy and comfort to her human friends.

So what does kitty offer us
In return for our kindness and attention;
What reward does she provide
That's worthy of a mention?
Well – quite a lot, in fact,

More so as we grow old together,
We're amused by Kitty's wiles and tact,
You won't hear that cat complain about
This lousy winter weather,
And she'll never scratch or bare her teeth -
Unless attacked.

She's always at the door to greet us
When we return from being out
Then she leads us to those feeding bowls
That she can't live without,
And when she's feasted well on lobster bisque
And yearling beef hot-pot
She expresses her undying gratitude
With much exaggerated purring,
Before retiring to her cot.

And when we take the time to brush
That silky coat of Magpie black and white,
And rub her old and aching joints, she's thankful
And observes us fondly through narrowed almond eyes,
Trusting, cool and tranquil.
She's still a cat, of course,
But that old moggie makes it clear she knows
That we're the cat-food source,
And that deep and rhythmic purring speaks louder
Than these laboured lines of verse.

When Kit was young, she scampered round,
Like any other kitten,
But always silent, without an uttered sound,
As if with *dumbness* smitten;
And now - in her dotage she's discovered
A loud demanding feline voice,
And from a lifetime of apparent dumbness
She's suddenly recovered,
So, was her life-long silence caused by vocal numbness
Or has it perhaps just been - her feline female choice?

The language Kitty speaks
Has endless variation,
Expressing satisfaction, boredom or annoyance,
Heartfelt thanks or urgent supplication,
Especially when she's hungry,
And that's many times each day,
We can ignore it at our peril,
But when the queen's demanding service
The servants must obey.
So, was she born of royal blood?
Not really – her parents, they were feral,
Dirt poor and plain as mud,
But otherwise OK,
And those poor feline strays had clearly seen
More mealtimes than meals,
They both looked more linear than spheral.
Rats and mice were *their* mainstay!

Way back in Ninety-Eight, when we adopted Kitty
We could have spent our hard-earned dollars
On an investment work of art,
In fact we almost did -
A landscape by Pro Hart,
Even then it wasn't cheap for poor folks living in the City
But that painting would be worth a lot today,
Now, it may seem a minor pity
That instead of that Pro Hart,
We adopted homeless Kitty
Who wasn't worth a dime,
She's now worth even less,
- Cats depreciate with time,
But we're happy to still have Kitty,
Sound asleep and snoring on the bed,
Now a long way from the city,
Kitty's been an endless source of friendship and amusement
- So much better than a Pro Hart on the wall.
No, you couldn't say she's been a sound investment,
Compared with that appreciating Pro
That we were offered at a bargain price,

All those years ago.
But we have no regrets at all.
Tho' Kitty's race has now been run,
She's lived eight lives, from her allotted nine
And after that - there's none.

One day soon she'll go to feline heaven,
That great Cattery in the Sky,
To join Silvester, Felix and old Tom -
That's Tom from Tom and Jerry -
Spindleshanks and Terry,
- The place where all the good cats go,
When they turn up their toes and die.

So spare a thought for all those family cats,
Not loved as much as dogs,
Our loyal canine friends,
And we don't begrudge them that,
But those useless purring pussies
Like our old friend Kitty,
Can be affectionate godsend
Although somewhat more restrained,
Not submissive or subservient, like Fido
After he's been 'trained.'

And cats are so much *cleaner*,
Even soaking wet, they never smell
They spend less time with that expensive vet.
And yes, of course we love our dogs as well
But when it comes to which one I'd prefer
Asleep, and snoring on the bed
Give me an ageing moggie every time,
And that's another reason why old Kitty
Still rings the family bell,
And there's no way that she'll be hurried, pushed or led,
She's still an independent, haughty dear old gal!