

One Modest Vampire's Chronicles

Well, perhaps it was a misnomer to associate the word "modest" with myself in the title of this little ditty. The rest is accurate, though, and it is my position to let it stand. Che is my name and being a vampire is my game. It's my secret life! It's such fun to pull this off, boy, life is such a kick.

My current chapter began when L. Frank Baum, the Buffy-the-Vampire-Slayer Type, was just about to put that stake through my heart and that would have been the end of me. What would the world have been like without a Che init? Would it have come to an end? Most likely, but we'll all never know because Frank was not successful. At the last second I suddenly had the brilliant idea to change into a two and half week-old kitten!! It's pretty well known folklore that we can turn into bats and fly away. Well, guess what, people, we can turn into 2 1/2 week-old kittens, too. Frank doubted what he had just witnessed, and of course he isn't a kitten slayer, so here I am.

You know, part of Frank's problem is that no one takes him seriously, and the other part is that he can only pursue vampires in his spare time, being that this is the last year of the twentieth century and there are no paying positions available in that line of work and a man has to eat. Suits me just fine, but isn't it ironic that when things are spoken of and written about for centuries, eons even, they are based on at least a grain of truth. Yet modern pooh poosers think of that as being illogical, insane, or ignorantly superstitious. Ghosts, witches, vampires, werewolves. Really, people, you are so modern you've lost all sense of what is real. That, too, suits me fine. Good thing no one takes Anne Rice seriously. She is so eerily close to reality.

It has gotten much more challenging to exist among the mortals than it ever used to be. Being a cat was actually a very strategic move. It is true that I started out as a black one, and due to my exposure to sunlight I have bleached out to silver. Well, give me long enough and maybe I'll be completely snow white one day and then disappear altogether. This being a cat is new to me, and I really do not know what will become of me.

To get back to the "chronology" referred to, though, I became a kitten and was rescued, then adopted out to one of the most naive and nicest women I have come across in centuries. I call her Mother. Mother has been the most loving and caring servant I have ever had. She is altruistic and everything she does for me (at my suggestion and command) she does for love.

Mother does not understand what she sees. I rarely show my teeth, having been trained over the centuries that there is often an adverse reaction to the sight of them by those who behold them. Well, on those rare occasions that I have shown her my teeth, she gets all lovingly excited and tells me what cute teeth they are! Cute. These weapons of destruction could sap the life out of the woman in seconds flat (centuries of practice makes perfect), and she thinks they're cute. It is fortunate that I love this family of Mother, her husband, her dog, her horse, and her ancient Egyptian wise one.

(There is also another poseur in this household, a black "cat", really one of my arch rivals, a witch, but that is another story for another time.

Suffice it to say we are like Stephen King and Dean Kuntz living under the same roof.) Because I love them, I do not harm them. I do not make use of them as my food, my elixir of life.

Mother tried to pet me after making garlic bread today. I of course recoiled instantly, and she just thinks I don't like the strong smell of the herb. That really smarted, I got away just in the nick of time before suffering burns. I wish she'd be more careful. Fortunately she is usually very considerate.

One of the nicest things about this household is the complete absence of religious articles and references. No nasty crosses or rosaries. I think there may be a bible tucked away somewhere in the deep recesses, but I'm not sure. And one of the convenient things about being a cat is I'm so low to the ground there are no mirrors at my height. This ain't no shoe store, you know. Mother did come at me with a mirror one day, though, and I had to run away. That was so annoying. I don't know what gets into that woman sometimes. So unlike her. Another nice thing is that Mother likes to leave the door open for me at night. That way I can fly right in after my night hunt without bothering to change back into a cat immediately. It is such a bother, I can't begin to tell you, to have to turn back into a cat in the winter in order to squeeze through that infernal cat door.

I wish I could tell you the end to the story, but it has only just begun.

I've only been a cat for two and half years. I'll keep you posted!

The OTHER Poseur in Our Midst

As I was giving you my brief sketch of my existence as a cat yesterday I could sense your great curiosity about the other poseur in this household, the black "cat," who is really a witch and is my arch rival. I have decided to humor you and discuss her today.

The household here calls her Samantha, after the witch on TV, or Sam for short. I sometimes think it would be a good idea to remind them that they actually named her Hekate the first time they laid eyes on her; they really do need to be reminded of their initial good sense. They knew what they were looking at that night and have softened and receded back into the dark shadows of denial. But they knew.

