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My Life As a Cat

What happens when a birthday wish comes true in the most unexpected way?

On her 11th birthday, Katja gets more than she bargained for when she wishes she were a cat. The next morning, she wakes up with four paws, whiskers, and a tail – she has switched bodies with her beloved cat, Kitty!

But life as a cat in Lion Hill is far more dangerous than Katja imagined. All summer, cats have been disappearing from the neighbourhood. Is there a cat-catcher on the loose? Or something even worse – a cat killer?

Together with her best friend Carl-Otto and Kitty (now stuck in Katja's body), Katja must solve the mystery before she becomes the next victim. But how do you investigate a feline crime spree when your mum is a busy mayor, your dad a distracted brain surgeon, and your older sister only cares about social media?

My Life as a Cat is a magical yet down-to-earth story, filled with humour, heart and suspense. With striking illustrations by Oda Valle, the book takes readers on an adventure that combines the warmth of *Bakkebygrenda* with the whimsical imagination of Roald Dahl.

A funny and gripping tale about identity, family, and friendship for everyone who loves cats and great stories!

Elin Hansson

b. 1985

Elin Hansson (b. 1985) made her debut in 2019 with the children's book *Pencil Heart*, which was nominated for ARK Children's Book Prize and Bokslukerprisen (Middle grade award). Elin lives at a small farm in the Norwegian countryside, and has previously worked as a photographer. She has played the harding fiddle since she was ten years old.



Synopsis

When Katja Kristianson accidentally wishes she was a cat on her 11th birthday, it has dire consequences. She is sitting with her cat Kitty by the window, thinking her life would be easier if she were a cat, when a shooting star whiz by. The next morning, it has happened! When she wakes up, she has swapped bodies with Kitty – Freaky Friday style.

But, despite what Katja thought in the spur of the moment, when making her wish, it is not unproblematic being a cat in Lion Hill, where Katja lives. All summer, cats have been disappearing from the street. Could there be a cat-napper on the loose? Or even worse, a cat killer?!

Katja (in Kitty's body), her best friend Carl-Otto and Kitty (in Katja's body) decide to investigate, and see if they can find out why the cats are disappearing. Katja and Kitty realise they can communicate via meows, and Kitty translates to Carl-Otto, who is the only one who finds out that the swap has happened.

Katja's mother (Konstanze Kristiansen) is the mayor of the city. She is mostly concerned with appearances, and freaks out when her daughter starts behaving like a cat. Despite her human body, Kitty keeps behaving like she did before: she chases birds, climbs trees and curtains. Konstanze and Katja didn't have the easiest relationship to begin with, and it gets worse as her mother tried to deal with her daughter's strange behaviour. Throughout the book, she tries to her daughter admitted to a psychiatric ward. She isn't successful, however.

Lion Hill borders a colony garden where there are lots of small cabins and allotment gardens. Katja, Kitta and Carl-Otto carefully investigate all neighbours. Isn't it suspicious that the evening the Sphynx cat Sherry disappeared, Katja discovers a white van outside the owner Harriet's yellow house? All the neighbours are busy listening to violinist and fiddle maker Fridjof Frandzen who is having a concert in the backyard. But afterwards, the cat-loving neighbours go manngard through the colony garden looking for the cat, but no one finds Sherry.

Quickly and enthusiastically, the trio run their investigation. They get hold of a surveillance film that has captured a mysterious female figure doing something strange in one of the neighbouring gardens to Katja's family. They also use Carl-Otto's father's social media to snoop on the neighbours' online profiles, and find out that Harriet, Katja's closest neighbour, is the leader of a rather militant group that calls itself "A Cat Free City".

Katja, Kitty and Carl-Otto get together with Katja's older sister Christina to make a trap to lure out the cat killer. The plan is to film everything and put it on Christina's social media, to draw attention to the cat disappearances among the adults. But it doesn't quite go as planned, because they manage to lure the wrong people into the trap. Katja's mother shows up, and she is furious.

