

Dear Diary,

I'd like to tell you, diary, how I've come to be, but you don't care anymore than I do so let's just skip it.

Today began like all of the others. The female human of the house (the old one, that is) got up way before the butt crack of dawn to pay homage to the boiling and bubbling contraption I've heard them call a koffee-pot. With a container of the hot stuff--I know it's hot because I've stuck my nose in there when she went to the room with the huge porcelain water bowl, which is defiled by both humans multiple times daily--she sits down in front of the thing I've heard her call a kompooter. Noisy and bright, that's all I can really say about the stupid thing. It has a flat thing in front it with buttons, called a kee-bored. I heard her call it that one time when she told the big, hairless on top male of the household the damn thing wasn't working. I watched for a little while, while she made the buttons tap, then got bored. Who in the world can sit and watch that dribble for longer than a minute or two. Sure, she makes great faces when she taps but it's just not enough to make me pull up and rug and study her for long.

So, I bid her farewell and went off to find the Butler of the house. He is a supreme feline being like me. I found him on

the human's bed. He was in the utmost posture, one that will always make us superior to humans, finishing his bath.

"What say you, Sir Butler?" I asked him, stretching up and swatting him with one of my paws to get his attention.

He raised his head and swallowed down a few of the stray hairs he'd managed to remove.

"I say the water bowl has not settled, Sir Sheldon. It makes me anxious. And you?"

"I am well," I replied. "Although I am quite bored. Perhaps I'll have another run through the house, sliding the kitchen rugs always seems to lift my spirits. Why are you anxious?"

I'm afraid there's trouble in the house, but you'll have to talk to the one who's seen it."

"Who?" I asked.

"Tis the wiener in the box over yonder."

I looked over at the aged and sleeping lump in the box and shook my head.

"He's going blind. How can you take his word that he saw anything," I said.

Sir Butler squinted his golden brown eyes at me. "Go. And see, Sir Sheldon. Go and see."

And so I went.

## The Weiner Beyond the Gate

Dear Diary,

Like all good feline heroes of the past, I made my way through the angry desert and strangling forests into the clearing that held my holy grail. Sounds good doesn't it? Much better than just meow and walking into the bedroom where the huge plastic box held a very old wiener. I jumped panther-like onto the top and peered into the dark cave. My eyes are excellent for my species and despite the blackness I could see the furry lump curled on a pillow near the back of the enclosure. The old canine's snores echoed out of the box. I reached out with one of my paws, catching the top of the metal gate in front and gave it a good yank. BANG! This is actually one of my favorite pastimes. BANG! BANG! BANG!

"For the love of all that is holy, stop that banging!" The wiener yelled.

I grinned a cat's grin which is mostly on the inside; outside we have a perpetual smile that keeps all we're thinking a big secret. This is very useful when we're plotting someone's demise. They never know when or what is coming.

The wiener came to the opening just as the metal gate banged shut again (with a little help, of course) and bopped him in the nose.

"Ouch! Who goes there?"

I stopped the gate with my paw and pushed it open to rest, then I leaned down and peered at the top of his head from above. SMACK!

"Tis I, Sir Sheldon. What say you old and wise wiener that is?"

The wiener let out a menacing growl. "I say stop talking like that."

"I have to. I am a knight."

He barked--this says nothing other than ARK! ARK! In human terms, it would be like a good throat clearing.

"First off," he said, "you are not a knight. Second, even if you were, knights do not speak like that in this day and age."

I squinted my eyes at him. "Then how do they speak?"

The wiener cocked his head. "Well, they say "Hey Jude" or "I'm still standing" a lot, mostly in a sing-song way and with piano accompaniment. What brings you to my door?"

I pulled on the top of the gate again, just for my own entertainment. It banged against the plastic frame and made contact with the old dog's nose once more. The wiener let out a combination growl-sneeze and gave his head a good shake, which

traveled all the way down his long, plump body to his bony tail. I popped him on top of the head again and jumped down to meet his snarl.

