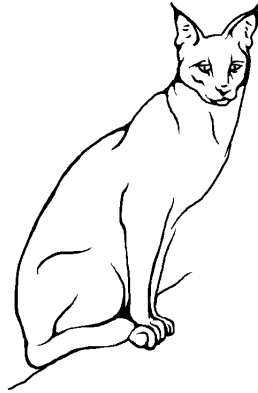


The Cats of Rekem

The Sequel to Yeshua's Cat

third volume in the Yeshua's Cats series



written and illustrated

by

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Text, cover, and Illustrations

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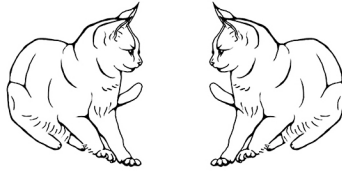
ISBN: 151758602x

ISBN-13: 978-1517586027

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Prologue	1
1	Heart of the Mother	3
2	The Gates of Ammon	11
3	Wind on Water	21
4	Life at Risk	29
5	New Beginnings	37
6	A Royal Dinner	47
7	Treading on Rainbows	57
8	A Road Full of Obstacles	73
9	Beautiful of Face	83
10	To the House of Lazarus	93
11	A Vessel Filled with Clear Light	105
12	Lizard	113
13	Child of Love	121
14	Hunger	129
15	Poisonous Fruit	137
16	Camel Spider	145
17	Walking in Dreams	155
18	Damascus Road	163
19	God Stone in a Niche	171
20	Silk and Spices	179
21	Disciples	189
22	Life Debt	197
23	A Selfish Man	207

24	Second Birth	215
25	Unexpected Treasures	223
26	Paradox	233
27	Demon Cat	241
28	A Crowd of Strangers	251
29	A Path Not of Our Own Choosing	259
30	Shadows	267
	Epilogue	275
	About the Author	277
	Notes on Petra/Rekem	279
	Glossary	281
	Acknowledgements	291



Prologue

“We are the cats of Rekem, descended from Daughter of Fire, sacred cat of the Egyptian temple of Bast.

“We bear the Mother’s gift of language, passed down through the cats of Bast since the days before time began, so that we might speak our wisdom into the minds of the troubled human race.

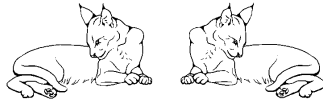
“We gather here tonight to honor Daughter of Fire and her human kitten, Yeshua ben Yosef, friend of cats—He Who Brings Life to the Earth—whose light shines upon all flesh, animal and human alike.”

The Grandmother paused in her recital of the familiar words and gazed at the circle of cats around her. The glow of a waning moon picked out row upon row of bright eyes and sleek coats. Striped and spotted, pale and shadowed, kitten and elder, they all watched her intently. She sat in her rightful place, beside the bubbling spring the child Yeshua had called out of the mountain.

This was the cats’ vigil. Later their humans would celebrate the dawning when the Mother of Cats (whom humans call the One) raised her son Yeshua from the great Silence to walk upon the Earth once more. But in the way of their kind, Rekem’s cats gathered on this night to remember

the mystery that had stirred in darkness, in silence, before the sun's light broke upon the world that day. Like a cat stepping unseen along the fringes of human habitation, that long-ago night had slipped silently into day's dawning unremarked. Now, many years later, the cats of Rekem celebrated the swelling of that unseen birth, the Mother's quiet miracle coming to life in the womb of night.

The Grandmother paused and acknowledged the memories that always pressed close in these moments. She had been only a half-grown kitten in those days, still unnamed. Her naming had followed close on Yeshua's return. Perhaps tonight she should tell her assembled kin *her* tale of how all this came to be—share the stories told by the cats who had lived those days, especially her uncle, Lion of the Mountain. *Yes*, she smiled, and let herself sink into the pool of the Lion's memories, hearing his deep voice rumble through her thoughts once more.