They apparently felt great empathic sorrow for her, for her terror that night was not an act, and even the blockheaded mortals could see it. (How the mighty fall! I guess you're just not good enough, Sam.) She had been turned into a cat by her most powerful competitor, and I'll grant you that even I cannot imagine how terrifying that would be. To

suddenly and without warning go from powerful arrogant witch to ordinary felis domestica, a vulnerable little black cat in a jerk-water hick town like Angels Camp on Halloween; well, let your imagination soar (puny minded one, oh mortal). After surviving that initial terror without losing her mind, she had to then survive the ordeal of the night's festivities. That nearly did her in, but then as if to add insult to injury, she then had to literally survive, you know, eat and find a place to sleep. To be thrust into such a situation is unthinkable.

Yeah, but they took her in, this household. And they treated her with love and gentleness in spite of what they saw that night. Do not make the mistake of thinking that softened her much towards the mortals because it didn't. After her recovery from terror she was just as arrogant as ever and trying to lord it over everyone. (Your mother was a Gypsy, Sam!) Except she had a soft spot for the one called Robin who had been the actual rescuer. I think it helped that Sam saw some promising qualities in the girl. So soft and young and pliable and already dreaming that which comes about.

There were all the other players to contend with, too, though. Check out this cast: Ozzie, supposedly a dog, actually a very powerful Shaman; Jerry, mortal man, very powerful clairvoyant (luckily for her he lives in denial); Bubby, supposedly a mild-mannered Siamese housecat, actually an old Egyptian wise one; Lucy a real dog and George a real horse, and Mother(my wonderful wonderful Mother)with her blossoming burgeoning talents.

There was a real cat named Violet, but she was ancient when Sam got here and dropped out of the running in no time.

Sam took an instant dislike to Mother. Perhaps she recognized something not visible to others. Or maybe Mother is like an idiot savant, a real happy go lucky ninny with incredible powers of discernment. Sam has always been haughty and unpleasant to Mother. (And I'll punish you for that, you black fiend.) Well, she thought she had everything under control after a year or so. She was in the process of grooming the girl and manipulating Mother into learning to be witches so they could cast a spell and mix the right potion to turn her back into a witch, when what should happen but that the Mighty Che should burst onto the scene!!! I'm not Mighty Mouse here to save the day, but I am Magnificent Che to foil her plans. He, he. You think that's why she hates me, other than the all too obvious traditional rivalry of witches and vampires? He, he. (Got you, didn't I, Sam!) Sam misses the things she liked to do. She used to jump on the bed when the mortals were about to become intimate or jump on them while they were in the act. (God, you're so rude! Have you no couth? Yes, you tacky trash, controlled by your mammalian urges. You're a spayed cat now, honey, and that, as they say, is that.) She does not have to pine over her love of coffee. The mortals share their lattes with her. They think she likes the foam. Hah! How do they explain the day they spilled some of their finely ground coffee, and she licked it off the floor? Mother does like her caffeine. I'm sure she would be so understanding if Hekate would just make her desires known.

(Secretive idiot! Your father had rat teeth!)The girl grew up and went away, as girls are wont to do. Sam the big baby had a heart attack! She thought she was going to die. Then she glommed onto the mortal man. He is so well trained now, he grooms her every morning as he performs his daily ablutions. She always loved to be caressed by a man. Doesn't have to miss that, either. The mortal man loves her and does caress her and treats her pretty well. It chaps her hide that he loves Mother more, though.

Of course it chaps her hide that Mother loves me the most, too! And Mother does. Mother loves me best! And you know that she was thinking she was next in line after Violet dropped out of the running and Ozzie figured it was time to move on, and there was only old Bub in the line of succession in her way. (It was not to be, Sam, old bean. You should learn to read your tea leaves better.)And so here I am to keep things in line and generally make daily existence as irritating for her as possible. This story still isn't over, and maybe sometime I'll feel like telling you some more. Right now I really gotta go demand Mother's attention. Ciao!

The Halloween Coup of '95

When tarantulas walk and corn stalks die, Wicans begin to feel joy in their hearts, for it is the harbinger of their most joyous day of the year. All Hallowed Eve. Let me tell you of one such day which they all keep near to their hearts and has been added to the annals of their history. It is the story of how the mighty fall, or Hekate is turned into a cat on the Halloween of 1995.

She won't tell you. She doesn't like the story. For sharing what has become in five short years a part of their lore. Grimmla, who told me the story, will forever fear retribution. Not today. Not tomorrow. The nagging voice of fear tells her that it will come. But the telling must be done.

Grimmla considers herself to be a mere cog in the vast machinery that is the society of Wicca, but she is important enough to have the courage to tell the tale. Yes, now that I think of it, she has always had courage.

This belies her appearance, which is that of meek supplicant. A willow branch that blows in the winds of change.

Hekate was the most powerful witch queen ever to exist in their history.

