



by Fen



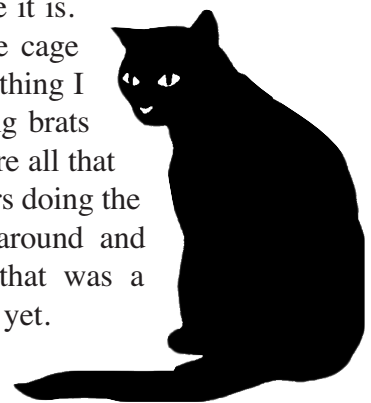
Crosbie

“**S**he loved every member of the Maynard family, from the busy Doctor and his equally busy wife, down to big Bruno and Pompey, the budgerigar, who lived in a huge cage in the playroom to keep him safe from Nox, the black cat, who ruled the kitchen. He was Anna’s own possession, but when the fit seized him, he took possession of any chair or sofa that he chose and the gate at the head of the top flight of stairs was always kept securely latched as much on Pompey’s account as the babies” (Adrienne, ch.11).

He! I’m Nacht; I believe you’ve heard of me, though I don’t make a fuss like some animals I could mention. I think you’d find me quite a handsome devil: glossy black fur, gleaming green eyes and the finest set of whiskers for miles around. Sturdy, too; I don’t hold with this fad for scragginess, and neither does my person Anna. By the way, don’t believe any of that rubbish about my name being Knocks. It was made up by Her Upstairs to impress the neighbours, but Anna chose my name, thank you very much, and she doesn’t understand the Knocks thing either. Knocks on what, exactly? I don’t need to do any knocking; I have my catflap in the back door, thank you very much. Nacht it is and Nacht it’s always been. All right, I know, not the most imaginative name for a black cat, but Anna’s not big on imagination (her sterling qualities lie elsewhere) and in any case they don’t seem to look much beyond the obvious in this house when it comes to choosing names. That dog thinks he’s really something, but they didn’t look very far to find HIM a name, did they? ‘Bruno’! Might as well call him ‘Dog’, if you ask me. As I do, when I bother to think about him at all.

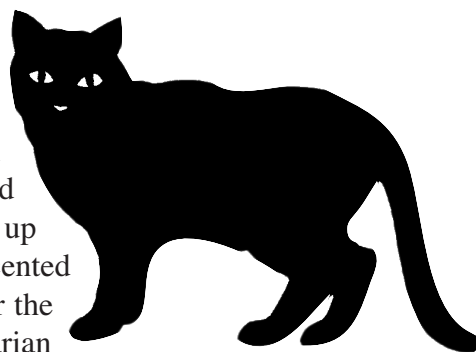
I’ve been living here with Anna for a few years now. There are other people in the house, but they live upstairs and they don’t come down to the kitchen very often, and we don’t want them here, Anna and I. I came here as a kitten; Anna got me from one of the farms she visits on her days off. She needed some company, poor soul. No holidays, no regular days off and expected to take those kids with her even when she does get let out! I flatter myself that my company is more entertaining than theirs, which, let’s face it, wouldn’t be that difficult. And I’m not ungrateful, oh no, not like some cats. I bring Anna presents quite often—all right, I sometimes have a little nibble at the tastier bits of the mice first when the temptation’s overwhelming, but I always leave the birds intact (can’t stand the taste of those feathers, to be brutally honest). She obviously appreciates my going to some trouble for her, because she shrieks with joy when she sees them and puts them away somewhere so safe I’ve never found out where it is. Talking of birds, I’m extremely interested in that blue effort in the cage upstairs. It’s a long way up all those stairs and there’s a silly hurdle-thing I have to jump over at the top, and then the place is full of screaming brats trying to grab at me, so to be honest I can’t be bothered going up there all that often. But go up there I do, and I’ve spent some very happy half-hours doing the hard stare into the cage and watching the stupid thing leaping around and tweeting blue murder. ‘Blue murder’—oops, some might think that was a Freudian slip! No, no, I wouldn’t. Really, I wouldn’t. Well, I haven’t yet.

So Anna and I, we live mostly in the kitchen in the daytime, which suits me just fine. Well away from that slobbering, galumphing dog;



in pole position for all the scraps and titbits from the cooking she keeps on doing (I keep well away when she's baking, mind you; flour doesn't do my looks any favours); conveniently near the catflap so I can go for a stroll when the mood takes me. I don't, admittedly, get in the mood for strolls as much as I used to. There was a time when I was round the farms most days in the spring and summer, and the larks I got up to there! Let's just say I made sure my genes were well-spread about, and there are a good few black kittens on the Platz to prove it now. But since Anna took me on a trip to Interlaken to see the Vee-Ee-Tee (that was what she said, and it wasn't a bundle of laughs, I can tell you), I've suddenly seemed to prefer staying nearer home. Well, it's a good billet. Anna has a couple of easy chairs with cushions she's knitted—it was a bit of a miracle she found time to do that, as Her Upstairs had her making whole blankets against a deadline recently, in what was supposed to be her free time—but Anna reckons nothing's too good for me, and she's not stupid. All I had to do was make sure she saw me having a few kips on her piles of squares before she got round to crocheting them together, and she got the idea OK. *And* she saved all the mohair scraps for my cushions, as is only right. I told you she's well trained.

At night, of course, we both sleep in Anna's bedroom over the kitchen. Getting up the ladder took a bit of practice, but I've cracked it now, and I reckon if she can do it, with her foot trouble, then I certainly can. It does tend to be a bit dark and stuffy, and the cooking smells linger up there, but that's fine by me. Nothing like a kipper-scented environment if you ask me. Though I have to say I prefer the old Austrian dishes Anna's so good at. None of that vegetarian



nonsense, I'm glad to say. That time when the weather was so bad that we couldn't get meat up here, you should have heard the fuss they all made, and quite right too. And of course the milk flows like water here—gallons of the stuff. I always reckon that's what accounts for my magnificently glossy fur.

Listen to me going on! I generally keep a low profile, as you'll know; I prefer to preserve my mystery and I'm not fond of being pawed by strangers, and heaven knows there are enough of those hanging around upstairs. That stupid dog doesn't agree, though. Slavering and fawning, he is, whenever he gets the chance. Excuse me—I think I hear Anna calling me. Yup, she's been making that trout with dill she does so often and needs me to clean up the scraps. It's a tough life in the cat corps.

**BREAK THE *FOLLY* CODE!**

**C**AN YOU CRACK THE *FOLLY* CODE? Each of the numbers in the grid represents a letter of the alphabet. All letters in the alphabet are used at least once. Use the letters given in the key grid (under the main grid) to get you on your way. *Answers on page 100*

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