1

Heart of the Mother

Lion of the Mountain speaks

Zaidan, master of caravans, grandfather of his people, and my chosen human, bore my sister's body down from the cliffs with honor. I, Lion of the Mountain, led the way, as I had led him into the rocks to find her. 'Ali'el and Kalba, Zaidan's sons by his mate Tikos, remained behind to climb higher into the red hills, tracking the wild dogs that had killed her.

The summer sun stood at the height of its rising as we made our way down into the wadi. The brilliance of the light washed the color from the red stone, bleaching the whole world with its glare. I squinted and sneezed, shaking my head in a futile attempt to escape the spicy breath of the mastic shrubs lining our path. Once clear of their scented shade, I could see doors and windows opening into the living rock below us where Zaidan's family had carved their dwellings in the wadi walls.

Tikos stood in the doorway of our home, her small frame belying the strength of will that held my human family together in peace. But today her face was drawn and grieving as she waited to receive the silent flesh that was no longer my sister. Heart of the Mother had chosen Tikos for her human

many seasons before, just as I had chosen Zaidan. I wondered who Tikos would find to nurse the orphaned kittens. Their eyes had just begun to open; now they would never know their mother's face. Soon they would forget even her scent.

I shook my head again to clear my thoughts. The burning heat of the sun must be dizzying my mind. Such concerns were the province of females. What did kittens—or the memory of mothers—matter to Lion of the Mountain?

Stepping aside, I sat down on the broad stone terrace outside the door and watched as Zaidan approached Tikos. A sycamore bowing over a river willow, he towered above her, his beard gleaming silver in the sun.

“Lady, I have brought Heart of the Mother home to you,” he said, laying my sister's shrouded body gently in her arms. “I wish I could have done more.”

He brushed his hand against her cheek, then stepped back and bowed formally, a silent witness to this familiar ritual of death. Even through her tears, I could see the flame that always leapt between them when they met.

I approved of my human and his mate. Regardless of their own distress, they rarely failed to act with dignity and restraint, as befitted the humans of Rekem's sovereign male cat.

Tikos lifted the pall, stroked the matted fur, and turned to walk down the stairs toward the spring-fed pool that lay along the wadi. I joined Zaidan, rubbing against his legs before settling beside him to watch Tikos as she laid the body on the sand beside the spring's trickling outflow and rinsed the blood away with a damp cloth. Tikos had once been a priestess in the

Egyptian temple of the cat goddess Bast, and although she had refused the honor of a priestess' place in Rekem's temple, she still presided over the births and deaths of cats dear to her.

After returning the body to its wrappings, she mounted the steep stone stairs that rose beside the pool, climbing toward Zaidan's family tomb, a many-chambered cave carved into the stone heights to receive the remains of his kin—as well as the many cats descended from Daughter of Fire, the cat who had journeyed with Tikos from the temple of Bast to Rekem, and founded our line. I knew the sun would drop behind the red hills before we saw Tikos again. She would be working into the night, preparing my sister's body for burial. Tikos might no longer believe in Egypt's many strange gods, but her people's care for the bodies of their dead was rooted deep.



The evening meal was past, the cliffs sunk deep in shadow by the time Tikos returned. From my place on the terrace I heard her slow steps approaching long before she arrived. She stooped to greet me with a light touch, and then stepped inside. The lamps flickered and dimmed at her passing as if death's cold breath billowed like a heavy mantle of grief from her shoulders. I followed her down the hall, certain of our goal.

"Hinat," she whispered, as she slipped into the lamp-lit room where her daughter lay on her bed, only her long black hair visible against the pillow. "Are you awake?"

"Yes, Mother." The child's voice was a mere whisper of a sigh.

Hinat turned her head away from the wall and met Tikos' gaze. Even from the shadows outside the door I could see that her face was swollen with weeping.

"Oh, Mother, how can she be dead? I visited her and the kittens only this morning!"

Tikos sank down to sit beside Hinat, but shifted her weight suddenly, reaching under the sheet and drawing out one of my many young cousins, a small dusky female, not yet old enough for a name.

"Well, hello, little Miw," she said with a tired smile. "Have you moved in with Hinat now?"

Tikos called every kitten "Miw" before it was named. It was the word for cat in her native Egyptian tongue.