Meanwhile, Katja is lured away from the others by another neighbour, Fridtjof Frandzen. The fiddle maker has previously fed her. He is nice and approachable as most Danes are. But this night he is acting very strange. Frandzen is missing a string for the violin he is building, a Viola di Gatto (loosely based on

the Renaissance instrument Viola d'Amore). And he uses cat intestines for strings, as was the custom in the past. Katja now knows what happened with the nine cats that have gone missing, but she also knows that she is in grave danger.

But fortunately, Kitty discovers that Katja has disappeared and is able to rescue her from Frandzen. There is a scramble between Kitty and Frandzen. Kitty is thrown to the ground and ends up in a coma.

Katja has escaped, but it's not easy being a little cat alone in the big city. Eventually, she finds her way back to Carl-Otto's cabin in the colony garden. She wakes him, and he carries her home. There, Katja's father explains that Kitty (still in Katja's body) has ended up in hospital. Carl-Otto persuades Katja's father (who is a brain surgeon and works at the same hospital) to take the cat (i.e. Katja) to the hospital for therapeutic purposes. He has read an article that coma patients wake up faster by being near their pets.

But it's not just Katja and Carl-Otto who visit Kitty at the hospital, fiddle maker Frandzen also comes there under the pretense of bringing flowers from the neighbours in Lion Hill. Katja is terrified, even Kitty, still in a coma, has a reaction to the murderer visiting. But no one else understands what is happening. They thank Frandzen for the flowers and he leaves.

Carl-Otto insists on spending the night in the same room as Kitty and Katja at the hospital. He has read that a meteor shower is expected over the city that very night. But in the gloom of night, the cat killer also returns. Frandzen is afraid that Kitty (in Katja's body) will wake up and reveal him, and he wants to complete the last string on the Viola de Gatto.

Fortunately, Carl-Otto is correct in that there will be a new shooting star that night. Katja wishes herself back into her body, and the transformation wakes Kitty up from the coma.

But Katja is not the only one who has learned to wish for something from the stars. Carl-Otto, having realised that cat killer is Fridtjof Frandzen, decides to make their problem disappear, and he wishes the Danish violin maker into a Sphynx cat.

When the three friends return home a few days later, they learn that Katja's mother has changed the name of Lion Hill to Cat Hill. They are met by an euphoric Harriet who claims Sherry has returned to her. But the three of them all realise the grumpy Sphynx cat she has in her arms is not Sherry, but fiddle maker Frandzen. He got what he deserved.

Sample translation

My life as a cat

By

Elin Hansson

Translated by Lucy Moffatt

[From end of page 8]

Our street really ought to be called Cat Hill, because there are almost as many cats here as people. Or at least there were until all the cats started disappearing this summer.

[pp. 34-60]

Twinkle twinkle little star

‘Kaaaaatjaaaaa!’ Mum bellows as she struggles to scrub the cream off her face. ‘Katjaaaaaa!!’

Oh no!

OH NO!

OH NOOOO!!!

My heart pounds.

Everyone in the room stares at me.

‘Katja!’ Dad says in a horrified voice.

What on earth did I just do? There’s no way this is going to turn out well!

I spin around, dash upstairs in three strides, make it into my room and lock the door. Then I shove the chest of drawers in front of it. And push the desk behind that. Last of all, I put my office chair on top of the desk.

Rage pumps through my body. My pulse hammers in my ears. I don’t know for sure whether I’m mostly angry with Mum or scared about how angry *she’s* going to be. One thing’s for sure, though: I can’t spend a single second longer in this house. I’VE HAD IT. UP TO HERE.

I drag my suitcase out from under my bed and chuck it on top of the duvet.

'Hssss,' says Kitty angrily as she squeezes out from under the suitcase.

I jump in surprise, then quickly lift the suitcase off the bed and put it on the floor instead.

'Were you lying there?' I say. 'I didn't see you.'

