

*So, you're saying NOBODY threw the freakin' apple at me? -- Isaac Newton*

The Kitty's Kismet

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Hi. Melody's cat here. I was purring the afternoon away on Gavin's lap about a week ago when this guy bursts into his office. Nearly made me move a paw.

"McQue," he says, "You must help me."

McQue doesn't ruffle—one of the reasons I'm not as indifferent to the guy as THE CODE demands—but simply taps a few keys on his computer and glances at the screen.

"Don't seem to have an appointment at this time," he says, closing the Cinema Sins® critique he's been viewing. "Call my secretary Mister . . .?"

"Fate," the guy replies, "And I need no appointment, McQue."

"See, that's where you're wrong," Gavin says, leaning back in his chair. "So, if you'll just . . ."

"No," the guy insists, "That's where I'm right. I Fated this meeting a thousand Millenia ago. That you know nothing about it isn't worrisome. That I just realized it a moment before I Fated it to start is."

And, just like that, McQue is interested. He leans forward and I slip off his lap to the floor. Claws remain in paws, though. A minor concession to THE CODE. Told you, I'm indifferent to McQue, but I like him well enough to avoid scarring his knees.

"So," McQue says, "You're Fate?"

"Yes."

"Not 'Mr. Fate' but actually Fate hims . . . er . . . Fate itself."

"Yes, yes, yes and I . . ."

Gavin ignores him. Love that about him. He says: "And you're here because you Fated yourself to be here?"

"Yes! Now can I . . ."

"So, you're here. No problem, right?"

"Big problem, he insists. "And it's not the first. Oh no. Not a by a long chalk. That cat," the jamoke is pointing at me, "Shouldn't be here!"

I think about hissing at the guy. Maybe showing fang; maybe even attacking his foot. But McQue is speaking:

"Yeah, yeah, but Melody's off visiting her sister and I gotta be in the office. So the cat comes along 'cause Melody don't like her to be lonely. You allergic?"

“No, I don’t mean she shouldn’t be here in this office. She shouldn’t be here at all! She should have died when she tripped that jewel thief a couple of years ago. He should have fallen on her and crushed her. That was her Fate, but somehow it didn’t happen.”

I’ve got a vague memory of that, but I was just a kitten then. The clumsy oaf that fell over me while trying to scoot with some swell dame’s necklace missed me by about 2 inches.

“Old news,” Gavin says. “Haven’t thought about that in, like, forever. Mel and me weren’t even married yet . . .”

“And you never should have been,” Fate snaps. “She should have been mad at you for getting her cat killed. She should have said bye-bye and went on to live her life without you. Instead her nutsy-faygin father killed her when he tried to kill you. That bomb should have set things right. But no! Fate was thwarted again. Well, I couldn’t let that go so I went to talk to the Big Guy—you know, Heather’s boss—”

Ooops, fell asleep for a minute or so there. A cat thing. For those of you who don’t know, Heather’s Gavin’s buddy and the Angel of Death. And this Fate must have some pretty big clout to be talkin’ to the Big Guy. No more cat naps for me, today.

“—And He tells me that He’s got His own plans for you and Melody. Then, she comes back as a ghost and you two marry and all kinds of chaos ensues.”

“Oh booo hoooo. Poor little fatesie, waitsee. What’samatter, bro, things not going your way for once?” This from a darkly-clad supermodel type who’s suddenly manifest next to Fate.

“Chaos!” Fate says. “I should have realized you’d show up. What did McQue give you to keep me at bay?”

Chaos slides her admirably trim derriere atop Gavin’s desk. Gavin tries to ignore it. Good for him! I won’t puke in his earphones.

“Not a thing,” Chaos coos. “Never has. I just like messing things up to annoy you, big brother. Around him,” she nods toward Gavin. “It’s easy.”

“Why?” Fate snarls.

“Because I love the shade of purple that flushes your face when . . .”

“Not why do you like doing it, why is it easy to do around him?”

She stops talking. A puzzled look crosses her face. Most people would think her pretty. To a cat, meh!

