

“The City of Black Cats”. *After a dream by H.P. Lovecraft.*

My dream of the black cat city was very fragmentary at the beginning. The place was built of stone and clung to the side of a cliff, with gates and sandy entrances at the base. There are high towns more or less like it in Spain. The place seemed to have been built aeons ago, but its present feline inhabitants had evidently lived there for countless ages. The cats were moving about in a rational and orderly manner, evidently in the performance of definite duties. In some cats an ineffably aloof bearing hinted that they were the chief keepers of the city. Despite my proficient fluency in the speech of our Providence cats I could not understand their language, until at last I thought I detected certain notes of command in their voices. This stony place began to present a forbidding air, and yet I could not help feeling that I was welcome there provided I did not hinder the cats.

The dark cats paid no attention to me, but went on with their labors without any break. As I continued to watch, I began to make out a pattern in their activity. I was standing very near the outer and lower part of the city. There were also cats just beyond the city and these seemed constantly on the lookout in the middle-distance, especially scanning — with curious, watchful green eyes — the dense shadows cast by some monolithic basalt blocks. These blocks were very regular and well seated on the raw red sand, and I had the

faint impression that perhaps they served some unknown purpose. Yet there was something I did not like about the very regularity and the impenetrably dark surfaces which they offered to the eye.

Alarmed at this new discovery of an uncertain alienage surrounding the edge of the cat city I made to venture some way back into its shadowy lanes. Seeing that the cats were not startled or disturbed by my movement into their domain, I continued to walk slowly back. Among the lanes there I noted that the cats became more docile. Some of the lanes were wide and in these I observed some cats to be sleeping in niches, the hollows being so contrived as to be struck by a shaft of high warm sunlight at a certain hour.

I neared the centre of the city and found the cats again constantly on the move, darting this way and that. It was as if they were performing some kind of chore or duty. Suddenly a reason for their labours occurred to me. The cats were guards of some type. I went on a little way and emerged into a vast central circular courtyard of dense smooth paving that was cut with an arc of sunlight falling from high above. Here I saw the cats everywhere, swarming in from arched openings on the sunward side with fierce eyes spangling with light, or departing like shadows into vaulted crypts or unlighted chambers deep in the walls. Some I saw above me,

racing upward on thin inclines into what I took to be the bases of certain vast conical stone towers which flanked the courtyard. I ceased then to be afraid of the cats, if afraid I had once been. Indeed, I began to look upon them with a certain admiration. For they were performing a task that demanded all their energy and concentration, and they did it nobly and without complaint.

It was then that a faint mewling and hissing reached my ears, with a precise note of urgency which led me to take this as a warning from forgotten duty-sentries posted around the edges of the city. The impression of those dark and unnervingly regular basalt blocks came again to my mind, and the memory was not pleasant to me.

Suddenly there was a shattering hiss which had the impression of a vast electrical discharge, akin to a ripping static force from the upper airs. But I knew instinctively that the noise was no common static phenomena of the atmosphere. It was grimly evident to me that this was the long-awaited doom of the city, a doom so desperately prepared for by the black cats, and that the mark of its coming was this new and violent irruption of outer noise. My dream-arrival to the city had clearly presaged the coming of such a horror, and by the pricking of their ear-tips and erectness of their tails I determined that the cats were now resolved that all in the city should be ready to face it. This hostile foray — of what I know not, but I took it to be an ancient enemy of the cats — might be some matter of vengeance, rather than an attempt to occupy or plunder or kill the cat city. Yet the vigilant cats had not weakened with the intervening aeons of waiting, and they were evidently ready.

Suddenly the city was in gloom. The electric-like hissing noise became overwhelming. It was a surging prickling hiss that grew louder and more ferocious the nearer it came, and at times almost seeming to carry a certain maddening musical pulse within it. Something then impelled me to walk toward this repellant sound, and thus I retraced my steps. I wove carefully through bands of forward marching and un-regarding cats. I slightly recall that I might have walked across the span of a bridge of dark stone, such that I had not encountered before, and under which a small river ran. The cats could not otherwise cross this river, since they feared only water. Beyond this bridge were narrow streets, and then came a wide ascent, until at last I came again into the familiar precincts near the outer wall. The city was by now shadowed in night, and this revealed curious fires burning in the many small arched window spaces. Yet, on passing some of these windows and looking in, I saw that these were not fires. They were the massed eyes of many cats. The streets behind me became full of cats. There were so many cats that they tumbled over each other, and they filled the houses and windows, and they clung to the walls of lanes as they leaped and mewed, hissed and spat. They seemed to be everywhere, and they seemed to be always in motion. The dark air was full of their scent. I could not stay in the city, and I could not stay in the dark. I had to go out, to battle. I now felt myself to be the appointed leader of the cats and was thus being carried bodily on their backs while their sinuous massed forms surged forward.

The hissing noise faded away into a thin and sinister piping and pulsing, before an utter silence and then a deeper roar like a vast rushing wind from some outer gulf of night.

My guard and retinue reached the very entrance to the city. We halted and I then sought to peer forward to spy my forward guard cats. Were they still there, moving about in what little light was now being given by the myriad eyes of my cats? In one maddening moment I glimpsed why the cat city had kept up their cautious vigilance, maintaining all their long precise habits of guarding. The shadow of a nameless fear hung definitely about the sinister monolithic basalt blocks which had sat patiently positioned near the entrance to the city. The menace around these was ineffable and half cloaked in darkness, yet it was undeniably out there. For the silhouettes of these formerly regular and upright blocks were now tumbled and awry in the dim blood-red sand. What titanic force could have made these immovable blocks so unstable as to tip them with such vehement action? Had the hideous sound emanated from the blocks themselves or — I hardly dared think it — from some titan entity which had approached the blocks only to be flung back by them? As my sight strained into the dim night beyond the city I made a further alarming discovery. Why had the forward cats abandoned their posts? I could only think of one thing. I called forward my army of cats and was carried bodily out of the city with all the stealth and cunning of centuries, and with a cold and incontrovertible realism that does not belong in dream, past madly tip-tilted blocks of alien black basalt that should not be on this earth...

I have told of the city of the black cats of which my dreams brought me dim, scattered echoes every night. I cannot hope to give any true idea of the horror and dread contained by this final surging march into what may have been fierce battle with the enemies of the cats,

for I have never discovered the meaning of the blocks or the conclusion of events. As the noise ceased, from the darkness behind me surged all the cats of the city, a vast army whose members moved to forward formations long appointed and diligently practiced. Of our final victory, if victory it were, I can give no report to the waking world. Yet... I am here to record my dream of the city of black cats.