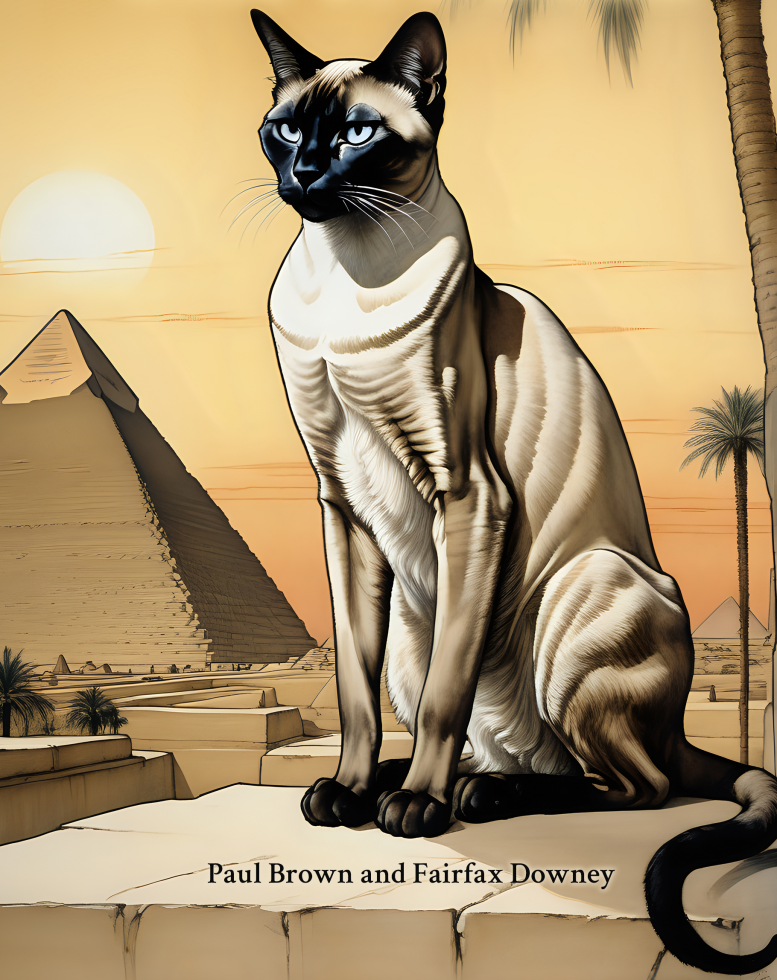


# Cats of Destiny



Paul Brown and Fairfax Downey

This edition published 2024  
by Living Book Press

ISBN: 978-1-76153-396-9 (hardcover)  
978-1-76153-398-3 (softcover)  
978-1-76153-409-6 (ebook)

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# CATS OF DESTINY

BY  
FAIRFAX DOWNEY  
AND  
PAUL BROWN



WITH PEN-AND-INK ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
PAUL BROWN

*Living Book Press*



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## *A LEGEND OF THE CAT*

Once a man who loved cats was saddened that there was no mention of them whatever in the Bible. Reverently he took his pen and wrote this story in the spirit and language of the Scriptures.

*As Jesus entered a certain village he saw a young cat which had none to care for her, and she was hungry and cried unto him, and he took her up, and put her inside his garment, and she lay in his bosom.*

*And when he came into the village he set food and drink before the cat, and she ate and drank, and showed thanks unto him.*

*And he gave her unto one of his disciples who was a widow, whose name was Lorenza, and she took care of her. And some of the people said, This man careth for all creatures. Are they his brothers and sisters that he should love them? And he said unto them, verily these are your fellow creatures of the great household of God; yea, they are your brothers and sisters, having the same breath of life in the Eternal. And whosoever careth for one of the least of these, and giveth it to eat and drink in its need, the same doeth it unto me; and whoso willingly suffereth one of these to be in want, and defendeth it not when evilly treated, suffereth the evil as done unto me.*

The Rev. G. T. Ouseley:  
*Gospel of the Holy Twelve*



# MAU

## *SACRED IN EGYPT*

JEWELS gleaming in her pointed ears, an ornate, golden necklace glistening upon the striped, short-haired fur of her sleek coat, Mau stared down from the temple wall. Below in the streets of the ancient Egyptian city of Bubastis, built upon an island in the lower Nile, a dreadful, stricken silence had fallen.