"Tell me now, old and wise wiener, what has disturbed the force."

He relaxed the snarl, sat down, and began to tell me tale.

## The Weiner's Tale

Dear Diary,

"I have been hearing things lately," the wiener told me, "and most of it comes from beyond the big doors. It's a jungle out there, filled with all kinds of treacherous beasts. I have heard tales of dragons afoot in the old days."

I tilted my head and perked up my ears.

"Are there dragons out there now?" I asked.

The wiener dog cleared his throat, a raspy sound that grated on my sensitive hearing.

"Well, no."

"Then skip it. Move on with your story."

He gave a dry cough and continued. "Yes, I apologize. I tend to ramble a bit in my old age. It wasn't like that when I was a--"

"Is this part of the story?" I asked, squinting my eyes at him.

"No."

"You're rambling, then. Continue the tale."

"As you wish. I have been hearing things lately on the outside."

"We did this already," I said, adding a hiss for punctuation.

The dog gave me a reproachful look, let out a quick growl of agitation and started again.

"When the shiny-headed master of the house escorts me into the back garden for my necessary constitutional, he pays little attention to what I am doing. True, I am relieving myself."

"Outside?"

"Yes, outside."

"You don't have a litter box? You just go outside?"

"Yes."

"That's disgusting."

"As I was saying," he growled, "he doesn't pay attention to what I'm doing, which is communicating with the outside world. It is my duty for the protection of this household."

I began licking one of my front paws, easing it over the side of my face and back behind my ear. I could bathe and listen at the same time. I'm just that talented.

"It's the birds, you see," the dog said, "they are the ones with the greatest insight. They travel far and see much."

I stopped mid-lick, my tongue still protruding slightly out the front of my mouth. A hair was caught in my throat, tickling just enough to set me to coughing. I quickly put my foot back onto the floor, braced myself, and began to heave. After a good gag, I managed to get up a nice clump of fur. The wiener

glanced down at the mess and then back up at me as if he'd never had a hairball problem before. Stupid dog.

"The birds don't talk to me," I said, settling back down. "I've sat at the window many times to try a conversation, but they ignore me."

"And so they wouldn't, naturally, for they are your prey. Perhaps you should try talking with less teeth. Now, stop interrupting me. The birds have been chattering much about an event to come, one that will affect our very being. A robin brought a message to me just last night as I hiked my leg on a bush. He said, "Beware the one with the eternal smile." When I asked what he meant, he spoke of impending doom, death to this house. I have tried again this morning to find out more, but to no avail. There is no new information. They just seem to repeat the same thing over and over."

"Well, that's creepy."

Birds chanting the same words over and over was extremely disturbing. I'd seen something like that once on the thing my humans call a tee-vee. It did not end well. So, I yawned and stretched a leg out in front of me, ready to start cleaning those harder to reach areas, an arduous but calming task.

"Sheldon!"

I snapped to attention and then cringed low to the ground as the voice of the old female of the house rang in my ears. I



didn't need to actually listen to what she was saying to know she'd spotted the hairball on the floor. And by the sound of the agitation in her voice my guess was confirmed that she, along with the blasted dog, didn't have hair ball problems either. I ducked under the bed where the bald-headed master slumbered and peeked out, awaiting her fury and wondering briefly if the male of the house ever had a hairball. He was bald, of course, but I was certain he had to have possessed hair at one time. The size of his hairball must have been astronomical. And did he have to clean it up? The wiener went into his box and turned back to me, getting my attention with a quick WOOF.

"You must find a bird that knows of this creature, Sheldon, and you must do it quickly. Remember, speak to them with less teeth."

And then he was gone, back into the darkness of his box.

## A Bird With the Word

Dear Diary,

I, Sir Sheldon, genetic participant of the feline race, secret member of the De-clawed Anonymous support group, loyal soldier of the Paws for the Imminent Cause, and lastly, protector of the Quire household do solemnly swear to tell the truth. The whole truth. And only the truth. So help me God. There. I said it. Happy now?

