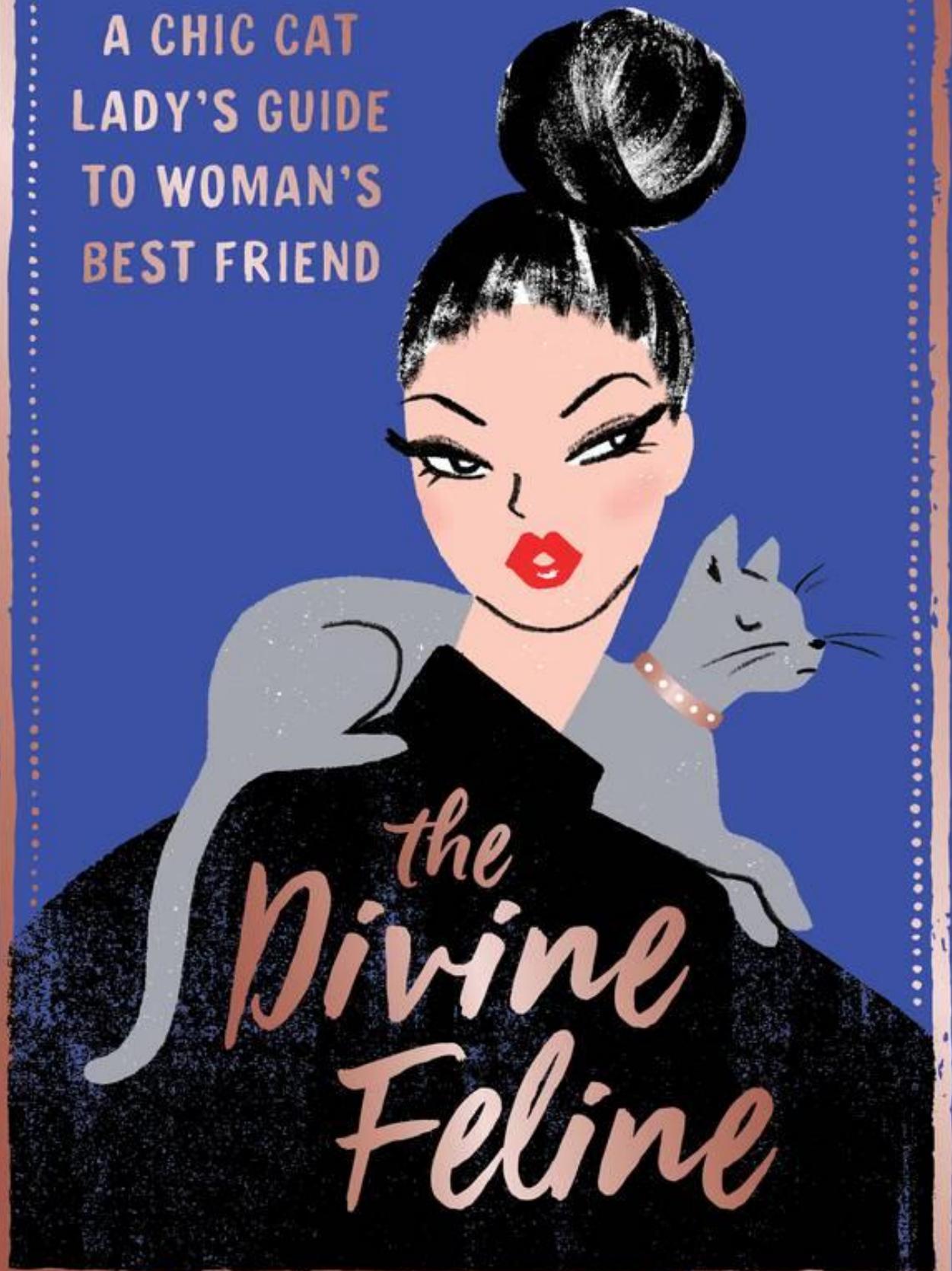


INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR,  
**BELINDA ALEXANDRA**

A CHIC CAT  
LADY'S GUIDE  
TO WOMAN'S  
BEST FRIEND



*the*  
**Divine**  
**Feline**

Also by Belinda Alexandra

*White Gardenia*

*Wild Lavender*

*Silver Wattle*

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*Sapphire Skies*

*Southern Ruby*

*The Invitation*

*The Mystery Woman*



*the*  
**Divine**  
**Feline**

A CHIC CAT LADY'S GUIDE TO  
WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND

**BELINDA ALEXANDRA**

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*To all the cats I have ever loved*

