



# CAT CALL

## SHORT FICTION BY LINTON ROBINSON

Sphlinka was not merely some ordinary witch's black cat.

Though she certainly looked the part.

Sphlinka was very definitely not a pet, nor a companion, nor even a "familiar".

Sphlinka was, in fact, a witch unto herself. Sister to all witches, daughter to all darkness, wife to all demons. And mother to all cats: their mentor, mistress, model, and misery.

Sleek and slick, she slinked through the broad streets and ordered gardens of the ridiculous dream of human residences. With graceful and arrogant disdain she snaked past lighted windows and regarded the temporal world, reproach in every skulking footfall. A cat was such a convenient and agreeable way to travel. To exist, for that matter. What fool would choose to present themselves to the world as weird, wizened, and warthaired, cackling crazily across the moon on a broomstick, with this elegant mode of living available to all who practice the True Arts? A superior style, a superior way to be. Just so much more... familiar.

And so much more so on this particular night, the happy hour of the Earth's own calendar, the dawn of the planetary pagan year. The moon-drenched night that marked the feeding frenzy date in the celestial line-up, the harvest of young souls, the eve of Samhain.

And not just any Samhain, by any means. And most certainly not the childish concept of Halloween, the sacred night spuriously attributed to "hallows" and "saints". A Samhain of full moon! And more than that, a cosmic confluence between so many worlds. A lifetime eventuality: all channels open, all hungers and needs laid bare and writhing. The night to reap and thresh young innocence. Shine on, harvest moon.

But even the silly "Halloween" customs of these feeble and pampered peoples carried its value on this night, like a garnish on a banquet. Those very sweet morsels of soul dress the part, their minds already prepared for the horrors that might await them. They burlesque the ultimate initiation with tawdry trappings of death and putrescence and sickness unto terror and death. How perfect is *that*?

The babes thronged into the street, showing off their disguises and pretensions. Sphlinka oozed out onto a front porch, gliding like an oil slick, insinuating her lithe black form among the crude festivities of the night. And stared avidly at the first group of little tricksters to gabble down the sidewalk, chattering of trivialities and sugary treats. Her orange eyes slitted, her ears laid back alongside her sleek head, her claws flicked sensually in and out of their sheathes in her ready paws. She stretched lasciviously. She purred. Through hooded eyes she watched them come to her.

How quaint; a faux vampire, all mired in the ersatz murk of Blue Light ersatz, all that cheap imitation of bloody concupiscence. Just too darling. You like fangs little boy? You like the drip-drip of blood? The tearing of throats? The dawning of damnation? The sucking of souls? Stand by, K-Mart shopper.

And what to be said of the witchy little waif with her plastic broom and stuffed black cat? Sphlinka's whiskers twitched in pique. The levels of artifice, the cheap and hollow knockoffs. She felt personally insulted by the bobbing peaked hat. Would "violated" be too weighty a word to describe this cut-rate subterfuge? She thought not. But a useful concept to keep around.

Oh, and look at the plump-cheeked little pirate, aping the style of the latest watered-down cinema evocation of havoc on the seas. You'll learn so much more than you bargained for about the plundering of booty, me hearty.

And just picture the little imp toddling along in red satin devil garb, stuffed, forked tail wagging and plastic horns tossing. Priceless. The comparison to the real thing should prove instructive in the extreme. And so amusing for all concerned.

And this little herd of bright eyes and unshriven souls would be just the first course of the movable feast the young evening promised. The evening of evenings! Sphlinka exulted in it, her throat rumbling wickedly. Moons on all planets were full on this night, resonating through the dark sides of all worlds, a ringing minor chord of all spheres, a rampant carnival of souls lost and found. The morrow would not be like all the other days that follow "Halloween", with a few scattered bereaved mourning the disappearance of a sparse handful of brats. It would be a plague of weeping as widespread as her heyday in Egypt, worshipped by all and plundering lives at will. A cleansing of nits, an area stripped of offspring, a carnival riot for the greedy appetites of Hell. The night we have all lived for, she thought. A night to just die for.

Ah, but wait, there was the true treasure in this clutch of costumed rabble. Look at the little bride! Oh, precious and rare. Tripping along in white lace and promise, adorable under the succulent symbolism of her gauzy veil. Blond, blue-eyed acquiescence: a fine feast for the demi-urges of Hell. Fancy grade, and worth the fine price they would pay for this imported delicacy. A more complex, richer taste that would bring Sphlinka the hard, cold coin of Power. In the markets of the misbegotten, concupiscence is silver but innocence is gold.

Oh, the treats that await these darling little dollops in the halls of Hell. And she could send them there with the playful snap of her jaw, the toying flick of a single claw. Simple, swift, no trick to it at all. But then hardly a treat, either, my tiny sweetlings.

Sphlinka eased forward from the shadows as the little band of festive fiend fodder turned in at the rustic gate and trooped up the front walk. Her whiskers twitched as one of them dropped his purloined candies and yelped as he scrambled to scoop them up. Adorable in his grey fleece mouse costume; how ironic is that? Yes, grab those goodies while you can, my little sweetmeat. Stow them away in your bright plastic jack-o-lantern. Her lip curled back from a gleaming fang in scorn. One more laughable artifact of human attempts to whistle past the graveyard. Carved pumpkins were themselves imitations of the skulls the ancients once lined their corrals with, a ludicrous attempt to ward off the inevitable fall of darkness. A pathetic pose of protection against the true nature of the hungry world. And now degenerated to this plastic cartoon imitation of the fake skulls. Well, tonight these whelps would see all levels of the charade; compare them to the originals in all their flaming, screeching glory.

The tot scrambling after his garish candy would have warmed the cockles of any heart. And even Sphlinka felt a warm languor as she slid towards the front steps. Don't think that this queen of felines didn't have a heart. In fact, she took pride in her splendid collection.

The brats were almost to the porch by then and Sphlinka was moving with more dire purpose, sidling past the little "pet door". Another aspect of this naïve trivialization; a people who invited the darkest of predators into their hearths and hearts just because we kill their mice for them. So droll.

Her hunger clambered, she sensed the rich spoor of the night through distended nostrils, heard echoes of tortured spirits through pricked ears, saw the outlines and simmer of spooks and hallows flitting in the charged, pregnant air. As she moved across the porch the expansion had already started: the lengthening incisors signaling the rest of the unholy shift of shape, the cocked crouch foreshadowing the fell leap, the jaws that rend, the claws that catch. Sweet pretties, come meet your ordained fate.

She slithered past the ruddy glow of a jack o lantern, already swelling into her fangs-first pounce. Even her canny slit eyes didn't catch the movement in time. She sensed the ballooning movement behind her, but before she could turn it was all over. Triangular chisel teeth munched in to shatter her spine, mushy flesh engulfed her, flame-colored cavities incorporated her and drew her down to the inner flame where she could already agonize at the burning, choke at the stench of her scorched fur, swallow the outraged shrieks of her own dissolving soul, fall like a doomed moth into the inner fire that would cook her for an eternity.

Jackola was not merely some ordinary wizard's pumpkin.



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