“I . . . don’t . . . know.”

“Well, neither do I,” Fate says and turns to Gavin. “That’s why I’m here and that’s why you have to help me.”

I hop up on Gavin’s desk and walk across Chaos’s legs. Claws still in. No CODE this time: just caution on my part. I see Gavin’s mouse on his mouse-pad.

“Help you how?” Gavin asks, brushing me toward the back of his desk.

“I want you to figure out why Fate sometimes doesn’t work for you. Then, I’ll find some way to make sure . . .”

“Well that sounds reasonable—except it’s apt to get me killed. According to you, I should be dead already. Why on earth would I want to help you?”

I take a brief stroll across Gavin’s keyboard and listen to the clacks. No big deal. Why does he spend so much time playing with this thing instead of feeding, petting, or grooming me?

“. . . to make sure that it continues to work for everybody else,” Fate says, then stops. “What? Are you so arrogant that you thought one or two glitches in your fate line made some sort of cosmic difference? So, now I know . . .”

“Hold on,” Chaos, says. “What one or two glitches? I never glitched his fate line. I thought he was supposed to survive that explosion. I thought he was supposed to marry Melody.”

“So you didn’t . . .”

“Didn’t what? Directly interfere with the Fate of two mortals? Neither Heather nor the Big Guy would allow that. Chaos is part of Fate, bro.”

Fate jumps a bit.

“Yes,” he says with that silly look you guys get on your face when you’re really thinking about something besides your cat. Gotta do something about that. “So I’m back where I started. McQue, find out why Fate sometimes fails for you.”

“Five hundred bux per day plus expenses. Two-week retainer.” Gavin says—whatever that means. He says it a lot when he’s ignoring me. Gotta do something about that, too.

“Done!” Fate says.

And I pounce on Gavin’s mouse.

As I fall off the desk I wonder why you guys call this thing a mouse. It might look like a mouse to you blind idiots, but it doesn’t smell like one, move like one, taste like one, feel like one, or bleed and struggle like one. I let go and land on my feet—THE CODE again—while the “mouse” bounces and clatters its way under Gavin’s desk. A minute later, Gavin lifts me from the floor.

“Mystery,” he coos, nuzzling, and cuddling me, “Are you OK?”

No.

I didn’t claw his face off.

Melody wouldn’t like it.

Besides, THE CODE says we should be nice for at least 10 seconds when the human is being solicitous. And, no, Mystery isn’t my “real” name. As you might know, all cats have—at least—three names. (Sorry, TSE. We sort of low-balled you on that one.) You want to know my real name? Say it with me: Fat Chance.

So Gavin puts me down after about a seven count and glances at his computer screen.

“You guys are family, right?” he asks.

“Half siblings,” Chaos says. “Same dad different moms.”

“Any others?”

“Several. Papa was a rolling stone.”

“Any of them named Karma?”

Curses and recriminations abound for the next several minutes. Seems neither Chaos nor Fate have anything good to say about that one. Gavin tosses Fate his cell phone.

“Get him here.”

Remember what I said about cat naps? Well, about an hour goes by and I don't have much to do, so I curl up on one of Gavin's client chairs and dream about being a mighty hunter. I wake just before pulling down an Allosaurus to find another oddball in the office. Three. Not even close to a record, if you're interested. I start to groom my fur to pretend I'm not interested.

Fate: “So why?”

Karma (shrugging): “None of your business.”

Fate: “Of course it's my business.”

Karma: “He's one guy!”

Fate: “And so far he's affected the Fate lines of at least sixty people. He's supposed to be dead! Every case he takes, every move he makes . . .”

Karma (crooning): “Every vow he breaks; Every smile he fakes; Every Claim he stakes . . .”

Fate: “You think this is funny?”

Karma: “Hilarious. Look. Even the cat thinks it's funny!”

Woah! Gonna have to be careful around this one. He's sharp! Usually there's no way you guys can know when we think something's funny.