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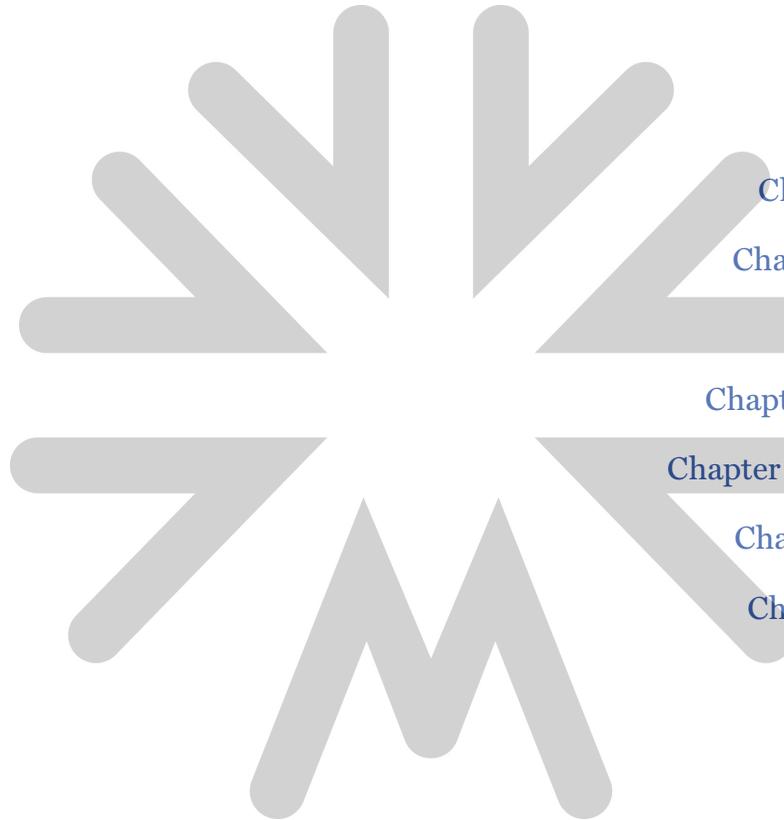
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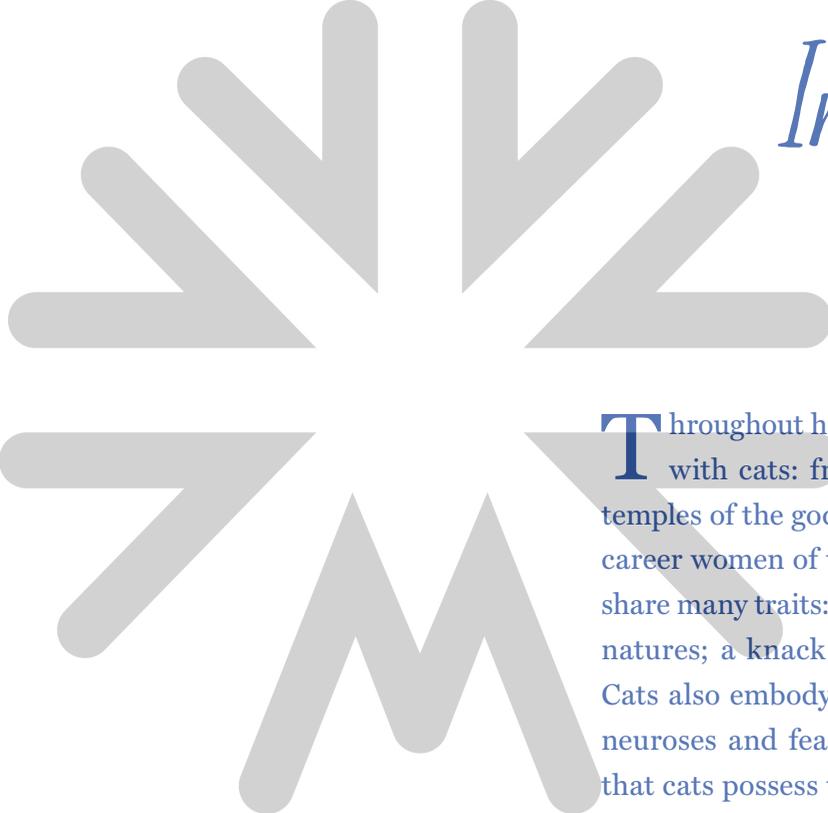
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## *Introduction*

**T**hroughout history women have had a special relationship with cats: from the ancient Egyptian priestesses in the temples of the goddess Isis, to witches of the Middle Ages and career women of today. This makes sense, as women and cats share many traits: beauty and elegance; sensitivity; affectionate natures; a knack for nurturing; and a love of the luxurious. Cats also embody the feminine dark side, with a tendency to neuroses and fear of change. Then there are those qualities that cats possess that women long to emulate. A cat will fight fiercely to protect itself; never says 'yes' when it means 'no'; and isn't afraid to claim the best seat in the house for itself. Cats are loyal to those who love them, but couldn't give a toss what people think of them. They don't suffer self-esteem issues



or worry if they are overweight. In addition, they exude an air of mystery in that slinky walk . . . oh, to be a cat!

Yet society has often driven a wedge between women and their cats, both physically and emotionally. In history, they were persecuted together during the witch-hunts, and even in modern times the lore of the ‘crazy cat lady’ persists. The ‘cat lady’ is thought of as a hermit and a hoarder. Shunned by society, she dies alone. Her body isn’t discovered for weeks and when it is, she has been half-consumed by her ravenous cats. The story is a subtle warning to women who want to remain single, independent and childless: better get a husband and family or this could be you! (It’s interesting that there is no equivalent of the ‘crazy cat lady’ for men.)