Understand that powerful does not mean kind or gentle. To be a great leader a certain degree of ruthlessness must live. But Hekate was one of the most ruthless and cold witch queens Grimmla's kind had ever seen. Her power at casting spells was unequalled and her skill at punishment was a nagging voice in the back of the community consciousness.

During Halloween festivities it is common to play "Trick or Treat," a game of daring and skill. It is a well known fact that while a witch is uttering the words "trick or treat" she is at her most vulnerable but only while she is uttering them. Not before, not after. This game is similar to the mortals' Russian Roulette, or "throw the knife at your hand which is flat on the table," or some other such test of courage and stupidity. Trick or Treat is ridiculously dangerous but traditionally played every All Hallowed Eve nonetheless. To avoid it would spell one's complete failure as Wican.

Some witches approach their turn by saying the terrible words as fast as is witchly possible, while others demonstrate their power and fearlessness by drawing them out as long as it is possible to do, enunciating each syllable as clearly and slowly as one possibly can. It is a contest of wills, of personal strength.

Hekate was not aware of a deep unease within the community. All were afraid of her and wished her to be gone, but no one was brave enough to voice such a thought and actually tried to suppress them. There was one brave true Wican, however, whose ambition outstripped her fear. Her name was Charmus. Charmus began to whisper around a plan to trick Hekate on All Hallowed Eve while playing the game of Trick or Treat.

At first her scheme was met with incredulity and a great community shunning for such audacious lunacy. No one wanted to so much as speak Charmus' name aloud for fear Hekate would read their thoughts and smite them for crossing her. There had never been such an arrogant and powerful leader of their kind.

Then a peculiar thing happened--Wicans began to have the strength to whisper, barely audibly, about such a scheme. Then to truly whisper. Then to discuss in no uncertain terms. And yet they lived! It seems Hekate was so arrogant she had lost her edge. She went on about her way preparing for the Halloween festivities, a lavish event, completely unaware of the plot afoot to depose her.

The important night arrived at last. The time came for Hekate to take her turn at the game of Trick or Treat. She smiled her arrogant strong smile and started to say her three little words so drawn out and slowly that even while the entire community was pouring every ounce of strength they had into the mass spell, they couldn't help but admire her one last time. And then it was done! In a puff of smoke she was gone, sent to Angels Camp in the form of a common house cat, a black one. And it was Halloween.

They could hear the scream for miles.

Tefnut's Story

The woman of the house calls me Ancient Egyptian Wise One. How discerning of her to recognize me in my present manifestation. She doesn't think she has talents, but she does, if she can see me through this disguise of ordinariness.

My life as a god was many lifetimes past and what is, is what was meant to be. I lived the life of a god with what I hope can be described as quiet dignity, and I performed my tasks and duties to the best of my ability.

Many lifetimes ago I lived in the warm dry place that is now referred to as Egypt. I was called Tefnut, which means tomorrow. I was a sacred cat in the family of Aguhatma, revered and worshipped as was my right. In turn, I dispensed what good fortune I was capable of unto the host family, and I felt towards them what would be called love.

I saw them safely through the occurrences of the time and kept their good fortune and riches intact through all that befell them. It is true, I was a strong god, yet I taxed my strength at times to accomplish that. They were good in their devotion, and I paid them back in kind.

After some years I died and was mummified as befit my rank of god, and I was entombed in the city of Kemet where all cat gods go. This city was excavated in what is measured as 1887 by the method used in these times, and my mummified body was disturbed and desecrated. And so my rest was disturbed, and I roam the Earth in a series of incarnations as decided upon by the great goddess Bast. To this day I have a deep and abiding hatred for the English for causing this cycle.

I reside in the old body of a mortal cat now, and I am very tired. Soon I will converse with Bast once more, and my next incarnation will be decided.

For now I am loved, as is my right, and I love in return. The woman and man and girl call me Bubby, and I forgive them for their ignorance. They have always been well-meaning and kind and loving. For that they have my love.

My life with these people began in the place called Sonora where I was born into this, my current incarnation. It had been decided that I would come back to this earth as a Siamese cat in the year measured as 1984 by the method used in these times. I did not like the household where I lived, and so, with what small powers I possess in this form, I took steps to change residence.

I left the household at which I had resided unhappily for some months and wandered the wilderness for some more months, living upon my wits and my innate ability to hunt. I really was a superb hunter, and I enjoyed it very much. For a short period of time I fell in with a family of raccoons, and they taught me many of their ways. To this day I cannot drink without first washing my paws. This causes distress for the woman, who must come after me and clean up the water that I spill and splash in doing so.

After some time of no place to call my own I was in poor shape in spite of my great prowess as a hunter. I happened upon a house in the woods with a wonderful aura emanating from it. Upon further investigation I found that it was a place of the worship of

Bast, for why else would there be what is called a cat door, an entrance of gods. I entered it. There was a girl child, and I accepted her as my servant and handmaid.

