

Wiccan Wonder

A Short Story

Louise Harnby

Copyright © 2018 Louise Harnby

The right of Louise Harnby to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. All rights reserved. This book is offered subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without permission of the author.

There are three of them. One white, smudged with grey and caramel, a scrawny tabby, and a big black bugger. She likes him. Handsome and haughty, already strutting around like he owns the place.

‘I’ll take him.’

‘Fidelio,’ says the cat lady. ‘That’s his name. He’s special. Can sense things. Came from that Wiccan lot over in Clapham. And he likes you – I can tell.’

Course you can, she thinks. She smiles, holding back the *fuck-are-you-talking-about* as she thrusts thirty quid for Cats Protection into the woman’s hand.

By the time the door’s closed she’s changed his name. Andrew, like the dog in *Mary Poppins*. A bit more down to earth and just a little bonkers. But it suits him. They’ll mooch along nicely together.

THREE MONTHS LATER

Two in the afternoon and she’s still in bed. Last night was a late one, another two-dinners jobby with her mates. Meet, eat, drink, eat again. London’s good for that.

She stares up at the blown plaster on the ceiling and makes a mental note to get someone in.

She would have slept like a log but the damn cat won’t settle. Keeps mewling and kneading the

mattress. She shushes him and he looks at her the way cats do. Like you're shit and in their way. He rises to all fours and pads to the bottom of the bed, leaving a tiny brown arse print on the white sheet. Maybe his guts are playing up – he's been off his food the past couple of days. Then he's back again, worrying her with his paws.

'Christ's sake. Come on then.'

She rolls to the side of the bed and stands. Andrew bolts through the door and she follows. He takes the stairs four at time, all grace and guile. She treads more carefully.

Halfway down, she freezes as a huge, keening yawn comes from above. Structural. She fights to make sense of it as the world turns beige. *What the—*

She takes a breath, chews dust. Gagging, she reaches for the bannister and steadies herself, then trips her way to the bottom and into the kitchen where the air is clear.

The cat's by the fridge, lapping at the water bowl. He looks up, then saunters across and rubs the length of this arched body against her calf.

She gives it thirty minutes, then climbs the stairs. She's worked it out. The catastrophe awaiting her confirms it. Half the bedroom ceiling has come down. The corner of a pillow pokes out from under a hunk of plasterboard and coving. *Christ, if—*

Fur tickles her bare leg once more. She looks down.

‘Who’s a clever bugger then.’

Handsome and haughty. And the cat lady was right.

TWELVE YEARS LATER

She runs a finger oh so gently over the fur just above his nose. Three weeks ago, she lost her mum. Now him. It’s a different kind of hurt, of course. And there are wonderful others in her life who arrived later – a man, a child. Still, it aches. The end of an era. And he saved her – there’s that.

She’s not ready yet but she’s spoken to the cat lady. And when the time’s right, the Wiccan lot in Clapham have a little something for her.