Holding the kitten in her hands, she looked at her closely. "You're one of Winter Blossom's kittens, aren't you? I wonder where she might be?"

"I'm here, Tikos," hummed a soft voice from the hall behind me.

As descendants of Daughter of Fire, many of us could send our thoughts into the minds of human animal speakers like Zaidan, Tikos, and their children. We also understood the speech of ordinary humans, but speaking into their minds was almost impossible, and their thoughts were mostly closed to us.

"I thought you might have need of me," Winter Blossom continued. "I've been comforting the kittens. They were hungry and crying for their mother."

"Your milk is still flowing, Blossom?" Tikos asked.

“It has slowed, lady, but it will return, and there is more than enough for such young kits. You need not fear for them.”

“Oh, Mother,” breathed Hinat, “can you bring them here to stay with me? Blossom’s kittens are with me much of the time anyway, and now that Heart of the Mother is gone, you may want to be alone with Father for a while.”

I watched as Tikos studied her daughter. Hinat was shockingly pale, her lips almost blue in a face gone as grey as airborne ash. I could feel Tikos’ belly twist with sudden fear. I wondered if her day’s sojourn in the twilit shadows of the great Silence had sharpened her awareness of its nearness to her daughter.

“Child,” she sighed, settling herself beside Hinat, “you may have anything you wish. You are the flower of my days and my dearest daughter. You’re wise to understand my need for a time of grief without having the kittens always about . . . they would remind me too much of their mother’s absence. I hope they will comfort you.”

“The little one in your lap already has,” Hinat smiled. “She hasn’t left my side since I heard . . .”

A spasm of coughing interrupted her words, and she struggled to push herself to a sitting position, gasping for breath. Tikos stroked her back and murmured soft words of reassurance until her breathing eased. At length Hinat lay back on the bed.

Tikos smiled at her and picked the kitten up, holding her high, where she could study the little cat’s face more closely. “Do you have a voice, small Miw? My own Miw, Daughter of Fire, waited long before sharing hers with me.”

The little female returned her scrutiny with every sign of understanding, but said nothing. It was almost impossible to tell if a kitten had the gift of speech if she chose to conceal it. Tikos laughed and set her down beside her mother.

“I’ll have the kittens’ basket brought here, then, Hinat, if Blossom is agreeable,” she said.

Blossom stopped grooming her daughter long enough to hum her consent.

“Hinat, we must put out the lamp now so you can rest. I fear the day’s grief has over-tired you. I’ll bring the kittens to you before I go to bed.”

Tikos fluffed her daughter’s pillows and leaned over to kiss her cheek, circling her thin shoulders in a gentle embrace. Then she rose and rolled the reed screen down over the window to shut out the chill of the desert night.

“Sleep well, daughter of my heart,” she murmured as she slipped from the room.

I waited patiently while Tikos finished her household tasks. Since Heart of the Mother was gone now, the responsibility for my human’s family lay on my shoulders alone. Who would watch over them if I did not? With her own hands Tikos gathered the basket of kittens from a small space adjoining her bedchamber and carried it back to Hinat’s room. But as we made our way through the dark house to join Zaidan, Hinat’s labored breathing followed us like a stubborn trickle of despair.



“She’s getting worse, Zaidan. My skill is little more than child’s make-believe with this disease!” Tikos raged, as she

flung herself down at her dressing table and began to unbraid her hair for sleep.

I looked from one to the other, feeling their anxiety like a burning in my mind. I yowled softly at their pain.

Zaidan said nothing at first, but only watched the comb slide through the silken masses of Tikos' blue-black hair, now released to ripple around her shoulders, covering her back like rivers of night streaked with starlight.

These conversations were coming more often now, and I could tell that Zaidan feared them. He was a proud man and powerful, master of a great web of Nabataean trading routes and a leader of his people, but he loved his daughter Hinat with such profound devotion that it sometimes left him breathless. His fear for her sapped his strength and darkened his days. Although his hair was silver and his face seamed with years, he was a mighty warrior still . . . but how could he fight this disease consuming his child from within? All his power was as nothing.