The entire household bustled around me from that moment, seeing to my comfort and desires. They nursed me back to great good health and did so lovingly. For this I will always love them. They accepted me with no proof of my great power, for they are ignorant of the old ways. The woman does seem to have an inkling, as I said, but that came over the years, not from the first sight of me.

My old age has been enlivened by the presence of a young silver god called Che. She is the delight of my life, breathing life into my winter, and when I am relieved of my present position and duties and go for my brief rest before my next incarnation, I will think of her fondly.

Ozzie Shaman

I am one of the People. I am the shaman of my tribe. This is the story of the time I became a dog and was the teacher of a nice, white woman.

I have been on this earth many seasons. It has become my custom to chew the peyote and purify myself and go to the top of the mountain to have visions so that I may help the members of my tribe with the wisdom of the ancestors.

On the day that the first snow fell it seemed a good day to talk to the ancestors, and so I prepared myself to go to the top of the mountain, and I went. I sat upon an ancient boulder, as was my custom when I waited for the ancestors to visit, and I waited. Patience is a good and necessary quality for a shaman to have.

When the ancestors came they gave me a very strange vision. They said I would turn myself into a crow and travel many miles across the mountains toward the great water. They said I would find a nomad dog about to have her young, and I would become one of her pups with a daughter of Coyote for a sister. They said I would be the second born and that great misfortune would befall the nomad dog and the daughter of Coyote, but that I would not experience the great misfortune. What is the hardest to understand of what the ancestors told me is that I would find the nomad dog where a white woman was and that she was an important white woman. They said it was important that I help the white woman learn to understand the ways of the ancestors and the spirits. I would know the white woman because she would be where the nomad dog is and would have a head of snow white hair, like the snow-covered mountains that I would travel through to find her.

It is pointless to argue with the ancestors or ever ask them why, just as it would be pointless to ask the sun why it begins its travels across the sky every morning.

I went back down the mountain and prepared myself to begin my journey. I turned into a crow and soared up into the clouds toward the mountains and the great water. After many days of flying and nights of resting and guarding against my enemy Owl I did come upon a nomad dog in the land of the MiWuk. The nomad dog did live in the house of a white woman with a head of snow white hair like the snow-covered mountains that I had traveled through.

The white woman was empty, like a stone wall of a canyon before it is adorned with paintings. I thought it might not be too hard to help her learn the ways of the ancestors and the spirits. I became one of the nomad dog's pups, the second born, and was named Ozzie by the white woman's daughter. I found I had a love for the white woman's husband, he who knows things without a visit from the ancestors and without chewing the peyote.

When we pups were half a season upon this earth the girl and the white woman found homes for some of us in other pueblos. And then the nomad dog went off on a night adventure, and she took the daughter of coyote with her, my sister. I did not ever see them again. The white woman was sad for she had loved the daughter of Coyote, and it had made her laugh to hear her yip like her father. Only I and my sister Lucy were left to cheer her up.

After four seasons I decided to begin to train the white woman. She first needed training in humility and patience. To help her learn this lesson I was quiet for four full seasons. I did not talk to her at all. She would tell others of her people that I was "dumb as a fence post." I did not correct her. I said nothing, waiting for her to use her powers. I decided that if the woman could learn patience and humility, she would be as an empty bowl ready to be filled.

One day after I had been quiet for four full seasons, the woman noticed something cunning that I did in my silence. I saw the thought in her face, that she saw that the second born pup, Ozzie, was a very cunning dog. It was like lightning. And then she knew and understood that she had been possessed of arrogance. She learned patience and humility. I did not make loud noises to make her see; I was silent, and she saw.

I helped the woman have her visions from her ancestors. I helped her see what is there for all to see, and yet so many do not see. She learned about the spirits and ancestors. She was a good student.

One day to reward her and to help her understand more, I, Shaman, came out of the dog in her presence. She was in awe, and she knew what she had seen.

The white woman had learned to understand the ways of the ancestors and the spirits.

I stayed in the dog for many more seasons because I had love for the white man.

And then I went to the place of evil spirits and ate meat with poison in it. I was hungry, and I ate it. The white man had known what was to become of me and had warned me and told me not to go to the place of evil spirits, but I smelled the meat, and I wanted it.

As I lay at the medicine man's pueblo, and I was in pain and dying, the white woman asked me why I ate the meat if I knew it was poison, and I would die.

The answer is that when I am a dog I am a dog, and I have the hungers of a dog. I cannot control my fate anymore than I can stop the rain from falling from the clouds or turn back the sun when it has dawned.