I'm not. The truth is, I am a prisoner. Oh, they say it's for my own good. But they lie! I am not allowed out of doors at all! The windows are all shut up to keep both myself and the cool air inside. So I loathe this thing they call summer and desire nothing more than the cool, crisp air of some other time. Maybe then my humans will open the portals to the outside world and allow the breeze to flow through my prison cell. But for now I'm stuck, trying to peek through these things they call blinds. They are a horrid and vicious invention and I wish nothing but fleas and tapeworms to the one who built them!

I have spent the last few tiring days trying to part them just enough to seek the birds, but they keep snapping back and popping me in the nose which has become increasingly sore. As if that were not troublesome enough, I am forced to try my

efforts whenever my humans are away or slumbering in their bed. When they witness me doing it, their voices raise to ear-splitting volumes (screaming my name and the distasteful word "no", for which I refuse to comply with unless they start to approach me in a threatening way) and I have to retreat under the shelter of the couch.

Through great effort, I have now managed to lift the blinds just enough to get behind them and to the glass, but only on certain ones of course. To the one who built the confounded things which hold these violent contraptions in place at the bottom, may you find yourself in the belly of a jungle cat!

A few hours away from dawn on day three of my turmoil, I made progress. Above the kitchen basin, I found the window where I can successfully see birds sitting beneath a covering at the back door. They are lined up like a group of soldiers and appear to be asleep. So I promptly begin to attract their attention. I am lion. Hear me roar. MEOW!

I scratch at the glass, but since I have no claws my paw pads are the only thing to make contact with the slick surface. The movement makes kind of a muffled squeaky sound, however, I am not discouraged. I will finish the job.

"What are you doing?"

I glanced down at the floor and see the Butler. He is staring up at me, his aged eyes reflecting in the darkened room.

"I'm trying to get the attention of these birds."

"Is it working?" he asked me.

"Not yet. But it will."

I glanced back out the window. One of the buggers cracked its eyes open.

"Right there," I mumbled at my fellow feline. "I see one of them looking at me with its beady little eyes."

"I don't like their eyes," the Butler said. "They're deceiving. That's why you eat the heads first, to get rid of them."

I ignored him. Not that I didn't believe what he said, but this was no time to entertain fearful thoughts. I needed to know what they knew and I wasn't about to be distracted by eyeballs. I went back to work on the window once more.

"What do you want, lowly cat?" The bird leered at me as he spoke.

A shiver raced from the top of my head to the tip of my tail and I froze, peering at the small one towards the end of the line. The Butler hopped onto the counter, taking a spot inside the basin next to me. He poked his head under the blind and growled. I gave him a warning glare and he ceased his sound.

"I want to know about the one with the eternal smile," I said to the bird. "What say you? What is the word?"

The bird tilted his head, piercing me with just one beady eyeball.

"We are the sparrow flock originating from the great tobacco barn many, many, many moons away. We are innumerable and yet we are one. We know that which you speak of, the smile is legendary and ominous. To come too close is death."

Immediately, the rest of sparrows popped their eyes open and began to chant into the night air.

"Death! Death! Death!"

"Now you've gone and done it," the Butler grumbled. "They'll be doing that for hours."

## A Bird in a Mouth

Dear Diary,

The word of the bird was death, chanted over and over by a bunch of psychotic feathery beaked things at my back door. When they were still doing it an hour later, I knew the Butler was right, I'd created a monster. He'd taken cover in the far room of the house in the human's bed, probably burrowing his head under a pillow to muffle the annoying sounds they were making. I'd spent a while squeaking my paw pads against the window pane in order to distract them from their ominous rant. There had to be some way to make them stop. I chirped at them, meowed at them, hissed and growled at them, but nothing worked. On and on they went, it was enough to drive a cat insane, until a sound even worse blared into the air.

EH! EEH! EEEH! EEEEEH! EEEEEH!!