In this book you will find none of that. It is an unashamed celebration of the spiritual bond of feline and feminine that has been handed down to us from ancient times. I will describe the history of the relationship of women and cats through the ages and share the journey of my own life with cats, relating how they have influenced my writing. I’ll also show you how to revive the sacred bond of the witch and her familiar (an animal that assists a wise woman to travel from the physical to the spiritual realm) by suggesting ways you can create a magical connection with your cat (or cats, as the situation may be).

As a lover of history, I’ll share some endearing stories of famous people and their passion for cats, and as an amateur cat behaviourist I’ll give you some insight into why cats do

the things they do. I'll also provide information on how to understand the ways your cat communicates with you, suggest home remedies for simple ailments, and ponder with you on the question of whether it is possible to train a cat or not—they have certainly trained us! As a lover of all animals, and especially wildlife, I'll propose ways to both enjoy your cat and be mindful of all the other lives around you too. I'll also describe some ways to create a stimulating environment for indoor cats to take care of their psychological and physical needs.

But most of all this is a book about joy. Quite often women who love cats are made to feel guilty about it. We are almost compelled to describe ourselves as 'crazy cat ladies' by way of apology for our passion. There is a difference between a cat hoarder, who keeps herself and her animals in terrible conditions due to a tragic mental health issue or other trauma, and an everyday woman who happens to like cats and maybe even has several. You'll notice that I've taken the 'crazy' out of the subtitle of this book. I'm all for joshing and not taking ourselves too seriously, but you'll see when you read the history of women and cats that the belittling of the relationship has some dark undertones.

Apart from that, I am also a huge proponent of joy! It is an emotional state that adds zing to our lives, makes us better and more loving people, and gives us purpose. The best way to find joy is to fully and unapologetically indulge yourself in things that make you feel good. It is my hope that by understanding

the divine bond between women and their cats you will be able to see the relationship you have with your cat in a new and magical light.

So make yourself a cup of tea (or coffee, hot chocolate, Champagne or whatever you fancy), settle down with your feline companion and delve into the world of *The Divine Feline*.

Enjoy!

*Belinda Alexandra*



*Dear Pebbles,*

*I've always hated using the pronoun 'it' when talking about animals: he or she is preferable, but it can be messy and slightly confusing when writing about cats in general. Although I don't personally have a problem with the word 'pet' (the lady at the local fruit shop calls me 'pet' in the most affectionate manner), I appreciate that this can be considered belittling to our feline companions.*

*What labels and pronouns would you recommend for this book?*

*Belinda*

Dear Belinda,

The art of being correct is as delicate an operation as traversing the narrowest of fences, pretending to be adorably fast asleep when you are in someone else's favourite chair or sneaking titbits from the dinner table and then appearing innocent when somebody notices that there are no prawns in the Shrimp Fra Diavolo. That is because what is 'correct and appropriate' is like beauty: it exists in the eye of the beholder.

Let me share a little secret with you. We cats exist in a world of feelings, smells and sounds. Words are of little importance to us. How else could we put up with undignified names like Darth Kitty,



Meatloaf or King Fluffy Butt if we didn't feel the genuine love of those misguided beings who named us? You could say, 'You little devil incarnate, you hairy gremlin, you lumpatious little lump,' and we would lap it up as long as you said it in a soothing, sweet purring tone. And as for smells, don't even get me started . . .

Now, human beings are a different matter. No creature on earth is as easy to offend as a human, especially those humans who like to be offended on behalf of others. As your book will be read chiefly by your own kind, I suggest that you use the word 'companion' rather than 'pet' where appropriate. The term 'owner' will most likely cause confusion. Who is it exactly that is owned? The human or the cat? Those people fortunate enough to have one of us felines in their lives will understand that they are the ones who are 'owned', not us. Many people prefer to see themselves as 'guardians'—though it causes me to chuckle to think that any cat needs to be 'guarded'—which evokes a sense of the honour and privilege those humans hold in devoting their lives to a feline's every whim and need.

Perhaps the best thing you can do for your readers is to assure them that all conventions of language in *The Divine Feline* are used with the spirit in which the book is written: with deep love and reverence for the special bond between women and cats.

As we cats would say: 'Mrrh! Prrh! Meow! Meow! Meeeow!' (The meaning of a thing always depends on its context.)

*Pebbles* 

1

# Cat history

## Where the kitty cat originated

While there has been some contention over the years, it is largely now agreed that the ancestor of the domestic cat is the African wildcat, *Felis silvestris lybica*. This cat still roams in northern Africa and the Middle East and it is well adapted to life in the desert. Its tawny fur and striped markings are the perfect camouflage against the sand and rocky outcrops. It resembles a large, elongated mackerel tabby.

What is most fascinating is that although the African wildcat has been around for five million years there is little difference between it and the domestic cat in terms of genetics and appearance. The domestic cat is slightly smaller than its African ancestor, gives birth to more litters a year and has a greater variety of coat colours. But all domestic cat breeds

share this common ancestor. If you have ever suspected that, despite the highly privileged lifestyle you provide for your cat, there is something a little untamed about your furry friend, you are right.\*

The love story between cats and humans began about 4000 BC when nomadic tribes settled along the Nile valley in Egypt and planted crops. Egypt became an agrarian society that relied on grain and the ability to store it in times of famine. Mice and rats can destroy a grain store in a matter of days and, while local snakes such as the deadly asp helped to keep the population of vermin under control, they weren't desirable to have around the house. Wildcats were likely attracted to the granaries by the steady supply of mice and rats, and farmers were more than pleased to have them around. They offered the cats tasty morsels of food and milk to drink to encourage them to stay. Cats always know when they are onto a good thing and a mutually beneficial relationship developed; possibly the tamer kittens born from these cats became used to human company and, preferring the shelter and luxuries offered to them over life in the wild, they stayed put.

