

Scope of Reason

by Blakely Page

“Grandma, why do you name all your white cats Odie and the black one's Midnight?” I asked one day when a new litter of kittens arrived. As my grandmother cleaned the blankets from the box they were born in, she simply looked at me with her Mona Lisa smile and lovingly brushed her hand across my forehead. She was a quiet woman, but that never prevented me from feeling her love. We were two people trying to cope with the loss of my mother, relying on our feline friends to help us along the way. Midnight is an obvious name for a black cat, though I’ll never know exactly why she named the white cats Odie rather than Garfield. The thought is now one of those little memory gems that keep me company while I’m in traffic. My first cat was white, so naturally, I named him Odie.

CAT FACT: A cat can reach up to five times its own height per jump.

Odie entered my life around the same time my grandmother passed away. At eight years old, I had lost the two most important women in my whole world. I was living with a new family, trying to make sense of something that never would. Odie was forbidden from coming inside and it didn’t matter how frigid it was, the answer was always a tight-lipped no. I needed the love he gave so freely, and there wasn’t a rule in place I would hesitate to defy when he’d jump on my window sill, his meow announcing his presence. Slowly I’d slide the window open, trying to anticipate any sound

it might make, and his little body would curve against mine like a comma. It didn't matter how many times I got caught, how many times I was told no; each night he'd be waiting and each night I'd let him in. Looking back on it now, I think that Odie and I shared a common desire to find a home. The home we found was in each other.

The footprints found in our backyard belonged only to us, and together we claimed the space as our own. During our first Christmas together I handmade ornaments out of tinfoil, paper, glue, glitter, and string. With stolen tinsel from the tree inside, I decorated the pine near my bedroom window while he batted at the branches, freeing them of the snow wrapping them like a sweater sleeve. Our gift exchange consisted of the lunch meat, eggs, and milk I smuggled from the kitchen while his were of dead snakes, mice, and birds. The way he arranged them never failed to surprise me; straight lines in descending order according to length.

When Odie was nearing his third birthday we moved to a new house, but this one didn't have a window where I could sneak him in without being caught. Odie now had to face the winter nights on his own. Luckily, the house sat above a widespread golf course with infinite shelters. We spent our days exploring duplexes being built nearby and pretended they belonged to us. I was always so astounded by the way he jumped effortlessly up the half-built walls, my little friend with Michael Jordan feet. When we were tired we'd rest in a white birch tree with far-stretching branches where I could sit, and he could lay.

As we both got a little older, he would often disappear for weeks at a time. Just when I thought he'd be gone for good, he'd reappear, and we'd walk through the sprawling grass of the golf course, harvesting the final days of my childhood. By age fourteen I was regularly sneaking out of the house, trying to contend with the restlessness consuming me in an unhappy home. He'd follow my pace, my little protector in the shadows, as I'd be mischievously walking down a street at 1 a.m.

He'd be out of sight, and I'd think he'd gone home, but would reemerge on my way back and we'd walk together in comfortable silence. When he left and didn't return, I decided to do the same.

CAT FACT: Cat brains have identical regions to a human's brain that are responsible for emotions.

It was several years before I was stable enough to bring another feline into my life. Barely seventeen, I finally had a place of my own when I learned a friend of mine had a litter of kittens in need of a home. I inspected the bundle of fluff and eyed a small black runt. One nearly inaudible meow and I was hooked, but I decided not to follow my grandmother's lead of name choice this time. On the drive home I held her closely, telepathically letting her know she was in good hands; it seemed to work. She was a damn cool cat, my Maleficent. Mell-e-eff-i-cent, I would sing to her. Maleficent was the only cat I ever trained and I still don't really know how. We spent many of our days at the park where she'd stay by my side with no leash, and in the car she'd sit on my lap and purr, happy and content.

In addition to my new cat came a live-in boyfriend. Sometimes I wonder if she sensed his darkness. Maleficent loved me without limitations and I often question if the fluid that filled her lungs was a direct result of her worry for me. I'd wake up and she'd be sitting on my chest. "She's been there for hours," he'd tell me, and her little engine would spark to life as soon as I placed my hands on her. Was her sickness a warning to me? The thought of losing her wasn't one I wanted to consider and I opted for her to have an experimental surgery for the price tag of a month's rent. At first, the surgery seemed to be effective. We decided to take her to the park so she could get some fresh air. Thinking he was perhaps being funny, he decided to scare her to the point that her heart stopped and she quit breathing. As I kissed her she somehow came back to me, but within three

weeks after he'd been cruelly careless with her, she took her final breath in my arms. I should have known to walk away right then, but my naivety prevailed. I'll never forget the way the box lost its temperature as we drove to her final resting spot.