Mau's topaz eyes saw that one of her own kind, a cat of the city, had been killed. Some foreigner—a prince or wealthy nobleman from his splendid raiment—had driven his chariot over the animal. Suddenly the silence was shattered by an angry roar from a thousand throats. Soldiers, priests, shop-keepers, even slaves rushed in to surround the chariot and the limp body behind it. Mau watched the foreign man's gestures, first calm, then alarmed, explaining the killing as an accident. She caught sight, too, of the shining coins he offered in recompense. Not all the gold in his realm nor his rank could save him from the consequences of his impious deed. He had slain a cat, and it did not matter that his victim was a family pet and no temple cat like Mau. All cats were sacred in mighty Egypt.

Inscrutable, tail twitching slightly, Mau saw the mob close



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in with clubs and stones and clutching hands. Once only the foreigner shrieked, then he was battered and crushed and torn limb from limb. Owners of the dead cat carried it tenderly home, shaving their eyebrows in token of mourning and giving the body to be mummified and buried in the cemetery of cats.

As swift punishment had been visited on the slayer, so also any foreigner caught attempting to take a cat out of the country would fare ill. When cats were successfully smuggled abroad, Egyptians made every effort to recover them, sending regular missions to ransom them from slavery, save them from profane treatment and bring them home. So closely guarded were the sacred cats of Egypt that not until the time of the Roman Empire did they spread to other lands and become common domestic animals.

Mau descended from the wall to stroll through the temple. Priests and attendants made way for her as would the Pharaoh himself, for the name she bore, along with the other holy cats of the shrine, signified a seer—one who could pierce the veil of the future. Graven images hewn in her likeness sat at the feet of statues of Bast, the cat-headed goddess of this temple—Bast, the moon deity who held the sun in her eyes at night as cats do. Cat-headed too was Sekhmet, fierce goddess of war, and though the face of the Sphinx was human, its body was that of the great cat, the lion.

Mau in her lithe beauty trod with a lordly tread as if she realized her divinity, ranking with that of other sacred animals of Egypt: the bull, the ram, the ibis, the crocodile, and the hawk. So through centuries following cats would bear themselves on occasion—mysterious, untouchable, aloof. Mau's life was all veneration and dignified luxury, with priests ministering to her every want, feeding her choice fish and bread soaked in

milk. But in the stillness of the night she put aside the mantle of her sanctity and, motionless and stealthy, she crouched in wait within the temple granary beside other cats of Bast. When hungry rats and mice ventured from their holes, the cats pounced and slew. Thus they fulfilled the function which had made the cat first precious, then holy, in Egypt, granary of the ancient world. Modern scientists have estimated that one pair of rats in three years can multiply into 600,000 and that such a horde can devour as much food as 64,000 men. Had it not been for Mau and her tribe, rodents would have consumed much of the rich harvest of the Nile Delta, and famine have raged oftener in the land of the Pharaohs.

Dwelling in temples like Mau, in palaces, houses and huts, the cats of Egypt lived out their lives, worshipped and beloved. If fire broke out in a home, they were rescued first. Kept from harm, most of them died natural deaths and were interred with ceremony in vast cat burial grounds such as Beni-Hassan, where one day the mummies of 180,000 would be excavated.

For Mau when her time came, and for other temple or royal cats like her, only a funeral of magnificence was suitable. Skillful embalmers preserved her body with all the care given persons of high prestige. They wound strips of fine linen about her, layer upon layer. Her mummy was coated and gilded, and eyes of alabaster were inset before it was sealed in a bronze case, cast in her shape. And placed about it in the tomb for the sustenance of her ka, her spirit, in the hereafter were mummies of mice.