Unlike other domesticated animals such as dogs, sheep and cows, cats were not bred for certain tasks. They were perfect

---

\* *The Latin name for a domestic cat is Felis catus. You can use this term to impress your friends. For example: 'I have to go home now and feed my Felis catus.'*

as they were for rodent catching and as animal companions. As a result their appearance and behaviour are little changed.

In other words, cats chose us as much as we chose them. In fact, some go so far as to suggest that cats domesticated themselves. This could be the reason that cats have always maintained that intriguing air of self-possession and independence. They have never been our slaves or servants. We have never been their masters. We got cute companions who kept rodents away from our food supplies. In exchange, cats received treats, shelter, affection, adoration and eventually the status of gods.

Do you understand now why your cat might be just a touch haughty?

### The original cat lovers

The alliance between cats and humans may have begun even earlier than predynastic Egypt. An African wildcat and a human skeleton have been uncovered in a Neolithic gravesite in Cyprus. The fact that the grave of the cat had been deliberately dug and that it had been buried in close proximity to the human suggests that the two were connected in some way. But the most significant and large-scale relationship of cats and humans formed in Egypt. Mice and rats not only destroyed the grain supplies, they brought diseases with them. The larger rats sometimes attacked infants and the elderly. Cats kept rodent populations under control, and they also disposed of dangerous snakes and scorpions with aplomb. Those households with a

family cat or two prospered and also seemed to suffer less misfortune. As a result, cats became associated with good luck.

Any cat lover knows that when you invite a cat into your home you will eventually lose your heart to it. This seems to have been the case with Crown Prince Thutmose of the Eighteenth Dynasty (brother of Akhenaten), who had his pet she-cat mummified after her death and gave her a ceremonial burial. Thousands of cat mummies have been unearthed in Egypt. While some might have been temple cats, archaeologists believe many of them were companion cats of loving guardians who wished to assure them of an afterlife. Herodotus, the Greek historian, observed that in Egypt when a house caught fire it was only the cats that mattered, and when the family cat died the household members would shave their eyebrows and go into mourning.

With this sort of reverence for felines, it was only a matter of time before cats rose to the status of gods. The ancient Egyptians did not make a distinction between humans and other animals. Their religion was animism: the belief that all living and non-living things contained a spirit and reflected some aspect of the greater divinity. Therefore every person was able to make contact with the Divine directly themselves or through these beings. It was only later that the concept of almighty gods who needed the pharaohs and priests to act as intermediaries developed. It seemed that cats were able to bridge both forms of worship. With their dual natures—loving



and affectionate on one hand, fierce hunters and fighters on the other—cats were the animals most comparable to the gods, who could raise a pharaoh with one hand and then smite him with the other. The sun god Ra, the most powerful deity of all, was believed to take on the form of a cat each night and fight his great enemy, the snake-demon Apep. This meant that the sun could rise the next day.

Later, during the time of the Twenty-second Dynasty (945–715 BC), cats became associated with the revered Egyptian goddess Bastet, who had a magnificent temple in the city of Bubastis. Bastet originally started out as a lion-headed woman (the lion being closely associated with royalty), but in later periods her iconography changed to that of a cat. Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of small bronze statuettes of Bastet, suggesting that she was possibly the most popular goddess for households: a people's goddess, if you like. Although held sacred by both sexes, cats were most closely associated with women, especially in regard to fertility. Cats were noisy and ardent copulators, able to produce three litters a year. They were also elegant and clean animals that liked to groom themselves. Bastet was linked with sensual pleasures including perfume as well as being viewed as a practical protector.

Because cats were sacred, harming one was considered a crime. If a person came across a deceased cat, they would be sure to let everyone know that they had not been responsible for its death. Diodorus Siculus, another Greek historian, reported

that even when Egypt was part of the Roman Empire an angry crowd murdered a Roman soldier who had accidentally killed a cat. Legend states that during the battle of Pelusium in 525 BC the attacking Persians had their front-rank soldiers carry cats and other sacred animals, knowing the Egyptians would be reluctant to shoot their arrows in case they hurt one of them.

Smuggling cats out of Egypt was forbidden, but it was hard to resist such a prized animal. If a foreign trader managed to do it, the army was sent to retrieve the cat or emissaries dispatched to diplomatically argue for its return.

To be labelled a 'crazy cat lady' has become something of a put-down. But I'm comforted by the fact that the original cat crazies were possibly the most advanced people on planet Earth at the time. The same civilisation that brought us paper, libraries and advances in mathematics, science and medicine had an obsession with felines that was probably equivalent to, if not greater than, the popularity that cats enjoy on the internet today.