CAT FACT: The world's most fertile cat, whose name was Dusty, gave birth to 420 kittens in her lifetime.

About a year after Maleficent died, I was given another black cat. I named her Ganja. Ganja and I didn't get along; I think I was still grieving over Maleficent. Ganja was black and cute, but for some reason, I just couldn't make myself like her. In all honesty, I'm not sure I really tried.

When Ganja was about a year old I was married and also a mom. Motherhood came early for me but never had a single occurrence been so delightfully welcome in my life. When my daughter was about three months old I saw a little grey sock on my bed while I was settling in after work. Then the sock started to move. I got closer and was perplexed by discovering that the little sock wasn't a sock but instead a squirming kitten. Ganja gave birth to a sweet tiny grey baby and I was instantly smitten. Sometimes I would joke that I had some weird crush on my cat. He had this perfect jawline and such a debonair meow. His fur was several shades of silver just as his eyes were several shades of gold. He filled a hole in my heart I didn't even know I had.

We named him Maestro, and I couldn't keep him away from her. My sweet baby girl would wake me up with her cooing and there he'd be, sleeping at her feet. Everyone told me how dangerous that was because cats could cause SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), but Maestro was anything but dangerous. He proved his demeanor again and again and I felt safer with him near

her. Baby girl started walking and putting stickers on everything. I still laugh when I think about the way she'd carry him, neck in one arm, leg in the other, and he'd be purring. Sometimes I'd interfere and make her put him down, but they'd both look at me like I was the crazy one. He'd go back to following her and before long he'd be contorted, back in her arms, covered with stickers, and purring like crazy.

CAT FACT: Cats don't have a collar bone, and because of this they can fit into anything their head can.

I was mourning again. I bought my first house and not long after moving in, Maestro disappeared. The man I was married to would ask me if I wanted a new cat and I'd just shake my head to decline. Baby girl was getting big, now five and constantly running back and forth between our house and her best friend's. "Mom!" she squealed as she ran in, "Vannah's got kittens!" I smiled at her and told her that was nice.

Vannah's mom called and told me there was a little black kitten. She sounded just like Maleficent, another little runt waiting for a home. Maleficent's last breath replayed through my head like one of those painfully catchy songs that won't go away. They kept asking and I kept saying no. Then Vannah's older brother showed up, his hands surrounding a furry, softly breathing mound. "You have to see her, you have to hold her," he said as he handed her to me. I've never held anything so perfectly small. She was so tiny that she fit in the palm of my hand. I think it was the first time I had smiled in a month. The man I was married to looked at me as I held her in my hands, "you're happy."

The kids all insisted that she be named Midnight. I was a firm no. I hadn't called a cat Midnight since my grandmother's house, hadn't wanted to. In the end, they won. Her official name is Midnight but I have my own names for her: Mama Cita, Minnie, and Baby Kitty. Often, it's just a ridiculous run of all these names joined together by song.

CAT FACT: There is a bronze statue in Glenturret Distillery, Scotland dedicated to a cat named Towser, who caught over 28,000 mice in her lifetime.

Minnie never liked the man I was married to. Maybe she could sense the darkness in him just as Maleficent had. She became such a skittish cat unless it was just me or my daughter around. We'd be laying on my bed and I would sense a shift in her. She'd hear his car before I would, and the closer he got, the stiffer she became. She'd stay with me until the car door shut in the driveway and rapidly disappear.

She learned the rhythm of his breath while he was sleeping. At night she hid in my closet, waiting for his sleep to sink in. As I'd lay there in the dark, she'd lightly jump onto the bed and curl up next to me. Sometimes I would lay on her while I was sleeping, and she seemed to revel in my weight.

Minnie was such a good huntress. I could watch her navigate my back yard with her prowess for hours, the most beautiful vixen panther. She was always with me in that backyard. As I would plant tomatoes she would lounge in the heat of the sun. Sometimes she'd let out this chirping sound and I knew she was on the hunt. Those poor mice, the target of a ruthless killer. It wasn't enough to kill them, she also had to play with them. The worst was when she'd let them go, and just as they

thought they might get away, she'd bring them back again, sinking her claws deep, repeating the torture. This is the only side of her I've seen that made me disappointed.