What We Do While Mother Is Gone

As I told you once, Sam and I exist in this house like Stephen King and Dean Kuntz under one roof. We are rivals with grudging respect for one another. Yes, I have respect for that black daughter of jackals. And she would never admit it, but she has respect for me, too. For that bloodsucking leech, is the way she would put it, I believe.

While Mother is away we do have our adventures. We don't live here alone, as you know. There is Lucy and Bub and George, but he's out in the pasture and misses so much. Lucy just exists in general awe and slight fear of us, and Bubby sets himself pretty much apart from us, having way too much dignity and decorum (that's royalty for you) to join in the argument.

There is a door next to the wood stove. Not the ordinary door going into the sunroom, no I mean the one the mortals cannot see. The door used by the other ones who live here. Yes, the ghosts. The spirits of the dearly departed. There are so many of them. And Sam and I go through that door many times a day and night, and they come in and out at will, too. Sometimes we have huge parties, and the humans hear a little thump here, and see a little glimpse there. It is so hilarious to think how much goes on in between that they are blind to! This place is rocking, and the man and Mother live such a downright, well, I have to say it, boring existence. They hardly notice anything at all. And when they do, we all make a mental note to be more careful.

Let me tell you how we discovered the door. Please keep in mind that this didn't happen until I came here. That lump couldn't find a pentagram if it slapped her in the face.

The day began as usual. Mother and her husband got up, had coffee, flew out the door, and drove away in their cars. (I don't like cars. Mother warned me about them right from the beginning. They can squash you, and they can hurt you. They are evil, and I wish she didn't even have to have one of the horrible things. Their presence takes the fun out of roaming the garage.) Well, they were gone, and we were alone at last. We started our usual stare-down over the food bowls in the sunroom. I was contemplating taking Mother's advice about knocking Sam down and sitting on her (I am surely robust, just as

it says on the computer) when we were interrupted by a sliver of light and noise that suddenly opened up next to the wood stove.

Boy, I tell you, we both jumped just about out of our respective skins.

Then a stranger, a man we'd never seen, but we could see through him, came through a narrow doorway that had just opened and walked right up the stairs and into the bedroom! We are both here in the form of cats, and you know what is said about cats and curiosity. It took hold instantly, and away we went--through the door with not a thought in the world about a) where the heck were we going, or b) would we be able to get back, pushing and shoving each other to be the first through the narrow opening.

The place was nothing but light and ethereal beings, beings of all kinds.

Mother's old cat is there, Violet, and the German shepherd Mother and her husband had as newlyweds, Frieda, is there. There are people and dogs and cats and mice and birds and just everything. Mother's mom and dad are there. Mother's husband's father is there. Mother's grandma. And there are strangers there. I could go on, but you get the idea. They are there, and yet they are not here. They are only here when they come through the door.

It turns out the trunk upstairs in the bedroom is a conduit of some kind, and that is why Mother's grandma is here. She watches over her and used to have to be quite threatening to Mother's husband before he settled down and became a good husband. She can use it because it belonged to her, and she came with it when it was given to Mother after her death. She has a fondness for it. She used it when she came to this country on a ship from Germany in 1922. It was a finely made trunk, like her, and that's why it has stood the test of time. She figured since she came with the trunk she might as well make herself useful and scare the girl's husband into behaving himself. (Mother was a girl once.) Mother's father came with the rectangular metal box which resides in the way back of Mother's walk-in closet. I think that explains why Mother's closet is always so cold, but the man's is not. The box is what his ashes came in the day they were shipped to her.

Mouse ghost has no conduit, only the door. Mouse ghost used to run back and forth under the armoire and along the wall to the table. Back and forth. Making Mother and her husband think they were seeing things. What a little trickster. My kind of mouse. If he weren't already dead I'd eat him.

So we discovered that door and all our new friends that one remarkable day, and we do not ever have to sleep in the sun for lack of something to do, that's for sure. Not that we don't sleep in the sun for the sheer sensuality of it sometimes.

Well, I'm hungry now, and I thought I saw Sam go in the sunroom. Perhaps I'll have a bite and maybe a growl and a stare. Ciao!

Lucy

I don't even know why I am writing about her, except that I suppose Lucy has guilted me into it. She is not a goddess or a witch or one who lives beyond the reaches of time. She is only a dog, a mortal dog, with one little puny dog life to lead. I don't even know if she'll come back again.

(I never claimed to be all-knowing.)When it comes to Lucy, people are always finding themselves saying "Poor little Lucy!"

This is how Lucy came into the world: after having five or six puppies, her mother, Ruby, felt the need to go out and relieve herself. She was let out, and while she was relieving herself she had a puppy, which plopped out onto the lawn, and she simply didn't notice. She blithely went back up the steps and went to the door to be let in. If one of the mortals hadn't noticed the already shivering thing (it was Christmas Eve), she would surely have died in a very short period of time. Lucy the afterthought, the forgotten baby.