'Mwrrriaaow,' says Kitty crossly.

'Sorry, Kitty,' I say and lift her up onto the window sill.

Suddenly I hear the hard click-clack of two sharp heels on their way up the stairs.

Here comes Mum.

'Katja,' she says, jiggling the doorhandle.

I stand there wringing my hands even though I know she can't get in.

'Come on out Katja,' Mum says. 'We need to talk.'

'No,' I say.

She yanks the door. It doesn't budge.

'Katja, you said it yourself: You're not in kindergarten any more. In fact you turned eleven today.

Part of growing up is taking responsibility for your own actions.'

Look who's talking! Every time Mum does anything wrong, someone else in the municipal administration has to go. Never Mum though. She always 'acknowledges that mistakes were made,' but never admits they were hers.

So that's what I say.

'All right then. I acknowledge that mistakes were made.'

'Katja,' Mum hisses on the other side of the door. 'This isn't funny! Come out right this minute.'

Then I hear Dad's deep voice in the background.

'Give her some time to calm down a bit, Konstanze. We'll deal with this tomorrow.'

Mum sighs.

'Oh, all right then,' she says. 'But that doesn't mean we're done with this discussion, young lady. Do you hear me?'

'Nope,' I say, and then I creep up to join Kitty on the window sill.

It's started to get dark outside. Some people say that the dark nights are the worst thing about August. But that's exactly what I like best about it. I love sitting on the window sill watching the night spread its black blanket over the Allotment. After all, if it isn't dark, you can't see the stars, can you?

'Purrr,' says Kitty, placing a paw on my hand.

'It's just those people,' I say, nodding towards the door. 'I'm so DARN sick of them right now.'

'Meooooow?'

'I'm going to leave tonight,' I say, looking down at my empty suitcase.

'Hsss,' says Kitty and arches her back.

'I mean it,' I say, peering out into the Allotment. 'Anything has to be better than living here!'

I gaze at the stars above the Allotment. It's one of the few places in town where there aren't many streetlamps and now I can see the evening star twinkling in the distance.

That makes me remember a song Dad used to sing to me when I was little.

'Twinkle twinkle little star,' I sing quietly. 'Can you help me from afar?'

I laugh.

It's fun coming up with new words, so I carry on.

'Up above the world so high,

That is where I'd like to fly.

Twinkle twinkle little star.

Can you help me from afar?'

Just then a shooting star whizzes across the sky.

'Did you see that, Kitty?' I say. 'A shooting star!'

Kitty, who's washing herself, looks up then jumps onto my lap.

'I've never seen a shooting star before. Have you?'

'Meeew,' says Kitty.

Drat, I should have made a wish. For a new house, maybe, in a totally different country. Or no, a new family. That's what I need. But I hardly manage to think the thought before another shooting star whizzes across the sky.

'Bother,' I say irritably. 'I didn't manage to wish on that one either!'

Kitty tramples round on my lap a bit before lying down and purring.

'Sometimes I wish I could be you, Kitty. You have a pretty nice life, don't you? *That's the dream I carry!* The dream of being a cat.'

A bright white light rips through the Allotment, rumbling like thunder and earthquake combined. And then everything goes pitch black.

Shooting star magic

The next morning I wake up lying on something big and lumpy that's making waves. For a second, I wonder if I'm out at sea because everything underneath me is black and blue. But I can't smell any saltwater here. What I *can* smell is vanilla with a hint of liquorice. That's when I realize I'm lying on an enormous duvet. And beneath the duvet a giant girl lies snoring. She must be at least ten metres tall and probably weighs a ton. Her hand is enormous.

When I put my hand on hers the sight of it makes me jump. I don't have a hand any more – I have a paw! A white paw.

I look down at my body.

It's covered in fur.

Thick black fur.

Apart from my belly and chest and paws. They're covered in white fur.

I spin around and land on the floor with a crash. Hang on, no – I land on all fours without even thinking about it. This body I've ended up in seems to have a will of its own.

