

The *Cat*
and the **Canary**

by

B. L. Higgins

“The *Weres* of London,” Book 3

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To the usual suspects: Pete Radatti and Eloise Hopkins, my two biggest fans and supporters in this endeavor.

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Chapter 1: Awkward Introductions

“Exactly what the *hell* is going on here, Sherlock?” I asked, confused and just a tad annoyed, as I wandered into the parlor from the hallway, still toting my medical bag. It had been a long day and I was in no mood for any of Sherlock’s more outrageous antics.

I walked over to the couch, placed my bag on the coffee table, and stood beside his pillowed head, examining him. He didn’t respond to my movement. Instead, Sherlock continued to lie, peacefully supine, on the leather couch, fingers steepled under his chin, as was his wont while either meditating or cogitating. His ankles were elegantly crossed, his feet bare. I noticed he was still wearing his threadbare pyjamas and silk dressing gown; I knew that he had no cases pending and, therefore, had obviously felt no compelling reason to get dressed.

That, in and of itself, was not unusual. In fact, it had almost become the norm lately. Sherlock had been at his wit’s end for days, trying to find a case that would satisfy that restless brain of his. Unfortunately, the criminal class of London had been offering up only the most basic and uninteresting escapades, easily solved by Scotland Yard, thereby making Sherlock all but impossible to live with.

Sherlock’s sometimes-bizarre attempts at self-amusement were not the issue now, however. Rather, it was what was lying on Sherlock’s chest that had provoked my sudden outburst of surprise and annoyance. Lying over his sternum, hind legs tucked away so as to resemble a Sunday meatloaf, was a beautiful cat, fluffy to a fault, its coloration cream with dark brown ears, feet, and tail. Its face was neatly tucked between Sherlock’s palms, tail elegantly swished around its rump and back legs, and it was purring. Loudly. The kind of purr a race car driver would love to hear from his auto.

“*Sherlock!*” I raised the ante, and my voice, and was rewarded by a grunted sigh, accompanied by the very slightest shift in position. The cat rolled easily with the movement.

I was just about to use my old army voice when Sherlock finally spoke.

“I heard you the first time, John, but I was so enjoying my meditations that I didn’t have the heart to break them off to reply. However, once I determined you were about to use your ‘Captain Watson’ voice on me, I decided to return to answer your query.” He cracked open one eye, then the other, and peered up at me with a relaxed smile. The cat still hadn’t moved.

I stood beside the coffee table and stared down closely, first at Sherlock, then at the cat, pointing mutely at the second while raising an eyebrow at the first. Sherlock looked down his body from between his hands, obviously noticing the cat for the first time, and grinned.

“Ah, she’s back! How delightful!”

“Wait a minute,” I said, as I carefully seated myself next to my bag on the table. “Are you saying that you didn’t even know this cat was here? Were you *really* that far under?”

Sherlock shrugged, carefully, but the cat seemed undisturbed and continued purring contentedly. “She *has* been in here before, but never quite so boldly as this!”

I cocked my head, in mute inquiry, as Sherlock continued, “You see, there are times when I

leave my bedroom window open, to air out the room, and, upon occasion, this cat has been known to enter through it from the fire escape and wander around the flat. At first, she limited herself to only exploring my bedroom, but then she became more brazen and began to investigate the entire floor. However, she never seems to go either upstairs or downstairs.”

“Hmph,” I grunted, non-committally. I stretched out one hand tentatively, but the cat moved subtly away from my fingertips and threw me a look that clearly said, ‘*Don’t do it, human.*’ I pulled back my hand, feeling inexplicably miffed about having been rejected by a bloody cat. Sherlock smiled in amusement.

“Don’t feel bad, John. She didn’t let *me* pet her for *days*. Just kept me company while you were at work. She’s actually quite brilliant, for a cat.” He separated his hands from around her face and indulgently swept his large, long-fingered hand over her back as she arched gracefully, tail flaring up into the air behind her.

“She?” I inquired, skeptically. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, John, I *do* know the difference between male and female cats,” Sherlock drawled, patiently, as he stroked the cat more firmly, causing her to trill in pleasure. “I was thinking of calling her Cassandra because of her ‘all-seeing eyes’. And stop rolling yours so loudly, John, I didn’t say we were keeping her. The name is just for when she comes to visit.”

“As I recall, Cassandra was an oracle whose pronouncements were always true, but no one would believe her,” I chipped in, despite my dour mood.

Sherlock looked impressed. “You surprise me every day with your hidden talents, John. Yes, indeed. We oracles are often disregarded until disaster strikes, and then the fools come running for our assistance,” he said, with a little, self-satisfied smirk.

My jaw dropped open just a tad, then snapped shut. *We*, as if he had somehow, through his divine gift of deduction, had achieved godhood. *Bloody arrogant git.*

Insults are unbecoming to you, John.

I threw up my hands, picked up my bag, and trudged upstairs. No use engaging with Sherlock when he was in a mood. I idly wondered, for a moment, if I could find a way to charge the cat rent. I also wondered at my own disturbing sense of having been, in some strange regard, *replaced*.