In times of crisis Tikos could step in with her healing skills, but he? He merely stood by helplessly while Hinat's skin took on that terrifying bluish tinge and her breath grew ever shorter. Lately she'd even begun coughing up blood. Her flesh was melting away before his eyes.

I sensed his sudden revulsion at the painted gardens on the chamber walls; their illusion of peace set his teeth on edge.

"Oh, my love, I see it too," he murmured, moving to stand behind Tikos, his weathered hands parting her hair to rest on her shoulders. "If only Yeshua were with us now!"

How many times had he said those same words over the last few years? The child who had once brought Zaidan's torn body back from the edge of death was now a man, and if the rumors that reached them could be believed, he'd become a mighty prophet among his people.

No cat of Rekem now living had ever seen him.

Zaidan felt Tikos' body grow still under his touch. He waited patiently for her to speak whatever words were gathering in this silence. He'd long since learned to recognize the signs of her retreat into that place of inner vision. At last she twisted on her stool and looked up at him, laying her hand on the soft linen robe covering his arm.

"We must *take* her to Yeshua, Zaidan! I heard only yesterday that he's in Ammon, teaching and healing in the marketplace. If we take swift camels and ride hard, we could be there in two days, maybe three. Is that not true?"

Her eyes scanned his face anxiously, awaiting his response. He was the lord of caravans, and he must judge the practical possibilities of her heart's intuitive leap.

I crept across the carpet, settling beside them to observe more closely.

For a few moments Zaidan said nothing, but then his brow cleared, and a smile spread slowly from his lips to his eyes. Suddenly, he began to laugh.

"Of course we must, my lady of the Nile!" he bellowed, and swept her up in his arms. "To the child of light we shall go!"

I leapt to his shoulder and curved my body around his neck, not wishing to be left out of their celebration. His

shoulders bent under my considerable weight, but he was a strong man—and where else should I sit?



*from The Wisdom of the Cats of Rekem:
Lion of the Mountain*

Cats don't fear death. We'll fight to live, holding on to life with all our strength, but when death comes, we step into Silence, nothing more. We relax against the breast of the Mother of Cats and fall asleep in her embrace. What happens to our bodies is of no importance. We eat, and we are eaten. This is the Great Balance.

Humans make it complicated. Fear of death lurks beneath everything they do—as if the Silence were an enemy. To ease their fears, wealthy humans carve tombs into Rekem's cliffs, ever grander and loftier, pretending that their now-living flesh will still have need of shelter after death. Even common people starve themselves to gather enough coins to purchase small crypts.

Foolish humans! Do they truly believe that their many gods will protect their bodies from decay? Their rock-cut temples and shrines spring up in the hills like desert flowers after a rain, but even stone falls into Silence in the end.

My humans, those of the house of Zaidan, follow a different path. Ever since the child Yeshua ben Yosef came among them, they have followed his god, a god they call the One, Creator of all life, whose light overwhelms all darkness.

As a cat of Rekem, I understand that “the One” is just another name for the Mother of Cats, but humans are slow in grasping such things.



The Gates of Ammon

Lion of the Mountain speaks

In the years after Daughter of Fire first came to Rekem, her grown kits often joined their humans on caravans: bonds between speaking cats and their humans are strong, and we never care to be parted without good cause. But some cats went astray on the long journeys when the flames of their time of making overwhelmed them, driving them to wander. Only with the wisdom of years could a cat resist the madness of these times.

Grieved by the disappearance of her firstborn son, Daughter of Fire spoke to Zaidan, and together they decided that caravans would be accompanied only by kittens, females in the early days of bearing, and cats over ten human years of age . . . and then only with Zaidan's permission. So it was that I, Lion of the Mountain, a cat wise with the passing of many seasons, prepared to join my humans two days later in their urgent quest for Hinat's healing.

I was sitting in the doorway beneath an early morning sky still trembling with stars, supervising the proper loading of our camels, when I heard the dreaded sound of racking coughs. I ran to Hinat's room, but came to an abrupt halt at the sight of

Tikos struggling to calm her furious daughter. Hinat shook with the force of her coughs, and her sheets were stained with fresh blood, but her anger rolled through the room like wildfire, even as she struggled to breathe.