I look round.

There's no one else here apart from me and the giant girl. The room feels familiar even though it's enormous. It reminds me of my room, only a hundred times bigger.

I creep carefully over to the pile of furniture that's blocking the door. I slip behind the desk and over to the mirror. When I see my reflection, I start to scream, but the only noise that comes out of my muzzle is 'Meeeeeooww!'

I've turned into Kitty.
There's no doubt about it.
But how the heck did it happen?

Just then, the duvet up there starts to move and the giant girl stretches and arches her back as if she was a cat too. But she isn't. She's a kind of giant copy of me. I can tell by her short black hair and green eyes. Or rather she isn't me, of course. Because I'm in this cat body. But the giant looks like I did when I was a human.

Heavens above, what kind of a sick dream is this? I try to pinch my arm, but only succeed in scratching myself with my own claws. Owww I want to howl, but all that comes out is: 'Brrrrompioo!'

The giant girl looks straight at me.

'Hiss,' she bellows, jumping onto the floor. 'Who are you? And what are you doing in MY house?'

I back off. But it looks as if the girl isn't quite used to moving around on two feet because she's staggering around and crashing into stuff. And then she tries to climb up the curtains, but the curtain rail just comes crashing down.

Suddenly I pick up the sharp smell of Mum's perfume from the corridor.

'KATJA! Are you awake?'

The giant girl looks at me.

Even from over here, I can smell her fear.

'Come out of there so we can have a proper talk,' Mum continues on the other side of the door.

Help! the giant girl's eyes say. And that's precisely when it strikes me like a bolt from the blue: If I've turned into Kitty, that must be Kitty sitting over there, scared out of her wits. Oh no! *This is the dream I carry...* and then there was a flash of light outside. I wished I could be a cat. And now we've swapped bodies. It's the only logical explanation.

'All right. If you're not coming out, then I'm just going to have to come in,' growls Mum.

A second later, she's started picking the lock of the door.

I'm Free!

In a matter of minutes, the door is open. Kitty hurls her gigantic body to the ground with a thud and squirms under the bed. Her eyes shine with fear behind the suitcase. Typical Kitty. She always hides under the bed when she's done something wrong. I jump up onto the bed and try to get under the duvet, but I just can't lift it up. I shut my eyes instead and pretend to be asleep.

Mum makes a tremendous commotion as she struggles with the furniture.

Then she comes into the room.

Seconds later, I feel her hands around my body.

'Kitty, you know you're not allowed to sleep in Katja's bed. Silly pussycat,' she says.

Her sharp red nails dig into my fur before she puts me down on the floor.

I feel sorry for Kitty lying under the bed. Because when Mum's angry, her anger seems to fill the whole room. Everything gets grey and scary.

'Katja,' growls Mum. 'There's no point trying to hide. I know you're in here.'

She checks the wardrobe.

The giant girl lies under the bed, still as a statue. Her eyes are huge and she's white as a sheet.

'Help, what do I do now?' she meows quietly.

'Hey! I understand what you're meowing,' I say. 'Do you understand me too?'

'Of course I understand meowing, I've been a cat my entire life,' she hisses back.

'Wow,' I meow. 'My birthday wish really did come true. I've turned into a cat.'

'Well I sure as heck wish to turn into a human,' hisses Kitty. 'And especially not to turn into you on a day when your mum's mad at you. You have to help me.'

'Just say sorry,' I meow back quietly. 'Grownups always want people to say sorry.'

'But I'm not the one who did something wrong,' Kitty says. 'You are! Besides I don't know if I can speak human.'

'Just try,' I meow.'

'You're making a terrible racket today, Kitty. Are you hungry?' Mum asks, looking at me. 'Just pop downstairs. I'm going to have a chat with Katja.'

Oh no, I think. I can't leave Kitty here alone with Mum. It can't possibly go well.

I hear Mum's high heels clack towards me and then I lose eye contact with Kitty.

