

## Cats Between the Lines by DM Denton

Cats must be there. Even as I wander long ago and faraway, they follow me, rub my legs, curl on my bed and beg my attention without disturbing it. Their purring is my mantra too, so natural and deliberate at the same time, encouraging the perfect rhythm of my heart. They are soft to the touch yet strong enough in their will. One swipes at my pen to remind me not to take it all so seriously; another paws my arm, pleading, eyes green with envy for the obsession that seems to leave him out. Oh, no. How can I tell him? With a turn and a bow and a stroke he's reassured; with an Eskimo kiss he's a distraction but—as one of my favorite writers, Colette, once noted—never a waste of time. Yet another stretches, slithers and yawns like a serpent enticing me to a nap. And then I realize I'm being watched by that scamp who only sleeps to run and jump and wrestle when he's awake, small and smart and certain I can't grab him before he runs away again.

Cats know more than they ever say, probably for the best if progress is ever to be made. A leonine length with legs neatly crossed and head shaped for stillness sets me wondering if any activity could be better than none. Oh, I know. I must make a living, eat and drink and pretend to hunt. So I do so with their goal in mind, eyes squeezed closed and whiskers and paws and tail twitching, to savor sleep as much as success—for the dream of the mouse even more than its taste.

Cats can be characters; as many as I've had there's no end to the possibilities. I can dress them up and use them in stories that otherwise might not welcome them. I suspect they would be flattered if they knew, expecting me to take them everywhere I go and include them in everything I do. Saying that, they realize being ignored is freedom from expectation, especially if turned into a choice. And vanishing is just another way of being found.

Cats must be there, whether off by themselves or entwined with each other blending colors and creeds, laying on my feet or an angel at my shoulder, between the sheets or novel pages which means manipulating history a little for their appearances. Even as they don't seem relevant, I hear their breathing and know I'm still alive, remember their passing and feel them present, anticipate more to come and believe they too will save me. They persuade my life and writing to pay tribute to what is here and gone and yet to be created.