*It is easy to understand why the rabble dislike cats.  
A cat is beautiful; it suggests ideas of luxury,  
cleanliness, voluptuous pleasures.*

**Charles Baudelaire (French poet, 1821–1867)**

*Dear Pebbles,*

**My cat, Merlin, is destroying my love life. Whenever my boyfriend comes over to stay, Merlin pees on his clothes or on his side of the bed.**

**What should I do?**

**Desperate**

Dear Desperate,

The answer to this question is rather obvious to me. If Merlin doesn't like your boyfriend, get a new boyfriend! We cats sniff out a rat long before you do! But seriously, look at this from Merlin's point of view. How many nights has he sat faithfully by your side as you cried your heart out over some cad who was never good enough for you anyway? Now you are turning up with this new person who smells strange and, even worse, is getting those special smiles from you that used to be reserved for Merlin alone. And God forbid if you are shutting Merlin out of your bedroom when your boyfriend comes over! Merlin is simply reacting as any self-respecting feline would: like an insanely jealous lover! If this gentleman is really meant for you then he will go to as much trouble to win over Merlin as he does to win you over. This could include:



- ♥ Lightly misting his shoes and clothing with a synthetic cat pheromone product before he enters your home. This will make Merlin feel more comfortable with sharing his territory with this interloper.
- ♥ Arriving with a yummy treat for Merlin as well as flowers for you. Merlin will associate the arrival of your boyfriend with something positive, even if it really isn't.
- ♥ The three of you playing Merlin's favourite game together. A small toy on the end of a string is nearly always a winner.
- ♥ Making sure your boyfriend speaks softly and respectfully to Merlin and never whistles at him like a dog or tells him to 'scat'!

I'd also recommend that you allow Merlin to continue to share the bed with you along with your boyfriend, as 'cats' that sleep together bond together. If that's not possible then give Merlin the dignity of a far superior bed outside your room (perhaps one that is heated in winter and smells deliciously of catnip, with a 'turn-down' service that includes a cat treat).

Mind you, if you really want to win over Merlin, you should let him continue to sleep with you in your bed while your boyfriend gets the couch. Just saying!

*Pebbles* 



### The cat goes abroad

Although it was illegal to take a cat out of Egypt, some foreign sailors managed to do it—not only wanting the cats as symbols of good luck for dangerous voyages, but also to control the vermin populations on their ships. Cats may not like rough seas, but they do like fish and mice and maybe even cuddling up to a lonely sailor. A symbiotic relationship developed between felines and seafarers and to have a cat on board became the talisman of a safe voyage.

The Greeks were important traders with Egypt and it wasn't long before depictions of domestic cats began to appear on pots, artwork and coins in Greece as well as its colonies in Italy, France, Spain and the Balkans. While there is some conjecture about whether there had already been some domestication of wildcats native to Asia, it appears that cats from Egypt soon appeared after the opening of trade routes to India, China and Japan. Having arrived, cats quickly became popular in Asia because they kept rats away from the valuable silk cocoons. Oriental breeds of cats such as the Siamese and Burmese still share the DNA of the African wildcat.

The Romans helped to further spread the cat throughout their empire, including Britain. The Roman army employed felines to protect their military and food stores from vermin. Soldiers could not go into battle only to discover too late that their weaponry—manufactured using leather and sinew—had

been gnawed at by rats. Again, cats became associated with good luck, but this time in battle.

Cats were not the only Egyptian export. Religion travelled from that ancient land all over Europe, including the cult of the goddess Isis. This goddess of fertility, childbirth, marriage and children had become entwined with Bastet during the Hellenistic period. Isis became a popular goddess throughout the Roman Empire and had more temples and shrines dedicated to her than any other deity. She was seen as the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses of the world, so no matter what religion you followed, you were worshipping some aspect of her.

Isis was the goddess of the night and the moon, and black was the colour of her robe. Black was considered a magical colour by the Egyptians. It was not viewed as symbolic of evil: it was simply the colour of the night. Isis was also believed to have the ability to transform herself into a cat. This may be one of the reasons a black cat was to become associated with her and with pagan worshippers in general.

Isis later merged with the goddess Artemis in Greece, and the goddess Diana in Rome. She was also associated with the Norse goddess Freya, who was believed to ride in a chariot pulled by two black cats.

Women had important leadership roles in the worship of Isis and were held in high regard in these times. They had rights that women for centuries after could only dream of, and would have to fight tooth and claw to get back, including

the right to choose their own marriage partners, to own their own property, and to be awarded half the marriage assets in cases of divorce.

Powerful women, an almighty goddess supreme above all, the magic moon and black cats. What could possibly go wrong?

### The dark age for cats

Next time somebody tries to tell you that cats are of no practical use, spend all day sunning themselves or sleeping, and have done nothing to advance humankind, you might remind them that without the cat's rodent-catching abilities, civilisation might have taken another direction entirely.

Initially the Roman imperial era was good for women, pagans and cats. The central government was tolerant of diversity of religious beliefs and left different regions to express their unique cultural traditions as long as they didn't commit monstrous crimes such as murder (including human sacrifice, which was common at the time) and rape. If citizens paid their taxes on time, they were mostly left alone.

In return, the government undertook various public works, including waste disposal and the supply of clean water, which led to good standards of health and hygiene as well as advances in medicine.