'Ah, there you are,' she says, and I can feel the coldness in her words.

And then Mum starts to yell. She talks about being shown up. About how I have to learn to control my anger. It's the same old story. Poor Kitty. It really *isn't* her fault, she's quite right about that. But I don't feel like it's my fault either. To be honest. I just wanted to be left in peace yesterday but then everything went wrong. And after that I just wanted to run away. But that didn't work out either. And now suddenly I've turned into Kitty and Kitty has turned into me. But if we try to explain that to my parents, they won't understand a word of it.

If only someone could help us.

Someone Kitty and I both trust.

I jump up onto the window sill and look out. And that's when I suddenly spot him: Carl-Otto. He's lying in the hammock outside his cabin reading Donald Duck. Carl-Otto is the most trustworthy person I've ever met. He's kind through and through. *Carl-Otto* – I try to say it, but all that comes out is, 'Meow-miiotto.'

'Shush, Kitty,' Mum says irritably. 'Katja's old enough to take care of herself.'

Then she carries on yelling at Kitty-in-my-body. But the odd thing is that Kitty doesn't react the way I usually do. Like, she doesn't cringe. She doesn't bow her head the way I do. Doesn't look down. In fact, as Kitty stands there, she looks as if she's getting prouder. And when Mum stops talking for a second, the giant girl looks her straight in the eye.

'Hssss,' says Kitty. 'No one talks to *me* like that.'

Then she scratches Mum in the face before turning and walking out of the room, stumbling but proud.

Mum touches her face – she's horrified.

A thin trickle of blood runs down her cheek.

Wow, I think. What just happened?

And then I hear a tremendous crash from the staircase and Mum dashes out into the corridor. I pad after her. Kitty's sitting at the bottom of the stairs. She's crying and blood is gushing out of her nose. Dad is trying to comfort her, while Christina just stands there staring.

'What happened?' Mum asks.

She must be in shock, I think. Because she wouldn't normally let something like that go so easily.

'Katja just fell down the stairs,' Christina says. 'It was pretty wild to see.'

I look down the enormous staircase and realize Kitty must have taken a terrible tumble. And the worst of it is that I'm probably going to do exactly the same thing myself – because how on earth am I supposed to go downstairs on all fours? With paws instead of feet?

While Mum and Dad and Christina are distracted by Kitty, I try to slide down the stairs on my bottom. It isn't quick but it works in a way.

'LOL!' Christina yells suddenly, with a loud laugh. 'Just look at Kitty!'

I turn around slowly. All three of them are staring at me. If I'd been a person, I'd have blushed. Holy moly – it's fantastic having fur!

'Now, now Kitty!' Dad says, as he comes to carry me down. 'Just because Katja hurt herself that doesn't mean you have to be scared of the stairs too.'

Dad stinks of coffee and aftershave.

He gives Mum a worried look.

'Talking about injuries...' he says, clearing his throat. 'What actually happened up there?'

Mum touches her face.

And suddenly she seems to wake up.

'Katja scratched me,' she says. She walks over to the mirror above one of the decorative tables in the hall 'Oh. It's that bad.'

'Shit,' says Christina, going over to Mum. 'It's really deep.'

'I think you ought to clean it with some antiseptic,' Dad says.

Kitty's nose has stopped bleeding but the giant girl just sits there on her bottom. It's perfectly obvious that she's terrified.

I hurry over to her and put a paw on her thigh, just the way Kitty always used to do to me. Kitty's eyes narrow.

'Thanks,' she meows.

Then she pets me gently behind the ears with her huge hand and that's when something strange happens inside me. Something I've never felt before. It's a kind of deep bubbly feeling that comes from my heart. A really wonderful bubbly feeling. It's like having an inner bubble bath that's simply bubbling over with happiness and warmth.

I purr!

'It's a darn good thing we have Kitty,' Dad says, giving me a smile. 'It doesn't matter what stupid things we come up with, we can always sit down and she'll come to us. And if we pet her, she'll purr.'