“She’s . . .” Hinat wheezed, “coming!”

Tikos balanced uneasily on the bed beside her, while Zaidan looked on in alarm. And in the middle of it all, Blossom’s dusky kitten crouched among the covers.

I understood at once: Hinat was refusing to go anywhere without my small cousin.

“Of course the kitten may come, child!” Tikos murmured, stroking Hinat’s back with a trembling hand. “You may bring every cat in the house if you wish! We didn’t know you wanted her, that’s all. She can ride with you every step of the way. Please, beloved!”

Slowly the girl’s spasms eased, and her body relaxed. I scowled at the kitten, but she pretended not to see, creeping instead into Hinat’s lap and burying her head. Apparently the kitten would be coming.

I turned and stalked back out to the wadi, where, by the dim light of early dawn, we finally mounted the camels and turned our faces toward Ammon.

I’d long heard stories of the swinging net that had cradled Yeshua’s mother in their flight across the desert, but now I saw its like with my own eyes. The towering saddle frame held the net high off the camel’s back so that Hinat could ride without being jarred by her mount’s rough gait. Blankets, pillows, sunshade, sheer panels of dampened linen to keep out the blowing dust—and the kitten—completed her bed. Tikos sat

her own camel behind Hinat, followed by 'Ali'el and Kalba, and several men of Zaidan's house with pack camels. I, of course, rode with Zaidan at the head of our small caravan. Our camels were in their prime, swifter than the king's horses, and we carried little baggage.

No cat actually enjoys riding on camelback. A camel's gait is jarring, and utterly exhausting. And they stink like a jackal three days dead. But a cat *must* accompany his traveling humans when he can, to protect them in times of trouble. Still, I've noticed that cats born without the gift of speech don't often travel with caravans. Maybe their bonds with their humans are less strong; I've never asked. All cats have their pride, and their secrets.

Zaidan didn't drive the camels hard at first, but he did keep them at a fast walk. Although he said little to me as we rode, I could sense his heart circling endlessly between hope and dread. I had no comfort to offer. I could only ride with him, my body pressed against his leg. When I grew tired of clinging to his saddle I retreated into a leather pouch behind it made especially for me. There I could relax the grip of my claws and let the leather sides take my weight. I found myself envying the kitten riding quietly on Hinat's lap.

At first we crawled along the edges of a vast desert plain that stretched away until it vanished into the brilliance of the sun's rising. I could see the road before us, rolling between the endless flat and a wilderness of tumbled mountains. But before midday, desolate hills rose around us, hiding any view we might have had behind ridges of ashen earth. I'd traveled with Zaidan twice before, so I wasn't surprised by these stony

wastes. The camels staggered into dry wadis and lunged over barren ridges until my legs ached. My world narrowed to the breathless confines of the leather pouch.

We made several welcome stops for Tikos to tend to Hinat's needs. Her linen screens needed dampening, and Tikos was careful to make sure that she drank enough water and ate a few small pieces of fruit. But because she was determined to guard Hinat's fragile sleep, we rode under the blaze of the summer sun and only rested after dark. The first night we stopped in the wilderness beyond the city of Sela, by a small spring beneath a Nabataean fortress. But the pale glow of false dawn had barely touched the sky when we set off again.

Zaidan had saved our most fearsome descent for the early morning of this second day, when the camels were fresh, and the sun's first light picked out every loose stone in the towering wadi walls. I soon sought refuge in my pouch from the sheer drops plunging away into nothingness as we lurched along the narrow trails into the canyon's bottom.