Cats were considered valuable, on par with other domestic animals such as chickens, sheep and goats. They were accounted for in divorce settlements as they were regarded as assets.

## Cat wisdom

---

*Xenia*



*'Remember you are a queen, so act like one! Stop tolerating fools and quit wasting your headbutts on those who don't appreciate them.'*

\* \* \*

The rule was that if the family had one cat, it went to the husband. But if there were several cats, the husband would get one and the rest went to the wife.

Things took a nasty turn with the rise of Christianity or, more accurately, with the misappropriation of it, as there is nothing in the teachings of Jesus that would support the brutality and ignorance that was to follow. In the early days of Christianity, women held important roles in the church, which reflected the regard Jesus showed toward them.

Paganism was a minestrone soup of religions, incorporating old gods, new gods, local deities, nature spirits, magic, genii

and philosophy into its spiritualism. Its followers believed that the Creator's spirit inhabited all things: people were sacred, trees were sacred, cats were sacred, and so on. It's interesting that modern-day study of DNA seems to support this view. Humans share DNA with other creatures and even plants. Cat-lovers may be interested to know we share about 90 per cent of our DNA with felines; not much less than we share with primates such as chimpanzees (96 per cent).<sup>\*</sup> This view allowed for tolerance of individual beliefs. Christianity, on the other hand, was dogmatic: there was one true God and one true way. Conversion, therefore, was important and apostles such as Paul were zealous about it. The Roman emperor Constantine used this fanaticism to consolidate his power. His new capital, Constantinople, contained Christian churches alongside pagan temples. The emperors who followed continued to encourage or even fully embrace Christianity. In 380 AD Emperor Theodosius I made it the official state religion.

The type of Christianity that arose from the teachings of the apostle Paul was strictly patriarchal. Women were ousted from their positions in the church, while those in the countryside were loath to embrace a new religion that devalued both them and nature. Why should they stop worshipping their beloved goddesses Isis and Diana?

---

*\* Even more startling, perhaps, is that over half of our genetic code is identical to that of a banana!*

In the repressive atmosphere created by the new interpretation of Christianity, the notion of honouring nature—or even studying scientific principles—was considered demonic. Controlling people by keeping them ignorant was the objective. The library at Alexandria was destroyed by monks. The human body—especially the female body—was regarded as inherently sinful, therefore bathing, which had been an important part of Roman culture, was discouraged.

It was a dark time for all humanity, but for women and cats, things were about to get worse.

### Witch-hunts of the Middle Ages

The new Roman emperors used Christianity as a force of conquest and unification, and the old pagan religions were driven out. The goddesses Isis and Diana were demonised; their temples were plundered and destroyed and their followers massacred.

Many of the advancements made by the earlier Greeks and Romans in public health and medicine were now disregarded and humankind went rapidly backwards. Waste piled up in the streets and the rivers and wells were contaminated with sewage. People stopped washing themselves and their clothes and began living in filthy conditions, wrongly believing that slovenliness was pleasing to God.

Violence became the order of the day and the chaos was further exacerbated by the invasion of Europe by Germanic and other barbaric tribes who destroyed and devastated the



cities. Charlemagne, leader of the Franks—a Germanic tribe living in the area that is France today—conquered the Saxon territories, expanding into what was later to become Germany. He also gained control of northern Italy along with the city of Rome, and fought the Moors in Spain.

As Charlemagne supported the papacy, Pope Leo III made him the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800 AD. Charlemagne ordered the death penalty for anyone still practising paganism and allowed torture in the case of ‘witchcraft’.

As Isis and Diana were associated with cats, this was bad news not only for women but for their feline companions. To destroy an old religion, anything venerated by it must be devalued and

associated with evil. Possessing a cat was considered evidence of witchcraft, as witches were supposed to be able to transform themselves into cats by the light of the moon. In 1233 Pope Gregory IX issued the *Vox in Rama*, which denounced cats as evil and gave divine sanction for their extermination, especially black ones, and the killing of their owners. So many women and cats (along with other ‘demonic’ animals such as hedgehogs and frogs) were rounded up, tortured and burned or drowned that in some villages no woman or cat remained.

The mass hysteria about witches that was unleashed would gradually grow to its full height from 1450–1750 and would result in the death of tens of thousands of women and children, and an uncounted number of cats and other animals. The killings in Europe would not come to a complete end until the late eighteenth century. The targets of these attacks were often the midwives and healers in their villages, educated women, elderly women who kept cats for company, women who had refused the advances of vengeful men, and women whose relatives wanted their property so falsely accused them of demon worship.

Many Christian celebrations were marked with cat torture and deaths, including St John’s Day and the first Sunday of Lent, when live cats were roasted over bonfires, their agonised cries supposedly warding off evil spirits. In Ypres, Belgium, cats were dropped from the belfry tower of the Cloth Hall into the town square.