# MUEZZA

## *PET OF THE PROPHET*

A WHITE cat slept deeply on the broad, outspread sleeve of the robe of her master, seated on the flat rooftop of a dwelling in the city of Damascus. Because she belonged to the dark man with the burning eyes on whose garment she lay curled, Muezza was held in high honor. She was the beloved pet of the Prophet Mohammed, founder of a fiercely zealous religion which had spread beyond the borders of Arabia and on deeper into Asia, a faith destined to flood through Africa and on into Christendom.

Followers of Mohammed often had watched him gently lift Muezza so that she could finish her bowl of milk, or hold her in his arms while he preached to his disciples. It was no wonder that Muezza, sharing the veneration accorded her master, was surnamed Abuhareira—ancestress of cats—and that she had won kindness and mercy for her kind. Here in Damascus there was an endowed hospital for cats.

As Mohammed meditated, and Muezza slumbered by his side, the sun sank slowly. It was the hour of evening prayer. Muezzins appeared on the balconies of towering minarets and

called the faithful to worship. "There is no God but Allah," their echoing voices chanted. "Great is Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet."

Mohammed stirred and half rose to obey the summons of the priests. Least of all could he neglect them but must spread his prayer rug and prostrate himself toward Mecca, decreed a holy shrine because it was his birthplace. Yet, looking down at the white cat in peaceful repose on his sleeve, he could not bring himself to disturb her.

Quietly he drew his knife. A slash of its keen blade, and the sleeve was severed. Only then did the Prophet answer the call to prayer, leaving Muezza still soundly asleep upon the cloth.

The tale of Mohammed's fond consideration of his cat was told in many a market and caravanserai. Story-tellers, embroidering it, related that when Muezza woke from her nap on the sleeve, she walked to her master, rubbed against his legs and purred her thanks for his thoughtfulness. Whereupon the Prophet, understanding that she was showing her appreciation of his deed, passed a hand three times over her arched back, thus giving her kind immunity forever from any harm on that part of the body. So that is why cats, falling or dropped from a height, are said to land on their feet.

Muezza's prestige as the pet of the Prophet lived on after her, and for her sake Mohammedans everywhere cherished cats. Anyone who mistreated one was scorned or beaten, for Mohammed had set the example when he commanded the punishment of a pitiless woman who tied up her cat to starve, refusing to free it so that "it might eat the reptiles of the ground"—lizards and snakes. Since Muezza had lain in the bosom of the Prophet, cats were allowed to enter mosques, where they were welcomed and fondled. In the great city of Constantinople,



captured from the Christians, Moslems gave their cats the same fond care they did their children. The powerful Mameluke Sultan of Egypt, El Daher Beybars, founded an asylum for the homeless cats of Cairo. Two or three pussies, in charge of an old woman called Mother of Cats, always traveled camelback with the caravan which each year bore the Sacred Carpet back and forth between Cairo and Mecca, and that custom is said to have been founded as a memorial to Muezza.

An Arab chronicler borrowed the story of Noah from the Bible and added a tale of the creation of the cat, relating that when mice overran the Ark, Allah caused the lion to sneeze, and the cat ran out of his nostrils. "From that time," proclaimed the scribe, "the mouse has been timid and has hidden in holes."

Christian artists adopted that Arab legend. Ignoring the fact that cats are not once mentioned in the Bible—perhaps because they were sacred in Egypt, hated land of Hebrew bondage—a Renaissance painter depicted a large and dignified pussy at the head of the procession of animals leaving the Ark after the flood. Another painting portrayed a cat lying in the place of honor at the feet of Adam and Eve, and still another showed one remaining in the Garden of Eden while the first man and woman were being driven forth.

Although the tradition founded by Muezza inspired Christian artists, it failed to win kindness to cats of Christian countries. During cruel centuries, thousands of the poor creatures were branded familiars of demons and witches and tortured and killed. But in Moslem lands the memory of Mohammed's white cat blessed the feline race. And to this day nurses in Cairo tell children the story of her undisturbed rest on the severed sleeve of the Prophet.