'Well yes,' Mum says. 'But this is hardly the time for petting cats. My secretary will be here in five minutes to pick us up.'

'Are you planning to go out like that,' Christina asks, pointing at Mum's face. 'On the first day of school?'

Mum glances at herself in the mirror before looking down.

'Uh no,' she says. 'I think maybe I'll work from home today and see if my skincare therapist can drop by at lunchtime to patch me up. But YOU have to go to school!'

She points at Kitty and Christina.

'Oh nooo,' groans Christina. 'I think we all need to work from home after Katja's shenanigans yesterday!'

'I'm glad I don't have to do anything,' meows Kitty, then starts to wash my black jacket as if it was fur,

'Yes you do,' I meow back firmly. 'All human children have to go to school. Especially on the first day of school.'

'WHAT?' meows Kitty. 'I've never HAD to do anything at all in my entire life.'

'Well, that's what it's like being human,' I reply.

Kitty goes red in the face with rage.

'Chill,' I meow back. 'Carl-Otto and I will help you.'

Suddenly everyone looks at me and Kitty, eyes wide with surprise.

'What's up, Sis?' Christina asks, giving Kitty a puzzled look. 'Have you learned to speak cat?'

'Duh, yeah,' Kitty says irritably. 'Didn't you know?'

'OMG, you're so lame,' Christine says, rolling her eyes.

I follow Kitty and Christina out into the hallway. Kitty watches Christina put on her shoes and jacket. Then she sits down and tries to grip the tongue of a shoe with her teeth as she pushes her foot into it. It looks really weird, but she manages it in the end. She puts her jacket on upside down and back to front.

'Come on now, Katja, let me help you,' Mum says. And fixes Kitty's jacket so she's wearing it the right way.

Then they all vanish out of the door together. I jump into the mayor's car after them. But Mum isn't having that. No matter how hard I scratch and bite to get free, she keeps a firm grip on me. The last thing I see is Kitty's terrified eyes gazing at me from the back seat of the car as it glides off down the drive.

'There, Kitty,' Mum says. 'Be a good girl now – catch and kill a few mice in the Allotment. Harriet is threatening to go to the newspapers if we don't get rid of all the voles so I'm counting on you today.'

Ugh! I'm definitely not planning to eat any mice or voles, I say. But the only thing that comes out of my muzzle is 'Meeeeow!'

Then Mum goes inside and the door clicks firmly shut behind her.

For a second I'm in a complete panic.

I'M ALONE IN THE WORLD, AS A CAT!

Aaaargh!

But then it sinks in.

I'VE turned into a cat.

I'VE TURNED INTO a cat.

I'VE TURNED INTO A CAT!

For the first time in my entire life, I don't have to go to kindergarten or school or after-school club. I don't have to do anything.

I'm free. FREE! I set off, run across the courtyard, check there aren't any cars coming and dash over Lion Hill, then charge into the Allotment.

YES!

At last something brilliant is happening!

My life as a cat

I've always thought I know the Allotment like the back of my hand. But it's pretty different out here when you're cat height. The sunflowers are like skyscrapers. The bumble bees are like furry baseballs with wings, and the sparrows smell like freshly fried chicken. And if I look at them too long, they start to look a bit like fried chicken too.

My tummy rumbles.

I should have eaten breakfast before I left. But in all that fuss I completely forgot about it. I remember what Mum said about eating voles. I mean, it's never going to happen. But how about a little sparrow? Could I eat one of them? Does it really taste like chicken. Nope. I really need to pull myself together. Dad says sparrows are rats with wings, so no thanks. Surely it must be possible to get my claws into some proper food.

Way off ahead of me, I see Carl-Otto's red cabin. Yippee! I think. Carl-Otto will definitely give me something to eat.

But when I get there, the door is shut. Ugh! Of course. He's at school too.

