

# Cat People #9: Tales of Manhattan

*by* Kyle Hemmings

She'd make a great catch in the rain. Because in the rain nothing moves. No cat girl of deep shade eyeliner. No saint of dark corners. Trouble was whenever it rained we couldn't find ourselves. We became parodies of the Keystone Cops. She must have laughed with the flashing black eyes of a Daruma doll.

Since she was a part of me, mine, mu, that assumption of sticky fingers, I had to bring her in. We had gone to school together, PS 12 on 63rd across from Central Park. As kids, we flew paper planes there during recess. Our teacher was too busy collecting varieties of leaf and butterfly. In the shade of elm, she moved like a cat, had that sad glint in her eyes of a girl not afraid to be anything. "You're going to be a bird someday," I said, watching the paper plane float above us. "But with no wings," she added, dancing in circles like some mad Nijinsky. She stole my virginity without ever touching me. By the time I graduated the Police Academy, no victim could move me.

Years later she became the infamous Cat Girl, connoisseur of what diamond-shaped love belonged to others: Marquise, Emerald, Radiant, Pear, Asscher, 24 Carat and beyond. She ripped off the Tiffany Porcelain ladies who resembled their manicured poodles. In her apartment paid for by another ill-fated lover, I imagined her dancing to Stravinsky's Capriccio for piano, or collapsing to the floor practicing her graceful cat death. Across town, in a precinct of weak walls, I was promoted to junior detective.

I chased her through open windows, across floors with glass walls, up and down Soho's side streets, a no go in Noho. In Chinatown, she vanished through crowds of serious-looking women, shoulder to shoulder. In skyscrapers, she disappeared through

elevator cars perfectly timed and my timing was always too hard-boiled egg logical. At night, I fingered my torn pillow and imagined holding the fur of some jaguarondi jumping building to smoking building, and in my dreams a witch changed me into a white cat. In others, I drank Cat Girl's blood, the only thing that could cure my St. Anthony's fire.

She had become the rage of fashion society, of young girls tired of A.M. radio's divas. It became chic to dress in black leather, gold hoop earrings, a vampish hand of black eyeliner, to pose with one hand on hip, the other against a graffiti-raped wall, that incredibly over-dramatic smirk that said Am I fuckable or what?

On TV, in the courtrooms, her close-ups mocked me. There was never enough to put her away. At trials, she would turn around and wink at me, as if to say Fuck you, I'm a cat. One case was dismissed on the grounds of race alone. A DNA sample proved that she was part Russian Blue. We suspected she had seduced the judge with the sweep of her eyes, the keenness of her answers.

As I drove in patrol cars, everywhere written in bold reds and oranges of spray paint, from Spanish Harlem to Delancy Street: *You'll never catch me*. In her palm, she had oil sheiks badly in need of new tricks in bed, and Wall Street brokers badly in need of blue sky. She always had me.

We met at a diner. She sat alone, dressed like a punk rocker in some Indie band that grooves in its own distortion, the short skirt, the green leg warmers, the tattoo on her shoulder of a raging cat, paws outstretched. I approached her table, smiled and sat down. I said that sooner or later everyone's luck runs out.

She buttered her English muffin and said without looking up, "Do you find me fuckable?"

In my place back on Bleecker, we fucked like R.E.M. zombies in a rage of awakening, of having been dead for so long. We smeared ourselves with new voodoo and obscene ritual. We must have made a thousand babies with perfect blues eyes. After she left, I noticed my one hand was handcuffed to the bedrail. With the other, I found a two dollar bill under my pillow. I knew I'd never catch her.

A rainy night. We received a call about a robbery in progress on the upper East side. We fired the siren and drove through red lights.

The woman was in tears. Her best jewelry gone. It belonged to her grandmother from the old country, who in her youth kept a collection of jewel damselflies.

I caught a flash of her through the window. Like a fool, I chased her across rooftops, telling myself not to look below. We were light years up. The streets were lizards. The streets were snakes. She performed a magnificent jump, ledge to ledge. In the rain, through the mist, the hunched shadow yelled out, "Am I still fuckable?"

I squatted, tensed, and flew like a lousy invention. I realized that I was her paper plane from childhood that had turned into flesh and bone. My hands caught on the opposite ledge. My body grew heavy. I fell. I fell forever.

I woke up to a nurse taking my temperature. How bad, I asked. She said in a sweet melodic voice, that besides the concussion, I had some bad cuts, that one of them became infected, a gram negative.

I studied her. She had a tattoo of a cat on her forearm. There was a trace of eyeliner and that smirk.

"Is it contagious?" I yelled out.

She already left the room.