# DICK WHITTINGTON'S CAT

## *LORD MAYOR'S FORTUNE*

DICK WHITTINGTON kept the cat he had bought in his garret room in the London house of the rich merchant for whom he worked as scullion. The orphan boy was certain that he could not have spent the penny he had earned by blacking boots in a better way than the purchase of this affectionate companion. The cat changed his cramped quarters from a place of lonely despair. She curled up warmly on his lap and purred and, while he was asleep, rid the room of swarms of rats and mice. By day Dick hid his cat in a cupboard so that the cook and other servants, who cuffed and kicked him as he went about his duties in the kitchen of the Fitzwarren household, would not abuse her.

Despite the cat's company, Dick's lot was hard, and there seemed but little prospect of his making the fortune he had come trudging from his home in Shropshire to seek. Yet his employer, Sir Ivo Fitzwarren, his wife, and their lovely daughter, Alice, were kind to the lad of fourteen. And there finally came a day when the merchant, fitting out his ship, *Unicorn*, for a venture to Algiers, offered all his servants, including Dick, a

chance to share in the profits by investing their savings in English goods which would be put aboard for trade with the Algerians.

Alas, poor Dick possessed nothing to send. He already had spent the penny, all he had been able to save.

Hold, he did own something—his beloved cat! Tears running down his cheeks, the boy brought his pet and entrusted her to the shipmaster.

Lonelier than ever, Dick returned to his tasks. Months passed, and the cook's brutality at last grew so intolerable he could endure it no longer. Dreams and hopes faded, he ran away and retraced his steps toward his old home. Reaching Highgate Hill, he sat down wearily on a boulder which to this day is called "Whittington's Stone." It was All Hallows Day, and the Bow bells began pealing merrily, their strokes seeming to sound a message for the listening lad.

"Turn again, Whittington,  
Thrice Lord Mayor of London."

Dick jumped up from the stone and strode back to the Fitzwarren house.

Meanwhile his cat had fulfilled her destiny. On the voyage she made herself such a favorite of the shipmaster that he would allow no one else to care for her. At Algiers he took her ashore when he was invited to a state banquet by the Dey. As sumptuous dishes were set before the guests seated on divans, rats infesting the palace dashed in and out and snatched the food from the very platters. Thereupon the captain held up the eagerly squirming cat and was granted permission to let her loose. That experienced mouser pounced on the vermin and slew them right and left, to the great delight of the Dey.



At once he bargained for the cat, and an old tale relates that as her price he “sent on board the ship the choicest commodities, consisting of gold, jewels, and silks.” Nor is the story as exaggerated as it seems, for in certain countries at that time where rats and mice were a pest and there were no native cats, imported ones were worth their weight in gold.

So Dick, summoned by the bells, hastened back to the merchant’s dwelling and learned the *Unicorn* had returned, and his venture had repaid him many hundredfold, while his cat had become a cherished member of the Dey’s court.

From that day the lad’s fortunes rose higher and higher. He became a merchant like Sir Ivo, dealing in velvets, damask, and cloth of gold. He and the fair Alice were married, and just as the bells had foretold, Dick Whittington was thrice elected Lord Mayor of London. Out of his wealth he made large loans to two Kings of England, Henry IV and Henry V.

For three hundred years after Whittington’s death in 1423, the story of his cat went unquestioned. Later savants labeled it a legend, in spite of the facts that it had lived long as a tradition and that a stone statue of a boy with a cat in his arms was found in Whittington’s house when it was remodeled. But many others always will believe that the story of Dick Whittington and his cat is as true as it is charming.

