Places

by Thimblerig

Summary

Of the Cat Who Walked By Himself, and the First Woman, and what came after...
This happened in the Far Off Days, O Best Beloved, though perhaps not so far off as that, after the First Woman told the First Man she did not want to sleep in a pile of leaves but in a dry cave with firelight. And she unbound her hair and made a Singing Magic, to call the Wild Dog and the Wild Horse and the Wild Cow out of the woods, and later came a Cat, but that is written of elsewhere.

This was a morning in the Far Off Days, and the First Woman was working. She had a nice cave in the rock, and a fire that would burn all day and all night, and a wild-horse skin that hung tail down in
the entrance. Nearby was a tall black tree and in it hung a hive of bees. (They all had stings in their tails, even in the Far Off Days, but nobody was annoying them at this time so they just sang to themselves, quite secretly.)

Below the cave was a patch of ground and the Woman poked at the ground with a stick. Not far off slept the Baby, on a pile of soft hides in a spot with dappled shadows moving to-and-fro. He had been grizzling and complaining all night, but now he slept with his little fist tucked in his mouth, because Babies are like that.

"What are you doing?" said the Cat. "Is it interesting? It looks interesting." And he stuck his head in the hole where the Woman was poking. (Cats do this, as anyone who is friends with a Cat will know, and there is nothing to be done.)

The Woman pulled back the stick because it was pointy and she did not want to hurt the Cat, and said, "Where have you been, Wild Thing?"

"Oh, out and about," said the Cat, waving his tail. "Up the black tree, and over a small hill with the tasselled grass long and long, and around a swampy bit, and then I dashed about madly for the wind was blowing and my ears were wild. Then I came back. What are you doing?"

The Woman jabbed the stick into the hard ground again and shifted a rock. The Cat put his paw out to bat at the moving, pointy end. (Cats do this, as all of us who have work to do know, and there is nothing to be done.) "I am breaking ground," said the Woman, "because I am going to plant seeds here, and broken ground is best for that."

"That seems like work," said the Cat. He sniffed in disdain, and wound his tail around his feet, just so.

"Last month," the Woman said, "this field was Unpromising Ground. Today it is the Breaker of my Back." She sighed, gustily. "In some time, O Impatient Whiskered Creature, it shall be a field where the tasselled wheat grows long and long – and from that shall come bread, and pies, and small cakes mixed with honey and baked on the stone in front of the fire."

"I do not see the point of small cakes baked on the stone," said the Cat loftily, "but I suppose it is alright for you."

Then he stopped, for he spied a Little Twitching Thing. First he lowered his front, O Best Beloved, and hoisted his back with his tail waving high, and he coughed in his throat a little, as Cats do when they are hunting. Then he dashed for the Little Twitching Thing, and batted it with his paw, and leapt over it and bounded, and caught it up in his jaws. And he brought it back to show the woman.

"Oh, the cleverness of me!" he declared. (Cats do this, as we all know, and there really is nothing to be done.)

"I had a thought," said the Cat, when he had done with crunching down his Twitching Thing. "You should come with me when next the wind blows in my ears and makes them wild. Hunting is more fun than breaking your back. Come with me in the dark, when the trees talk in whispers and the Moon opens her Eye. Come be a Wild Thing tonight."

"Ah? Should I wear the rain as a cloak and let the wind braid my hair?" And the Woman smiled, quite secretly. "You are a Wild Thing but I am a Maker of Places," she said. "This field is my Place, and I am Making it."

The Cat sniffed. He picked up one paw and washed it, cleaning and drying between each toe, and
then he lay down on his side. "I am the Cat who walks by himself, and all places are alike to me," he said, shutting his eyes. "Toil in this Place of yours if you must. But do you then leave a sunny spot, quite high so I can see, and veil it with tasselled grass, long and long, and I might perhaps... (yawn) ... and I might..." and he fell asleep.

The Woman picked up her stick and poked again at the ground with it. She smiled. Nearby her child slept, on his bed of wolf-hide and bear-hide and fox-fur, gurgling quietly as babies do. The sun was shining and a quiet wind picked up and stirred her hair in its braids. In the black tree, the bees around their hive sang to themselves, quite secretly.

[This is where the picture would be if I could draw, but I can't, so I am describing it instead. Here is the Woman poking holes and shifting stones in front of her cave, and the Cat is putting his head where he shouldn't. His tail is in the air because he is enjoying himself. The Baby is asleep on a pile of hides to one side. On the other side is the black tree where the bees sing. Below in small is the Man and the First Friend. They were hunting green-necked ducks and the Man fell in the swamp, but they aren't going to mention the falling-in part when they come home.]

Chapter End Notes

The wheat field isn't directly mentioned in the story "The Cat Who Walks By Himself" but is referred to in the picture Kipling drew to go with it. It seemed like a lot of work.

"Oh, the cleverness of me!" - raided from Peter Pan, because why let a good line languish?

This story has a bit to do with agriculture, and actually a lot to do with the last three cats that shared my house, who all had Thoughts about company during their nocturnal perambulations, and company outside in general.

And a bit thank you to my beta-reader, Daisy Ninja Girl.
The Podfic

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sRBzLjx8Gc6EM3NuxcCTQFm0dpBimAI/v?usp=drivesdk

(or click here for mobile streaming)

Chapter End Notes

PLACES NOTES

Base Picture For Cover:

“black cat sitting” by LarahSK - Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)
Podfic Sound Effects:

“Cat purring” by Orange Free Sounds - Attribution 3.0 Unported (CC BY 3.0)
“Crackling Fireplace” by Daniel Simion @ SoundBible - Attribution 3.0
“Dig In A Cat Litter Box” by Mike Koenig @ SoundBible - Attribution 3.0
“Funny Boy Laugh” by Mike Koenig @ SoundBible - Attribution 3.0
“Sunny Day” by stephan @ SoundBible - Public Domain
“Wind” by Stilgar @ SoundBible - Public Domain

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!