Fate: “OK. We'll go to see the Big Guy!”

Karma: “Nah. No Big Guy. I was just doin' my job.”

Fate: “Since when does your job involve interfering with mine?”

Karma: “For this guy? A lot.”

Fate: “So tell me why. I gotta know.”

Chaos: “Me two.”

Gavin: “And me.”

Don't get me wrong, here. This is human business and I'm not really interested. But it's getting close to dinner time and I gotta bowl of Friskees waiting for me at home. Sometimes, a plaintive meow helps move things along.

“Meow.”

It works! Karma decides to spill it. “Ok. Ok. Seen this guy’s Karma?”

Fate: “You know we can’t do that.”

Karma: “Well I can. And believe me when I tell you, it’s freaking HUGE!”

Chaos: “Huge?”

Karma: “Enormous. He’s been a champion in a thousand-thousand past incarnations. Saved towns, rescued maidens, defeated tyrants, helped little old ladies cross streets, recycled, you name it, this guy’s done it.”

Fate: “So?”

Karma: “So he’s way overloaded with good Karma. He won’t encounter any significant bad Karma for years.”

Fate: “But that doesn’t make sense. What about simple bad Luck?”

“I’m not bad . . .” another supermodel type simpers from the office doorway.

Luck: “. . . I’m just misunderstood. I had a cruel childhood. Mommy never loved me. Kids all made fun of me. I was bullied in pre-school . . .”

“Enough,” Gavin says. He stands and starts pacing back and forth behind his desk. He gets that way when he’s about to solve something. Sort of like a cat when they’re getting ready to eviscerate something. I can almost like him when he does this.

“Enough with the family squabbling,” he says. “So the issue is that Fate doesn’t work with me. So what?”

“It’s not just you,” Fate replies. “It’s all the others your fate line affects. You’re very continued existence . . .”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“What? Of course it mat . . .”

“Think about it. Fate is nothing more than what happens in the moment. A billion, billion things can lead up to that moment and a billion, billion things can follow it. One of those billion or so things is Karma. Mine is unusually good. But even if it were unusually bad, what happens, happens. The fate line changes from that happening onward. It doesn’t break. It doesn’t even shift because fate is fate. You guys,” he waves, “don’t really have any control of fate itself. You’re just the embodiment of stuff that can influence it.”

Or something like that. When Gavin starts pacing and gabbing I tend to nod off. But the others in the office must have agreed ‘cause when I wake up, all of them are gone but Fate.

“So all I did was discover that a fate line is just an ongoing line. It’s not Fate itself because Fate isn’t what’s happened, it’s eternal, constantly changing, and nothing can affect it?” Fate asks.

“That’s about the size of it,” Gavin replies.

“Your fee will be in your account tomorrow.”

“Cool,” Gavin says (he’s such a sixties kind of guy, I’ll bite him for that later). “Neat family, you have there.”

“Them? Thanks. But the best of us wasn’t here. ‘Course he’s never anywhere you expect him—unless of course, you don’t expect him to be anywhere.”

“A mystery man, then,” Gavin says. “Sounds like my kinda guy.”

“Not a Mystery,” Fate says. “Just Surprise.” And he vanishes just before I can catch his shoelaces. A minute later, Melody materializes in the office.

“Gavin,” she says, her face aglow. “I’m pregnant!”

The end.

*Oh, I can hear the howl: “I have soooooo many questions!” ringing from the reader’s psyche! Well, maybe I’ll answer them and maybe not. A lot depends on my fate line. More depends on my remaining line. And I have no more influence or knowledge of one than I do on the other. Next year I plan to have 12 new stories from 12 authors. I got plenty of good ones and 12 that meet anotherrealm’s standard of quirky quality. Read and enjoy them and, if you’re interested in more things McQue, I can be reached via my personal email: [gary.markette@gmail.com](mailto:gary.markette@gmail.com). Post me soon. Ya never know when the lines might end. Manwhile: Merry Christmas from me, Webby, and the gang here at anotherrealm.—GAM.*