Lucy's role in the relationship with Ozzie was that of baby sister. Ozzie ruled, and Lucy followed. Ozzie made the decisions, and Lucy went along.

Ozzie decided what Lucy would be allowed to do and when. He did this quietly and almost invisibly, but he did it.

Lucy was under the impression her name was OzzieLucy. She always came when they called "Ozzie, Lucy!!" Or even just "Ozzie!"

Mother has always wondered why Lucy did not eat the poisoned meat and die along with Ozzie. I think it's because Ozzie did not allow her to. She bowed to his authority.

After Ozzie was gone, Lucy, the dog who loves food more than anything in the world, would not eat. The Pillsbury Doughboy slowly wasted away into a stylish greyhound. The mortals were all so worried--they thought she was going to pine away and die. They tried to coax her to eat with all manner of temptations. And eventually she took a bite. The next day a few more bites. And finally she would eat. They didn't lose her.

Lucy is in somewhat of a difficult position around here, as seniority does not rule. It doesn't matter that she will be nine years old this Christmas Eve. She is like the baby of the family, she gets no respect. She's the ninny dog, the poor booboo. No goddess name for her. She is just LouLou, Lou, Louey. She has no special power, no illustrious history.

When Lucy was a little pup she thought up a new game to play that Ozzie didn't share with her. Chewing on the hoses so that they spouted like little geysers when turned on was not fun enough. Digging up every last violet in the flower bed was not challenging enough. No, Lucy's game was to chew on a tree until the bark was easily peeled and then to pull off strips of bark all around the trunk. In essence, she was girdling the tree, a traditional method of killing unwanted trees. The trees were all wanted, however. Mother

and her husband had lovingly planted all the Poplars and Elms and Liquid Amber and were desperate to make her stop before they lost them all! Finally, with discipline and some time to grow up a little, she stopped playing that game.

Lucy took over as head watch dog when Ozzie was gone, and she has become a good one. She has expanded her duties to include daily inspection of the territory to see to it that no cat who does not belong sets foot in this yard. And that no deer shall eat one bit of the foliage. Well, actually I've come to the conclusion that Lucy does patrol and will actually bark at them and look like she'll chase them, but only if the mortals are looking. If they're not looking, she has short, friendly conversations with the stray cat or odd deer who wanders in, rather like making small talk with your neighbor. She seems to know them by name and I would venture to say they are her friends.

Lucy's major priority in life is food. She loves dog food, people food, my food, and the mulch pile in the back yard. Her theme song is (same as Cindy Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun") "Dogs Just Want to Eat Garbage." When Mother gets out the mulch bucket from under the sink to empty it on the mulch pile, she follows that bucket around on its way as if Mother were a Brinks guard carrying treasure. She runs to the mulch pile, eyes shining with eager anticipation. It is her banquet. (Is it any wonder she gets no respect around here?) She has a particular fondness for hazelnuts. When Mother gets the nut basket, she can hear it from a deep sleep, and will follow her to wherever she sits down with it, sitting at attention at her feet, waiting for her to give her one. (She gets one about every five or six Mother cracks.) She makes sure to look very perky and interested and cute while doing this.

After Mother puts the basket back in the kitchen she goes back to the woodstove and back into her deep sleep.

The mortals almost always have a year-round supply of drumstick ice cream cones in the freezer. Whenever anyone gets one out of the freezer, she goes through the same routine as with the nut basket, sitting at attention at their feet, because it is their ritual to give her the end of the cone, the part plugged with chocolate. And she knows it. And she recognizes a drumstick package being taken out of the freezer.

Lucy learned at a very early age to feign by shivering violently and that such an act (the ham) would get Mother's sympathetic attention. She learned that she would be babied if she did it, and so she does. When there is shooting somewhere in the neighborhood or when there is thunder or when something sounds like shooting or thunder, she does it. Lately, though, I've seen her trying to decide if the distant noise she hears is shooting or construction sounds, which she is at-home with. She and Mother argue sometimes. They'll hear it, Lucy will start to shiver, Mother will say "That's someone building something, Louey, that's not shooting!" She'll stop, and think. Sometimes she'll agree and end the game.

Lucy is not allowed to sleep on the couch, but I swear to you she does it every night. The only thing is that they have never caught her at it. They have heard her get off the couch as they are in their beds upstairs, but they have never seen it with their own eyes.