I jumped from the counter and bolted into the human's den. The old female rose slowly from her bed and slapped the screaming contraption silent. Backing up at a safe distance, I watched her throw her legs over the side of the bed, groan, and get up. The coffee doohickey in the kitchen came alive and the stench of the stuff began its daily waft to permeate the air. Her day was just starting. Humans are incredibly lazy

creatures. We cats do more before the sun rises than they are able to accomplish all day, even with several naps. She disappeared into the small room where the great water basin resides, reappearing moments later. I watched her perform her morning rituals, never even noticing the chanting of the birds. It was as if she didn't hear them.

The old wiener barked annoyingly, trapped behind the gate in his den. The sound mixed with the death song of the birds was starting to make my head ache. After what seemed like forever, she arose from the chair that paid homage to the compooter and went to the gate to release the wiener from his prison. I observed them as they made their way to the portal leading to the outside, a job I do many times a day. I have to be stealthy when I do so, for I am forbidden to step one paw out the door. But not this time, this time I would have my chance. She placed the thick string they call a leech around his neck and threw open the gateway. The birds began screeching louder. I wanted to cover my ears, but then I wouldn't be able to move in behind the human and dog, so I forced myself to focus only on getting to the outside where I might convince the birds to retire from their rant and supply me with the information of the one with the eternal smile.

It happened so fast, I barely realized my reaction to it all, but I'll break it down as best I can. The door opened, the old

human and the wiener stepped down into the darkness, the chanting rose to a mighty crescendo, and a shadow burst forth diving over their heads and straight into the portal towards me. No one but myself caught the fluttering for what it was, a bird. Oh sure, the old female human whipped around, finally putting two and two together in her sleepy haze. But it was too late. She'd already closed the door, descended the steps, and was halfway into the garden with the dog.

The bird swooped down over my head, pulling up just as my paws went into action. I missed it with the first strike, but my instincts took control making me one with my catness. I zoomed after it through the kitchen and into the living room where it crashed onto the desk and bumped the compooter screen, rocking the device slightly. It chirped and screeched, beating its wings and jumping around on the desk, sending feathers and papers flying into the air. My human was sure to have a fit at the sight of the mess. I leapt up and took another swipe at the wretched thing. I didn't miss this time. However, since I'd been de-clawed, what would have ended the ordeal with a nice bird stuck neatly onto my paw with the help of long, sharp talons became the hit that sent it flying back into the air and through the doorway to the dining room. It landed with a thud, somewhat stunned before it quickly regrouped and thrashed about



on the carpet, trying with all of its might to take off into the air again.

I squatted down in my best predator's stance (the one I'd been practicing with all of the toys my humans gave me), wriggled my behind and flicked my tail. I heard the back door shut, the human was coming. It would be best to get this out of the way quickly before the bird who'd made the mess on the floor got away, leaving me to take the blame. I pounced on it and trapped it between my front paws.

"What the devil is going on here?" my human asked, obviously spotting the mess on the living room floor. "I knew something flew into the house! I thought it was a moth. Feathers? Oh, dear Lord, the poor bird."

I growled. The poor bird she spoke of was on its back, trying to gouge out my eyes with its pointy beak. I pulled my head back just in time to dodge one of its jabs, rolled the thing over onto its belly and scooped it up into my mouth as neatly as you please. I could hear my human moving around, searching for my prize catch, so I quickly moved around and took cover beneath the table.

I heard a sharp bark from the wiener in the kitchen.

"Use less teeth, cat! For the safety of the household, use less teeth!"

I eased my grip on the bird, just enough to keep it from injury and demanded it tell me what it knew.

"You're getting spit all over my freshly preened wings!" it screeched. "Let go of me!"

"No," I replied. "Tell me what you know about the one with the eternal smile."

"Release me first."

"Not a chance."

The lights in the dining room blinked on and I came face to face with my female human. Her expression was one of shocked horror.

"Sheldon, drop it!"

"No!" I growled.

And I took off.