Even Zaidan was ill at ease. Our tedious trail might have been a snake's track, switching back and forth upon itself as it cut into the canyon walls. Again and again, I watched his anxious gaze stray to Hinat's swinging bed, and in almost the same motion, check the sun's advance across the sky. The day was slipping away, and our progress was too slow. When we reached the canyon's bottom Zaidan even approached the master of a heavily loaded caravan to beg his permission to take the trail ahead of them—a breach of courtesy unheard of among caravaners. But eventually, like flies climbing over the lip of a bottle, we emerged at the top of the canyon's far side

and followed our road into more barren hills. Then, as the hours passed, we entered a gentler land where scattered fields and villages clung to the hills and green wadis that sometimes broke the desert's harshness. Still the road ran on.

Neither Hinat nor the kitten had ever ventured away from Rekem before, yet neither of them seemed to notice the sights along our road, strange as they were. My concern for the child grew with each landmark that slipped past unheeded. She merely lay in her hammock, her eyes sometimes open, sometimes closed, her gaze turned inward—like a cat falling away into Silence at the last. The kitten drowsed quietly on her lap.

The horizon taunted us with its unchanging desolation. I could tell that Zaidan was as worried as I, and as the day dragged on, he drove us at an ever-increasing pace, until our camels were thundering along the King's Highway at full gallop. Then, near dusk, we finally emerged from the low desert hills to see Ammon's green highlands rising before us.

Zaidan halted our camels below the city and climbed stiffly from his mount, offering me his arm once he'd found his feet. He spoke briefly to Tikos and squeezed his daughter's pale hand. Then with me on his shoulder, he strode beside his sons along the darkening valley and across the shallow river that meandered between our camp and the city walls.



Night had fallen by the time we reached the city. Guards stood at attention beside the massive stone gates. Cressets burned in brackets on the outer walls and along the walkway

above, their flames leaping and guttering with the eddies of cool air flowing off the forested hills. The flickering light gave the scene a nervous, unsettled air. Wherever light failed, deep shadows pooled.

“How will we ever find him, Father?” Kalba whispered, drawing Zaidan aside before we could reach the gates. “The streets are dark, and people have gone to their rest. He could be anywhere: in a private house, an inn, even sleeping outside the walls beneath a tree. We should return to the camp and seek him tomorrow.”

“No, Kalba, your mother has told me that Hinat’s life is fading with each moment that passes. We can’t wait for the dawn. Yeshua is a famous man and a great healer. Someone will know where he sleeps. And if we can find no news of him, we’ll knock loud and long on your uncle’s door. Surely he can find someone to direct us.”

At this point something distracted me from their conversation. What it was, I couldn’t have said—a feeling of presence, of hidden power, but also of light, even of familiarity from beyond the borders of memory. I leapt down from Zaidan’s shoulder and peered into the shadows to one side of the gate.

“Lion!” Zaidan called, but I ignored him and moved closer to the shadows with exaggerated care, picking up one paw and then the other as if I were stalking wary prey. I’m a large cat, and strong—the Grandmothers say I’m as large as the Great Cat, our ancestor’s mother—and I fear nothing, but my limbs were quivering like a palsied human’s. I opened my mouth to

draw in the night air, the better to scent whatever lay hidden in the darkness.

A human figure stepped out of the shadows, into the light.

“Zaidan,” the man said, in a voice redolent of the sun’s first light, the soft breezes of evening, and the brilliant stars of a summer night.

I moved closer, trying to catch his scent. In spite of my strange reaction, he smelled quite ordinary—except that I sensed the presence of both human and cat.

“Yeshua?” Zaidan rasped in return, his voice a mere thread of its normal strength. “Is it you?”

“Yes, uncle, it is I,” the stranger replied, and I could feel the warmth of his smile spreading through the darkness even before I saw it.

The man called Yeshua stepped quickly toward Zaidan, grasping his shoulders with his hands, and then coming nearer to catch him in a full embrace.

“How I’ve missed you, old friend!” he laughed.

“But . . .” Zaidan stammered, “how did you know I was coming? How did you know to meet me here?”

The man shrugged. “I just know things sometimes,” he smiled, and Zaidan’s huge laugh boomed out and echoed along the walls.

“You do indeed!” he cried, and clapped the stranger on the back.

Now that I could see him, this friend looked little different from many other human males. His skin was less dark than Zaidan’s and he wasn’t so tall. Neither did he have Zaidan’s noble nose, but like Zaidan he wore a beard and the loose

robes of a desert wanderer. Whatever might set him apart from other men was unclear, even to me.