I gaze up at the row of houses on Lion Hill. Oh well, I think. I'll just have to start at one end and see what happens. Find out who has the best food and who has the cosiest home. And now I AM a cat, I can actually do precisely that.

Hurray, I think as I stroll back along the gravel path to Lion Hill.

That's when I catch a little whiff of roast meat tickles my nostrils. I look up the street and to my amazement, I see that Harriet's window is half-open. That must be where the smell is coming from. I jump up on the window sill to look in, but Sherry is standing in there and she hisses at me.

'Hsss!' she says. 'We don't want any common alley catz like you around here.'

She glares at me with her narrow eyes.

Her claws are out.

I swallow, and even though I can hear Harriet in the kitchen turning her chicken fillet in the frying pan, I'm darned if I'm going to challenge this scary Sphynx cat, so I carry on down the hill.

Beate sits smoking outside the green house.

'Baltasar?' she says out loud when she sees me, but then she puts on her glasses and sighs.

'Oh, no. It's just the mayor's pussycat going for a stroll. What's on your mind today, Kitty?'

'I'm hungry,' I say, but all that comes out of my muzzle is 'Meeeeeeoow.'

She pets my head absent-mindedly.

'You haven't seen Baltasar, have you?' Beate asks.

Her old eyes fill with tears. Poor thing. I wish I could help her find her cat, but right now I can't even talk. So all I can do is put one of my forepaws gently on top of her hand. That makes her smile, but the smile doesn't go all the way up to her eyes.

'Take care, now, Kitty,' she says. 'No cats are safe on Lion Hill these days.'

Then Beate gets up and goes inside.

A cold wind blows down the hill. The fur rises on my back but I don't know why.

There are loads of cars at the crossroads with the main road. I gulp. It's one thing strolling around the town as a human but quite another walking about as a cat. The buses are like gigantic apartment blocks on wheels. The cars are quite enormous too, almost like trucks. And they stink! They spew out exhaust fumes and loads of other poisonous gases too probably. No, I definitely don't have the nerve to hang around down here.

I spin around and run up to Pynten Pavilion. From there, I can look down into all the back gardens on Lion Hill. It feels as if I can see the whole town from the white pavilion. But there are no cats here. And there isn't any food either. My tummy rumbles loudly. I'd better go back down to the Allotment and wait for Kitty and Carl-Otto.

The sun is baking hot on my black fur.

I'm so hungry that I can hardly be bothered to walk another step.

But luckily it isn't SO far to Carl-Otto's cabin.

I jump up into the hammock that hangs between his apple tree and his pear tree. Just wait until Carl-Otto hears about the day I've had, I think, and fall asleep at once.

I wake when someone picks me up. For a second I've forgotten my strange morning, so when I see these gigantic hands lifting me up and the enormous human girl they belong to I feel like screaming. But then I remember what's going on. That's Kitty in my body. She has a bandage around her head, one arm in a sling and to be honest she doesn't look good at all. Luckily Carl-Otto is there too. He sneezes loudly when he sees me. Allergic as ever!

'What happened?' I meow, looking at Kitty.

'You humans have incredibly impractical bodies,' Kitty answers. 'You can't climb trees. And you're no good at jumping either. What can you actually *do*?'

Kitty is cross.

'Have you told Carl-Otto what happened?' I meow.

'Of course,' Kitty answers. 'But he doesn't believe me. You're going to have to tell him too.'

'Okay, but I can't talk now, can I?' I say, even though I know the only sound that will come out of my muzzle is Meeeeooooo!

'I'll translate for Katja,' Kitty says, giving Carl-Otto a stern look.

'All right,' Carl-Otto says. 'But I still don't understand very much...'

'We need to take it from the beginning,' I meow. 'We have to start with the shooting stars.'

‘OK,’ says Kitty. ‘Yesterday, after the birthday party, Katja came up to her room. There had been such an uproar in the house the whole day because of the party that I lay down in her bed for a nap. But Katja woke me up. She wanted to run away from home. I persuaded her not to and instead, we sat on the window sill to look at the stars over the Allotment.’