Whenever Sam gets into a snit about something and decides to vent her spleen on me, Lucy will look at Mother and, as clearly as if she's speaking aloud, ask her if she wants her to go kick Sam's behind. She looks eager and ready every time. It took Mother awhile to catch on, so Sam was chased up a tree a few times (ha, ha!!!) before Mother realized that she mustn't ever give Lucy any kind of encouraging signs whatsoever. Darn it! The mortals already have to close up the sunroom every night before they go to bed so Lucy cannot help herself to my food and water that is in there for cats only. That sneak will not touch or even look longingly at the little plate of food in the kitchen for cats only any time of the day, but as soon as they go up to bed, it's the first thing she goes for. This is a simple fact of life here. If you want any of that food, get it before the mortals go to bed.

On the surface Lucy appears to be a very, very simple dog. It is interesting how uncannily smart she can be whenever it involves food, though, and her comfort takes a close second. I really can't decide if Lucy is incredibly smart or a plain old dumb dog. She is mon ami, though, and she can lie next to me by the woodstove any time.

The Lost Story

Last night while I was dictating to Mother, the woman fell asleep! She lost the story. If I only had hands instead of these beautiful silver mittens, I would just type it myself. Merde! I will try to piece the story back together.

Something that Mother has noticed about me is my habit of not getting into habits. I rarely do the same things three days straight or habituate the same places long. One day I will be queen of the picnic table on the front porch, peeking through the wisteria at the birds flitting in and out, and the next day I will lurk under the Adirondack chair on that very same front porch, watching, unseen, the birds flitting in and out. (I could catch one any time I wanted to; I just don't have that pedestrian urge that Sam does, with her desire to show off her prowess at hunting. Poor insecure witch.) Well, I have had many different opportunities to experience many different lives during my immortality, and one of the most interesting ones was when I was a Mafioso, a member of La Cosa Nostra. That was, let's see, during the early part of this century. I'm sure you can understand why it wasn't one of the longest ones I've lived, that one. Short, but oh, so sweet. La Dolce Vita! The adventure began with my birth in Little Italy--that part of New York City now called Greenwich Village, in 1910. Ah, we had such power then, and no one could touch us. Yes, my life was hard, but so was I. I was tough as nails, and my childhood was short (a harbinger of the life to come, I suppose). By the time I reached the ripe old age of 37, I had reached what I thought of as the pinnacle--I was second in command to the Don of the city. Oh, it was sweet.

I am by nature of my very immortality and my need for the elixir of life, a cold blooded killer, and so it came as no painful shock to do so for money and reputation. There are certain rules of behavior which preclude the necessity of performing what would be distasteful tasks, and so I got ahead. No sweat. We don't pick on women and children. And we don't mess with the Church.

Yes, certainly, at first some of the things I did forced me to deal with the tackier side of life. The mundane and the slimy. But I excelled at what I did and soon found myself there at the top.

Life at the top is good, very, very good. I led a full, rich life, a home life with my soft wife and children, whom I loved like the stars in the sky, and my work life, definitely a masculine world. Contrary to popular beliefs of today we were not all immoral animals with mistresses and a plethora of bad habits. We were simply men earning a living the old country way. Life is hard, and violence is a natural part of it. Well, I thought I owned the world at that time. I bowed to one man only, and he deserved it. That man was a king. Our time had come, though, and this is the way it went down.

The Don was powerful, some said too powerful. By association so was I.

You can't knock off the top banana without knocking off those closest to him. It's a fact. And so I made a valiant effort to protect the Don, that king of a man, but lost my life in the trying. At the age of 37 big ones I was looking for another role to play.

You may have noticed I have named no names, identified no places or times.

This is not an accident. Old habits die hard, my friend. I am not now, nor do I ever intend to be, a rat. And I don't do the same things three days in a row. You won't be able to knock me off anytime soon!

2001: A Spice Odyssey

No I'm NOT Australian. Merde! That's s - p - i - c - e, okay, you know, the stuff that makes food taste good. I'm as French as De Gaulle, as you well know. My Gallic lineage is impeccable and goes back through the ages.

At the beginning of the new year and the new millennium I'm preparing to go in search of something called Beau Monde, some darned spice Mother's precious little rug rat just has to have. Makes me think of that song from Damned Yankees--Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets. . . But I digress, as I so frequently do.

Mother has been fretting since the beginning of November about this, and I love to make her happy, I really do. That and allow her to attend to me.

She is a wonderful woman. I have decided to make this my resolution for the new year. I will find some Beau Monde and put an end to the fretting.

I will turn into a bat and fly away across the land, and I won't come back until I find it. I want you to know this is highly unusual. First of all, that I am doing something that's not for me, and second, that I am turning into a bat to do something other than going in search of prey, of the elixir of life. (See, I'm not selfish, Sam!) I will fly over the mountains and through the dells until I get to wherever it is they make Spice Islands products, and I will acquire a bit of it. One bottle should do, I would think. Why Lola, I mean Robin, has to have Beau Monde I do not know. Oh, yes, I remember now. In the name of love. That's right. It is an ingredient in her love potion.