“Why do you seek me, Zaidan?” the man Yeshua asked. “I felt your pain from far off . . . and now that I see you, it strikes me like a blow.”

Zaidan’s smile vanished as if it had never been. “O, Yeshua, our daughter—Tikos’ and mine—is dying! Each moment she slips further from my arms into the darkness where I can’t follow! Death is stealing her light away!”

“Then let us go to her, my friend,” the stranger said quietly.

But before Zaidan could turn and retrace his steps, the man grasped his shoulder and looked into his face—with love and pity so palpable that my belly trembled. Zaidan stood motionless for many heartbeats, but when he moved again, his terror had dropped away. He seemed calm, even peaceful. Zaidan drew the stranger close, and, arm in arm, they walked back down the hill. I followed, my mind in chaos. Who *was* this strange human? How could he confuse my senses so? And I *did* smell a strange cat, although I saw no sign of one.



Tikos came running from the tent even before we turned off the path. She paused, her eyes burning with a curious light, then flung herself into the stranger’s arms, weeping with relief.

“Oh, child of my youth, you’ve come!” she cried, drawing back to look into his face.

How could she call this large human a child? But I suppose that’s the way of females with their children, and we’d all heard stories of the child this man had once been.

“Tikos, my mother,” he replied, kissing her gently on each cheek. “Show me where your daughter lies.”

Our men had raised the tent quickly, laying down carpets and pillows, and kindling a fire against the night chill. Hinat lay quietly beside the fire, propped up against many pillows, her eyes closed, as pale as death. I could hear her breath coming in wheezing gasps, so slow in coming that I almost despaired between them. The kitten lay curled on her shoulder, looking miserable.

The stranger knelt beside Hinat, gathering the kitten up in his hands and whispering something to her, then handing her to Tikos. I moved around in front of Zaidan and pressed against his leg, watching the man Yeshua intently.

A calm fell upon the tent. The soft noises of the night dropped away, and the air flickered with light. The man took Hinat’s hand in his own and bent over her for a moment before laying the other on her breast and murmuring softly. Like water welling from a spring, or blood from an open wound, light spread out from the hand that lay upon her breast, drawing in the glittering sparks from the air until both man and child swam in a mist of stars. The Earth beneath me seemed to quiver, and the vibration grew in strength until I feared I would stumble. But the light soon dimmed and thinned in a widening circle until it vanished in the night. I was no longer sure what I felt. Perhaps the Earth’s shaking had been no more than the quaking of my own limbs.

Then I realized that the child was stirring. Color was flowing into her cheeks, and her breast rose and fell quietly, without effort. At last she opened her eyes and looked full into

the stranger's face. For an endless moment she seemed to lose herself in his gaze, but then the scene was shattered by my small cousin's leap from Tikos' arms back to Hinat's breast. Her frantic purring rattled like woman-thunder as she dashed back and forth between Hinat, licking her face with her tiny tongue, and the man Yeshua, whom she butted insistently with her head.

And then . . . and *then*—a strange cat thrust her head out of the man's robes, announcing her presence with a grumbling string of irritated remarks.

There *was* a cat!



*from The Wisdom of the Cats of Rekem:
Lion of the Mountain*

The world is an unpredictable place, and full of mysteries. How can a cat—even a cat wise with the experience of many years—hope to swim the deep courses of the Mother's compassion.

I only know that I had never, ever, felt such joy among my humans as there was that night. The very air rippled with laughter—for our release from fear, for the grace of Hinat's healing. The stranger's boundless joy rolled over us like a golden river. Dinner very nearly didn't happen for all the happiness. My humans were too busy hugging Hinat and sharing stories from the long years since Yeshua, Zaidan, and Tikos had parted.

I felt utterly adrift, and hearing my humans speak of my ancestor as if she'd been alive only yesterday confounded me still more. It was as if Daughter of Fire herself had strolled into the circle of our fire. We cats forget just how long a human life can be.