Cat Fact: Cats have the cognitive ability to sense a human's feelings and overall mood.

It wasn't until my son turned four, and my daughter was fourteen, that my marriage was finally over. The week he left there was a strain in my house, a stench in the air that needed to be cleared, so I went to Petco to find a new cat. I was only going to adopt a Siamese. Sure enough, a Siamese was waiting, curled up like a little seashell. I was only going to adopt her if she was sweet, and the moment I spoke to her she started to purr. On the drive home I thought about what name I could give her. I was wanting a fun name, something angelic, when the song *Where Is My Mind* by The Pixies came on the radio.

The kids had no idea, nor did Minnie, what I was doing and I'm not sure I'll ever reach that level of excitement with them again. I opened the door and hollered at them to go sit down in the front room with their eyes covered. When they opened them, they met our little Miss Pixie Stix and her astonishingly blue eyes. Pixie made herself right at home in just under five minutes. My son and daughter took turns cradling her in their arms and for the first time in perhaps ever, our household began feeling light.

Minnie tried to hate her, but Pixie wouldn't allow it. Minnie would walk past her, and Pixie would smack her butt a few times. When Minnie spun around, Pixie would fall to the ground: all innocence. She was constantly teaching Minnie bad habits, like climbing into my dresser and covering all my clothes with hair—a trait that would be lifelong. Pixie Stix was...well, not as smart

as she could have been. She ran into our sliding glass door. Every. Single. Day. She must have smacked her poor little head on the chair and table legs ten times a day. It worried me. I didn't want her to have brain damage. She had more quirks than any other cat I've ever met. My favorite was her frequent desire for chips and salsa. If we tried to give her a chip without the salsa, she would look at us as if we were wasting her time.

I have my own special noises I use for my cats but none of them ever responded the way Pixie did. I'd ring my tongue in a high-pitched rattle and she'd come running. She'd run all the way from the deep of the yard, through the opened glass door and up my body, not stopping until she was standing on my chest and looking me in the eyes. We think she was attacked by Raccoons, but the vet wasn't certain. She went through surgery and seemed to be pulling through; she wasn't. They performed another surgery and the anesthesia took a hold of her tightly and just never let go. I kept ringing my tongue, trying to wake her up, calling her from the deep. She fought so fucking hard, trying to make her way back to us. I fell asleep after hours attempting to wake her, but in the morning, she was gone. Stiff and lifeless in my closet. I buried her in the backyard. Minnie kept standing on the back deck and I could see the worry in her eyes. She'd meow for me to follow her, and every time she would lead me to Pixie's grave, standing over it looking sad and confused.

CAT FACT: Outdoor cats' lifespan averages at about 3 to 5 years; indoor cats have lives that last 16 years or more.

Minnie had never liked men or even boys. She wouldn't allow my son to come near her, but Pixie had opened up something inside of her, initiating her recovery. For over twelve years she would take

turns cuddling with my daughter and me, but that was it, her scope of reason. Then along came Dave.

Meeting the One is pretty spectacular. When it finally happens to you it can feel rather unexpected. About three months in Dave and I were lying in bed, I think it was the early morning. Minnie jumped up and slowly encroached on him. With his endless well of calm, he stayed very still and let her make every move. She laid on his chest for ten minutes, letting him pet her and then ran away. I was pretty sure my eyes were going to jump out of my head when I watched her walk over his body, allowing him to pet her. She showed me in one articulated move that I got it right this time.

For the majority of her life, she hated men, men and people food. I'm not sure how he did it, but Dave healed my cat, he healed Our cat. There were times she used to starve herself if I didn't buy her preferred brand of food because I didn't have enough money. She's not so finicky anymore. She now seems to have an appetite for food that starts with the letter P. In the last few months she's eaten pineapple, peas, pizza, popcorn, and potato chips. Dave thinks it's because his last name begins with P. I laugh and remind him that mine does too.

Minnie is no longer afraid of people, particularly men. She loves to cuddle with my son now. We often joke that she sees in hands, always looking for the one most likely to pet her. My daughter and I have been petting her for sixteen years. Sometimes we've had enough, but Dave is always waiting and ready for her. She looks young, but she's not. I can see how tired she is. The vet thinks she might have quite a few years left in her. I frequently wonder about it, and Dave can't talk about it. Now, when my little Mama Cita hears car doors shut, she looks up only in happy anticipation, just as I do.