

Cat Among the Pigeons

by Victoria Watson

My friend Shirley has a tortoise shell cat called Minky. Shirley loves her cat; I think she loves her cat more than anything else in the world. She loves her more than lunch breaks, more than clothes shopping, possibly more than pumpkin spice lattes and even more than her gorgeous boyfriend Sean. Minky on the other hand loves no one but herself. If Minky was a person she would be a complete bitch. She would be the one in the office who told everyone that you had loo roll stuck on your shoe. She would be the one who didn't invite you to her birthday party and then spend the next Monday telling you how incredible it was. She would hug you on the street in front of her friends and then laugh with them once you had gone telling them about how you once got scabies and how you were so drunk at the last Christmas party you snogged Gerald in Accounts and he still lives with his mum.

Minky is a cow. Minky takes one look at you and then turns her back on you, shoving her poker straight tail in your direction like a middle finger. Shirley sends me photos of Minky asleep on her bed, sitting demurely on the windowsill, videos of her purring in Shirley's ear. Minky has her own Instagram account with over 100 followers. Minky lifts hers head and pushes it into the palm of your hand if you reach out for your handbag. Minky has great self-esteem. She pads her paws on your legs, her claws drawing blood beneath your new wool trousers, and just as you are unable to refrain from wincing at the pain any longer, she turns her back at you, waving her wrinkly bum hole in your face. Minky is a bitch.

I don't like cats and I especially don't like Minky. I don't like her tuna fish breath, her scratchy wiry whiskers rubbing cat food on your shins. The way she walks into a room, lays down like Joan Collins and starts washing her nether regions while I am trying to tell Shirley about the special offers in New Look.

I don't like the walnut whip way she has of sleeping on the sofa, tightly spiralled with no head or tail, but always claiming the best seat to watch the telly. I don't like her bendy body wrapping itself around my tights, tripping me up and making me look like I haven't shaved my legs. I don't like her throaty meow that stops all of Shirley's conversations and makes her talk in that annoying baby way. She starts using that sing song voice when quite frankly **Minky is a cat** and cannot understand a word she says despite Shirley insisting she is some special cat whisperer and they are both in sync with what each other are thinking. Even if this were true, I am convinced Minky's innermost thoughts would be, "give me food bitch" and "die little birdy die".

Sometimes Shirley goes away for romantic city breaks with Sean, scenic places like Amsterdam or Prague. They take photos of themselves on bridges, drinking coffee out of tiny cups and laughing at rude statues. When Shirley tells me about these city breaks, what clothes she is going to need for the train journey out, the first café breakfast outfit, the all day sightseeing trouser suit, and the romantic candle-lit dinner black dress; the same thought imprints itself in my head: who is going to look after Minky? I know Shirley will ask me, she won't ask her sister because of all her allergies, and she won't ask her Gran because her sight is so bad, she gave Minky tinned mandarin segments for the whole week she was in Corsica. Minky lost half her body weight and most of her whiskers, and Shirley couldn't get the orange vomit stains out of the bedroom carpet; she had to call a cleaning man and he told her that cat vomit is worse than red wine, worse than chewing gum, probably worse than nuclear waste I imagine. But that's Minky for you. So, I always know she will ask me, I am waiting for it, dreading it, praying that she will forget, and Minky will starve to death in a long and painful way, so I can come over and console Shirley with tissues and a copy of 101 Dalmations. She always remembers though, tells me how Minky is looking forward to my special visits to spoil her with chicken supreme and Aunty cuddles. I also know that Minky is looking forward to my visits because just before I open the front door, she will have filled her cat litter tray with the biggest turd ever to leave a cat and Minky will watch me running to the dustbin with my face mask on. Then eyes like saucers she will stare with haughty indignation as I dry heave into the larder cupboard and watch with eager interest as I refill the litter tray ready for her to do it all again the next day.

So, when I sat at Shirley's desk last week to take a phone message for Wanky Pete in HR, and I noticed her booking confirmation for Eurostar next month I did what anyone would have done in my shoes. I got myself a new floaty dress from French Connection, a pair of fuck me boots from Office and a chic new haircut by PaulSimon, the one that charges more than a months' wages for a colour. I mean Shirley is my friend, my very best of friends, we have shared lipstick, sparkly jeggings and covid but something had to be done. I had to stop the whole Minky situation getting out of hand, catnip it in the bud if you like, for it was bringing me down, I am sure it was even making me lactose intolerant; and I only drink PG Tips.

I just could not bear the thought of Minky's little padded footsteps running to greet me with half a pigeon in her mouth as I opened the front door. So, I drove to his gym, stabbed my front left tyre with a pair of nail scissors and waited patiently while looking gorgeous.

It turns out I was right all along; I am not the only one who hates Minky. In fact, I think there are quite a few people that cannot stand that tortoise shell ball of fluff, that moulting hairball that would be better off as a pair of gloves. I also think Shirley really does love Minky above everyone else, but hopefully that is consolation as she is going to need someone to cheer her up when she sees all my Instagram posts snogging Sean underneath the Eiffel Tower next week.