# CAT OF SIR HENRY WYATT

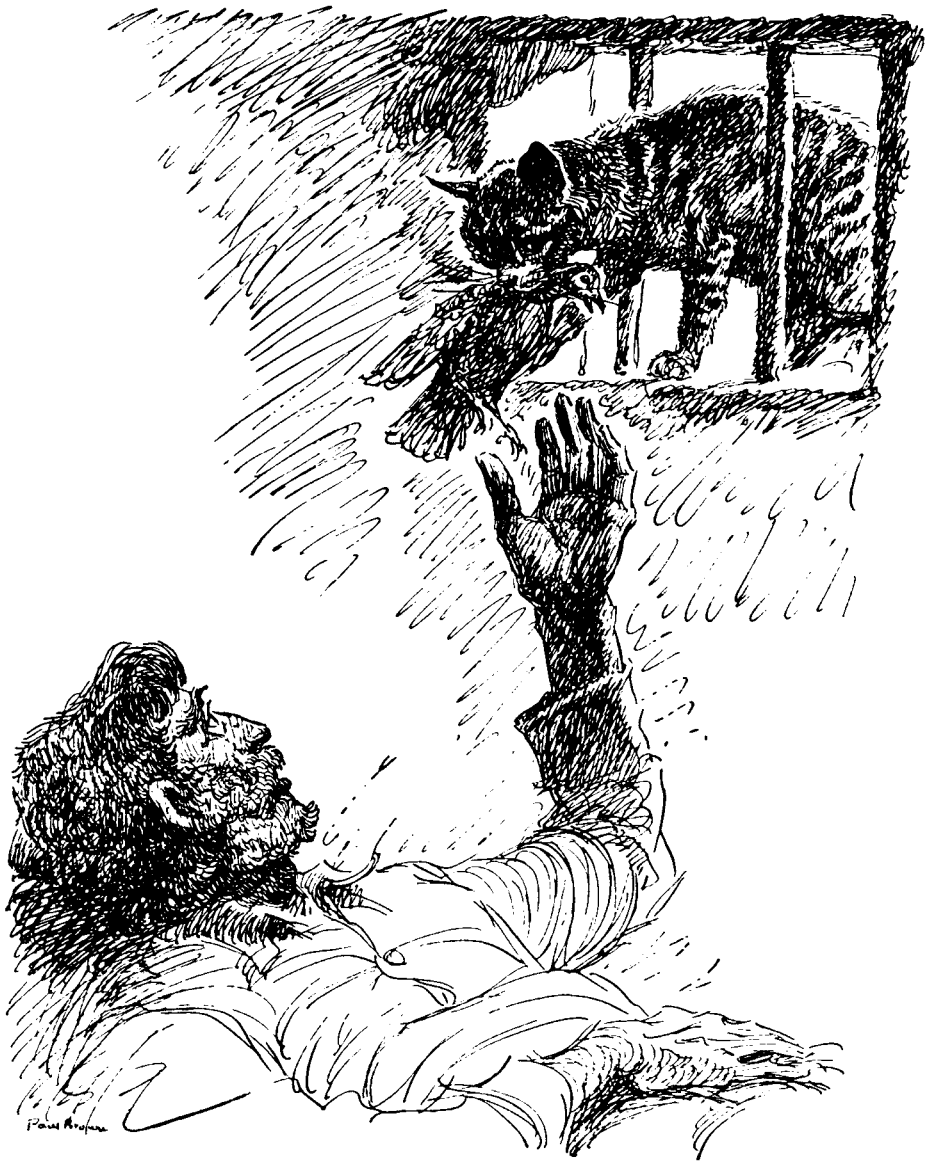
## *PRISONER'S FRIEND*

A CAT played a part in the War of the Roses, that bloody struggle fought for the throne of England. Her name has not survived but the memory of her deeds was preserved by the grateful knight whose life she saved.

Sir Henry Wyatt chose the red rose, the badge of Lancaster, against the white of York and suffered grievously from his choice, for York prevailed, and the crown finally fell to Richard III. That ruthless monarch sought to seduce the able Sir Henry to his service and, failing, the King flung the loyal Lancastrian into the grim Tower of London.

Wyatt was tortured on the rack, and mustard was forced down his throat, yet he would not yield. He might well then have been slain, for in that very prison Richard had ordered the slaughter of two boy princes who stood in his path. Instead of a quick death, Sir Henry was left to freeze in a cold, narrow, bedless cell with prison fare so scant he was slowly starving.