I told you the girl showed promise, did I not? Sam must really be getting excited by now. So close and yet so far. I can see her thinking "If she can make love potion, surely she can turn me back into a witch?" If she wanted to, if she made it her priority, I'm sure she could, Sammy old pal.

Well, some of the ingredients are apparently quite mundane. They are everyday items found in anyone's cupboard. (Yes, but honestly, tuna?? I'm not a witch, I wouldn't know. If she says so.) But for that elusive Beau Monde it would already be brewed, have had spells cast over it, have been in a stoppered bottle, and have been applied somehow to the poor desired creature it is intended for. Bless his heart, whoever he might be.

One of the wonderful things about turning into a bat and flying off in pursuit (of the elixir of life or the elusive Beau Monde) is that what seems to take hours, if not days, happens in a few short minutes. That's why I won't mind taking this long involved trip, because it will only be a few minutes out of my life. (Okay, Sam. So I'm not really all that altruistic.) I will appear to go outside and wander away somewhere, turn into a bat and go off on this search, then appear to come back in the cat door a few minutes later. This neat trick is necessary to allay suspicion, don't you think? It has evolved into being this way over the centuries. Necessity is the mother of invention, it is said. Like most old adages, it's absolutely true. I will never forget how close I came to being discovered in Sicily in 1347. Of course, the Black Death was on its march at the time, and people had other things to occupy their minds, other demons to chase. Thank the goddess.

Anyway, I thought I should keep you posted, dear diary, of what's in the plans for the future. These are the vampire CHRONICLES, after all. Ciao for now!

Tea with Socks

It was a clear night, crisp and chill, with the stars so visible and the sickle moon an astonishingly beautiful silver sliver, when I found myself on the north lawn of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. I'd just been knocked out of the sky by the biggest owl I have ever laid eyes on, and I landed with a tumble and roll the Flying Karamazov Brothers would

be proud of. I was so addled from the fall I didn't know where I was, but I could tell I had not been injured.

I walked toward a lit mansion I saw nearby, on my little kitty legs--the jolt had made me turn back into a cat. Someone was just going through a door as I, nearly invisible silver cat on this barely moonlit night, approached, and I slipped in. I walked down myriad hallways and up a staircase and was just sneaking along, trying to regain my usual composure and superb sense, when I bumped right into a cat wearing a tuxedo (with long white socks, for heavens sake, no fashion sense at all). This startled both of us, and we both leapt back from each other, like opposing magnets that have been slammed into each other, with eyes as wide as saucers. The tuxedo wearer regained his composure first, I'm ashamed to say, and asked me who in all creation I was and what I was doing in his house.

I told him as nicely as I could, under the circumstances and considering that I was the trespasser, what the situation was and asked him if I could just rest a few minutes to regain my bearings and that I would then be on my way without further ado. He responded in the most fastidious fashion, so gentlemanly and graciously as to cause me to become even more confused and addled. I had come face to face with southern hospitality, and believe it or not, it was a first for me.

This sock cat turned out to be Socks, the White House cat, and the mansion I had sought safe haven in was the White House! Socks had sympathy for my plight and my pitiful condition, so he took me to the Green Room to have a cup of tea. "To warm you up," he said. So we sat in the Green Room, with beautiful green silk walls, and drank cup after cup of delicious tea (a special White House blend) and had conversation.

Socks told me he had been an abandoned kitten, too, and that he had picked Chelsea much the way Tefnut had chosen the girl, Robin. He described what a good life he lived with the Clintons and what an adventure of a lifetime it was to be the White House cat, with staff and Secret Service to see to his needs. He told me that everyone was so good natured with him and that he had a dog friend named Buddy, a chocolate Labrador retriever. Socks also swore me to secrecy and regaled me with hilarious personal stories about the first family, but I am sworn to secrecy and can't tell you, sorry. I am a vampire of honor.

Socks also told me about when the bad times were going on, and everyone was so upset, and that he walked around on tiptoes and tried to be unobtrusive at the time. Then everything got better again. The Clintons are usually such happy, laughing people.

We talked and talked and talked, and then the time came for me to leave.

People were beginning to stir, and the place would soon be bustling, so we said our good byes. Socks made me promise to visit again.

I thought I was going to have to fly up one of the twelve chimneys in this alarmingly gigantic house to make my escape, but Socks said he knew of a more dignified way out. He walked me to the door and knew of a way to slip out. I was back out on the lawn. I turned the corner, turned back into a bat, and flew away directly toward the west, for home.