‘I know, I saw you there when we were walking home from the party,’ Carl-Otto says.

I try to say yes, but all that comes out is a meow.

‘While we sat there, Katja saw some shooting stars in the sky,’ Kitty continues.

‘Yes, we saw them too,’ Carl-Otto says happily. ‘I read an article about them in Junior News – they said there’s going to be a meteorite storm this August.’

‘Did you make a wish?’ asks Kitty.

‘No,’ Carl-Otto says.

‘A good thing too,’ says Kitty. ‘Because it seems people should be careful what they wish for. The last thing I remember is Katja saying something about how I had a nice life. Or that she wished she was a cat. And poof! Everything went black.’

I nod and meow.

Carl-Otto gapes.

‘Wow,’ he says. ‘Have you really turned into a cat, Katja?’

I put a paw on his knee and nod and meow. At least that’s *something*: Kitty and I can meow with each other. How bad it would be like if I couldn’t talk to Carl-Otto?

A party invitation from fiddle-maker Franzen

Kitty wants to go home. She’s hungry. So am I. Really, truly hungry. And cat bodies behave differently from human bodies when their energy runs out. I try to talk to Kitty but all the birds and little creatures I see and hear keep turning into FOOD.

‘So what happened to you?’ I meow, looking at her bandage.

‘I saw a really huge magpie nest in that birch tree in the middle of the schoolyard. And I thought: at last – payback time. Those darn magpies have been making my life a misery for years.’

FOOD! yells my brain as a blue tit flits by. My cat eyes roam around the Allotment in search of something to eat. Without quite knowing how it happens, I suddenly find myself shooting off after a thrush that’s standing around pecking the soil. It flaps off before I can get my claws into it, but I can’t help laughing when I realize how easy it was for me to go from zero to a hundred. Kitty is waiting for me and I stroll back.

‘Where was I?’ Kitty continues. ‘Ah, yes. So when I got to the branch where the magpies’ nest was, it wasn’t strong enough to carry my weight so I fell.’

‘What? You fell?’ I meow.

‘Yes – I mean, I managed to break my fall a bit.’

‘Not enough by the looks of it.’

‘Calm down. I’ll probably be able to control this body better by tomorrow. And hopefully we’ll switch back soon anyway. We just have to sit down tonight and look out for more shooting stars.’

When she says that, I get this heavy feeling in my stomach. And it isn't just because I'm hungry. Kitty has had a bad day. She's missing her body. But I've had a pretty exciting time of it. No way do I want to switch back to my own body yet. This is way too much fun.

'FOOD!' bellows my brain as a tempting dove waddles past. But this time I manage to keep my cat body under control.

'Hey,' Kitty meows and looks at me. 'Have you caught any birds yet?'

'Yuck, no!' I reply.

'Whaaat? The birds are at their very best right now. They've been guzzling worms and ice cream the whole summer. They're way better than fried chicken, trust me.'

I'm just about to protest when I see fiddle-maker Frandzen walking down Lion Hill towards us.

'Well, if it isn't the mayor's daughter and her possycat!' Frandzen says with a smile.

Kitty says nothing, but I look at him and purr.

'I'm going to have a little concert for my neighbours on Lion Hill in the backyard of my fiddle workshop this evening if you fancy coming along.' he says, then adds. 'A sneak preview of the jubilee concert in September!'

He bends down and scratches me behind the ear. The purring motor in my heart starts up instantly and I get that bubbly feeling.

'Yeah, maybe,' Kitty says, walking on up the hill. 'We'll see!'

I run after Kitty towards our gate. The security guard in the booth sees Kitty and thinks she's me, so he lets us in.

'Why don't you want to go to the concert?' I pant.

'I'm a cat,' she meows. 'Cats don't make plans. They do exactly what they want. Haven't you realized that yet?'