One day a cat crept through the grating into his dungeon. A lonely stray, she craved human companionship, and the prisoner found as much comfort in her company as she in his.



Paul M. ...

“He was glad of her, laid her in his bosom to warm him, and by making much of her, won her love,” so says an old chronicle of the time.

Thereafter the cat came to visit him several times a day. Sensing his hunger, she brought him a pigeon she had caught in a neighboring dovecote. The thin and wasted knight hid the bird and summoned the keeper to complain again of his meager rations, begging that in God’s mercy he be granted a little meat to keep him alive.

“I durst not do better,” the jailer protested.

“But if I can provide any, will you promise to dress it for me?” Sir Henry asked.

“I may well enough. You are safe in that matter,” the keeper answered. He kept his word, and when given the pigeon, he plucked and cooked it for his charge.

Again and again the cat brought fat pigeons to her friend, saving him from the starvation which would have been his lot.

The prisoner was released when King Richard, crushed by revolt, was killed in battle, and though Wyatt, in the succeeding reigns of King Henry VII and Henry VIII, rose too high posts, he never forgot the faithful cat nor her kind. People noticed that he would make as much of cats as other men of their spaniels and hounds.

A portrait shows him in his Tower cell, his cat pulling a pigeon through the barred window, and at the bottom of the painting is inscribed this tribute:

“This Knight with hunger, cold, and care neere starv’d,  
pincht, pyned away,  
A sillie [weak] Beast did feede, heate, cheere, with dyett,  
warmth, and play.”

# SATHAN

## *FAMILIAR OF WITCHES*

WHEN the Devil came seeking mortals as his prey, he appeared as a black dog, a toad, or a serpent, so people avowed. But his favorite form when he wished to serve as a companion to witches was that of a cat. And never, declared superstitious, sixteenth-century England, had the fiend wreaked more havoc than in the years he prowled about in a feline shape that bore his own name, Sathan.

Sathan was a white, spotted cat whose baleful glare frightened the folk of the Chelmsford countryside. Some of them shuddered with that strange, real dread of cats which has been recognized since the time of the Greeks, whose language had a word for them: ailurophobes—persons who hate the creature that waves its tail.

Once the evidence of Sathan's wicked work was seen, no one ever doubted that he was a witch-cat. It was whispered that he had come from abroad and swum the Channel to reach England. Others insisted that he had craftily used a bishop, about to take ship from France, as his passport and had arrived perched on the prelate's shoulder. Actually the cat was given Elizabeth Francis by her grandmother, who at the same time



was reputed to have taught her granddaughter to renounce God and practice witchcraft.

Sathan, curled in a basket, spoke to his mistress in an uncanny, hollow voice. While he partook of milk and bread, it was only when Elizabeth let him lap a drop of her own blood that he would perform an evil service. First she employed the cat to bewitch a neighbor's hog which sickened and died. Then she demanded riches of Sathan, and lo, a flock of eighteen black and white sheep was found grazing in her pasture, though later all mysteriously vanished. Something of more permanence, a wealthy husband, was next demanded of the cat. There Sathan's spells failed. He could not force Andrew Byles to marry his mistress, but the man for his stubbornness soon lost all his goods and died.

Soon a husband, though less well-off than Byles, was provided, but the couple quarreled, and a daughter born to them cried constantly. The witch caused Sathan to kill the infant and to lame her spouse by changing into a toad and hiding in his shoe. Dreadful events multiplied. Valuable cattle perished, and at length black arts were the death of Elizabeth's husband, and then of a neighbor and his wife.

Witch-hunters now commenced the merciless persecutions which in England and later in America would send hundreds of unfortunate women to the gallows or the stake—victims of coincidence and of their own and neighbors' spite, whipped up by cruel and senseless superstition. Finally Elizabeth was tried at Chelmsford in 1556, confessed to witchcraft and was hanged.

But Sathan, which had served his mistress with malignant fidelity for more than fifteen years, escaped. Just before her arrest she had traded him for a cake, along with her knowledge of sorcery, to Mother Agnes Waterhouse. Again the neighbor-