## Cat wisdom

Sabine



*‘Kittens are cute, but they don’t know anything. Grace and poise come with maturity. Value your experience more than your youth. (And give a motherless kitten a lick and a helpful nudge when she needs it.)’*

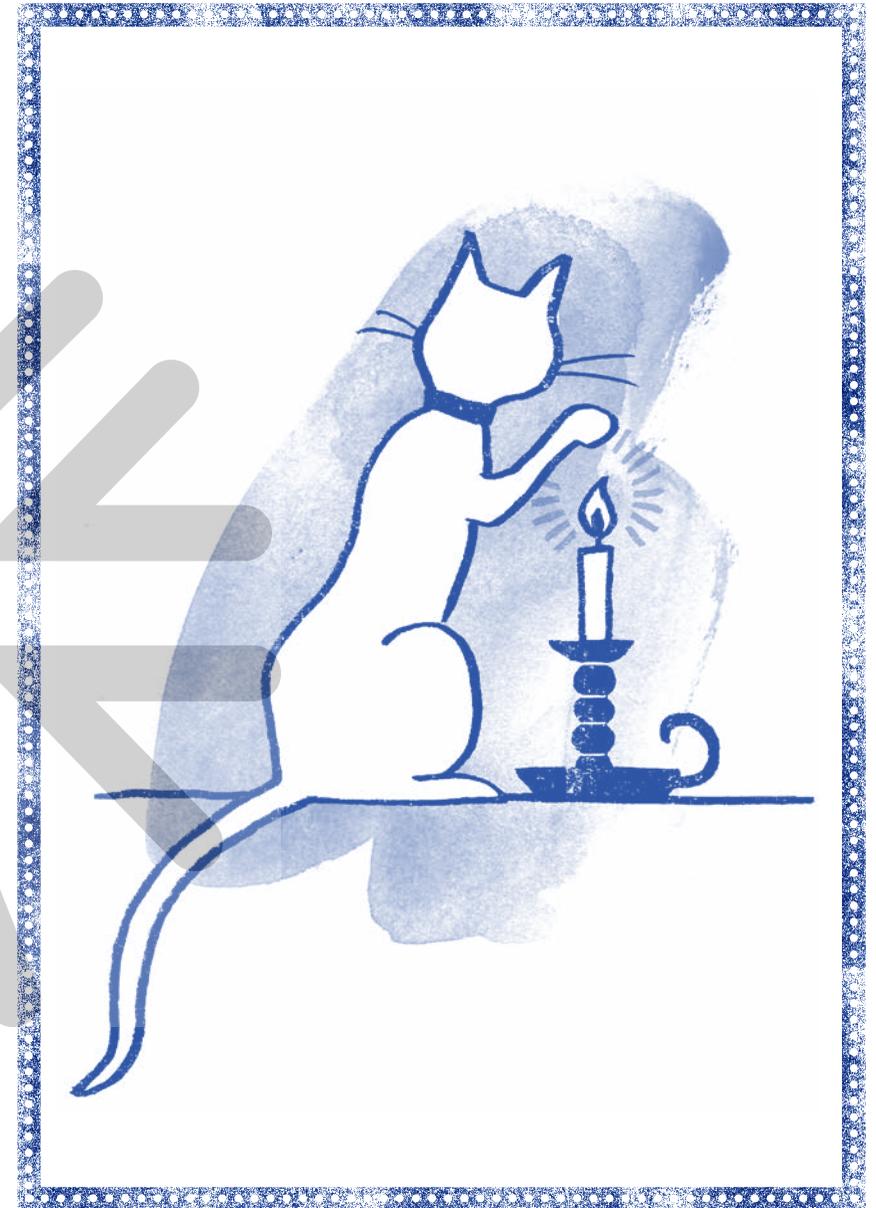
\* \* \*

The ignorance, cruelty, squalid living conditions and the death of so many cats became the perfect breeding ground for rat infestations and disease. It is no accident that the bubonic plague swept through Europe, killing millions. The disease is spread by fleas, their favourite vector being the rat. While cats alone could not have stopped outbreaks of the plague—better hygiene, cleaner streets and regular washing would have gone a long way to prevent it—the destruction and devaluation of an efficient form of rodent control certainly did not help.

## Charles Dickens

ENGLISH WRITER AND SOCIAL CRITIC  
(1812–1870)

When the Dickens family's cat gave birth to kittens, she moved them one by one from the kitchen into a corner of Charles's writing room. After several attempts to have the kittens removed to other parts of the house, Dickens gave up when the mother cat brought them all back again. He wrote with the kittens frolicking around him. Eventually the kittens were given to good homes, but Dickens kept one for himself: a white male cat who was deaf and was so devoted to the writer that he followed him everywhere. Dickens loved to tell the story of one evening, when he was reading with his cat beside him and the light of his candle went out. Absorbed in his book, Dickens simply relit the candle, but soon afterwards noticed it flickering again. He looked up to see his cat deliberately snuff it out with his paw. Dickens got the message. He put the book aside and gave the cat the attention he was seeking.



## The cat in Islam

While the medieval church was intent on wiping out cats, the animal was highly appreciated in Islamic culture. Cats were viewed as clean, welcome to wander into mosques, and valued for their rodent-repelling skills, especially by scholars because they stopped mice from destroying entire libraries of books.

Far from being demonic, cats were regarded as spiritual helpers and a cat's purring was likened to prayer. God's presence, it is claimed, was manifested to the prophet Mohammed on occasion in the form of a white cat. In fact, it seems Mohammed was quite a cat lover, something he conveyed in his *Hadith* when he instructed that affection for cats is part of faith. He prohibited the persecution and killing of cats. His love of cats was shared by his friend, Abu Hurairah (whose name means: Father of a Kitten). According to one legend, Abu's cat saved Mohammed from a snakebite and in gratitude the prophet stroked the cat and blessed it with its righting reflex (a cat's ability to land on its feet). Some even say that the 'M' on a tabby's forehead is for the first letter of Mohammed's name!

There is a charming story that Mohammed's own cat, Muezza, once fell asleep on the sleeve of his prayer robe. When the prayer call sounded, rather than wake her, the prophet cut the sleeve off his robe and left her undisturbed.

Mohammed's kindness was shared by other Muslims, including the sultan Baibars who, when he died in 1277 AD, willed a perpetual sanctuary for cats in a garden in Cairo.

## The cat makes a comeback

'Renaissance' and 'Enlightenment' are beautiful words with beautiful meanings. Renaissance refers to a revival and a renewal. Enlightenment means to develop a better understanding.

Both of these words refer to periods in history when humankind started to move forward again, after the brutality and darkness of the Middle Ages. These changes started at the top and took a while to trickle down to the masses, so it would still be some time before life improved for women and cats, but a crack of light was beginning to break.

### *The Renaissance*

The Renaissance took place over the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. It was a time of rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature and art. The role of the Roman Catholic church was questioned, and religion moved towards 'humanism'; a belief system that once again encouraged a personal relationship with the Divine.

Cats started appearing in Christian art, not as devils but as the embodiment of motherhood. In Federico Barocci's *The Madonna of the Cat*, Mary and the infant Jesus look on with benevolence as John the Baptist plays with a cat. There is some suggestion that Mary herself was seen as representative of the old earth mothers, Isis and Diana.

Leonardo da Vinci, perhaps the greatest genius humankind has yet produced, was not only ahead of his time in terms

of aerodynamics, anatomy and mechanics, but also in his appreciation of the cat. His drawing *Cats, lions and a dragon* displays cats in a way that brings their charm and playfulness to life. He also likened the feline form to a masterpiece.

The Renaissance was a period of world exploration and it may be that domestic cats first reached the shores of America on the ships of Christopher Columbus.

### *The Enlightenment*

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was an age when science blossomed and revolutions in the United States and France broke out. Good sanitation was once again viewed as important and education rather than ignorance was revered. The growing middle class gave rise to writers, scientists, philosophers and artists. The cat became a symbol, not of witchcraft, but of independence and cleanliness, and was adopted as a favoured animal companion by those who espoused the individual pursuit of happiness. Poets and philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and Alexander Pope claimed that animals had a right to pursue happiness too, and should be protected against cruelty. There was an increased interest in the old religion of paganism and its appreciation of nature, of which the cat had previously been an important element.

Women, especially those in high society, were free to express their love for their feline companions. French harpist

Mademoiselle Dupuy credited her tomcat as her muse and made provision for him in her will with a townhouse in the city, an estate in the country, and a servant to wait on him for the rest of his years. Before the Revolution, women of the French court lavished their angora cats with attention. Like the Egyptians' cats before them, they were remembered with elaborate tombstones on their demise.

Of course poverty of the masses was still a major issue during the Enlightenment, as was the horror of slavery. Humankind still had a long way to go, but things were definitely on the way up for cats!

### **The cat victorious**

The reign of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, from 1837 to 1901, was an explosion of inventions, progress and reforms. The Industrial Revolution saw people flock from the countryside to live in cities. The catchwords of the age could have been 'advancement' and 'curiosity'.

Travelling was no longer only for explorers. The burgeoning wealth of the middle classes and the expansion of the railways, along with British colonialism, bred generations of intrepid tourists. Egypt, with all its magic and mysticism, was a popular destination and an enthusiasm for archaeology brought about a renewed interest in the goddess Bastet.

For those who could not travel, new museums, public aquariums and exhibitions brought the world to them. In fact,



Victorians loved the exotic so much that they brought it into their homes. Cabinets of curiosities became popular items in Victorian drawing rooms, and no parlour was complete without a rare orchid snatched by flower-hunters willing to risk venomous snakes, tigers and angry natives to bring treasures home.

While the upper classes were out hunting the big cats of Africa, India and Asia to near extinction, the middle-class Victorian family became obsessed with the miniature version that curled up on their laps as they read Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*. Cats reaffirmed their place with women, because what symbolised a tranquil, well-ordered home better than a cat sleeping peacefully by the fire? Cats, along with dogs, were now included in family portraits.

Anthropomorphic depictions of cats appeared, such as Beatrix Potter's Mrs Tabitha Twitchit, a shopkeeper and the mother of three scallywag kittens, Moppet, Mittens and Tom Kitten. The Victorians adored knick-knacks, and images of cute cats now appeared on all forms of home decor from teapots to clocks, inkwells, tapestry cushions and weathervanes.

It's no secret that Queen Victoria was a great animal lover. As well as her many beloved dogs, parrots, donkeys and ponies, she was partial to a fluffy white cat that she named White Heather. It was Queen Victoria who gave Royal status to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and set the stage for many society women to take up the cause of homeless cats and dogs.