



MYRTLE ROAD STORIES

By Tim Kenny

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Tum Tum Mwghali's Cat

By

Tim Kenny

(a Myrtle Road story)

Wednesday was the day that Coco, Tum Tum Mwghali's black cat lost the last of its nine lives. Squashed by a Uber driver racing down Myrtle Road. The driver got out, tearing at his hair and looking for sympathy. The one thing you never do is stop your car in Myrtle Road unless you pay some kid at least £5 to avoid a keying, the price depending on the quality of the car owner's footwear. A good pair of brogues is worth at least a tenner. Nike's are more.

A crowd gathers. Not in sympathy for Tum Tum's cat but berating the driver for using Myrtle Road as a rat run. Soon there is a lot of pushing and shoving. As the noise level rises the fare gets out of the cab and adds his voice to the fray. Something about a meeting and 'anyway, it's only a dead cat'. At this point Tum Tum Mwghali runs out of her house. When I say run, I do not mean it in the sense that you and I use that word. Tum Tum carries a lot of heft so it's more a swaying slow propulsion of weight assisted by much forward flaying of the arms.

Tum Tum is yelling in distress and swipes at the Uber driver who ducks, the blow flooring and silencing the fare shouting about his meeting. Tum Tum falls on her knees, a move that shakes ceiling lights in Melbourne. Kneeling in front of Coco who now has the appearance of a black pudding pizza, poor Tum Tum raises her hands to the sky and screams abuse and prayers in equal proportions. But as many people know, the Almighty often has his phone on hold especially when it comes to the matter of black cats whose many lives have exceeded his generosity.

We are all fond of Tum Tum despite her dubious claim to ancestry. Many suspect it is from a country where relatives pass themselves off as Government Ministers seeking details of your bank account in order to deposit £5 million. However, it is the deposit from the Department of Works and Pensions that goes missing. We like listening to Tum Tum's details of overseas lands, of coconut and cocoa plantations. But I know Tum Tum gets her information from back copies of the National Geographic in the doctor's surgery. Never spoil a person's dreams even if you know they have come from Luton and travelled no further than can be wrung out of four litres of diesel.

At this point Chicken Davies emerges from his house with a large shovel. Chicken Davies is used to scooping mess as he keeps a variety of edible fowl in his back garden. This is against the terms of his lease. When Chicken gets word of the landlord's imminent arrival, Chicken gathers up his feathered edibles and puts them in the bath. The landlord is then treated to a fine capon and overlooks any breach of contract. He is a monthly visitor. Chicken thinks the odd capon is a suitable bung for allowing him to continue his practice.

At the sight of the shovel, Tum Tum gives out a piercing screech of horror that is louder than the sound of car and van horns complaining about the hold up. Angry hands are shaped into fists at this breach of sensitivity. Whatever you might think about the residents in Myrtle Road, they have their standards. Rushing out with a shovel to scoop up poor Coco in front of Tum Tum is definitely out of order. Chicken scurries away.

Soon there are two short wails of a police car. Several residents immediately make themselves scarce. Best to look honest at these times and find other things to do. A policewoman and her male companion push their way through the throng and stand near Tum Tum. They are quick to assess the situation. Their training goes a long way to help deal with squashed cats. Each seizes a Tum Tum arm and pull helplessly. However, the two police look as they have spent their lives sharing single dinners and their two frames are no match for the unyielding sobbing Tum Tum. A group of burly residents comes to her aid and without the help of a medical hoist – it has been known - lift Tum Tum to an upright position.

Razor Sharp, the Turkish barber, emerges from his shop saying this uproar is costing him business and what is to be done as Tum Tum is still standing in the road mourning her loss. Delight, Razor Sharp's wife, stands in the shadow of the shop, her arms folded. A beauty if ever there was one. Long shiny black hair and coal black eyes. I have a soft spot for Delight although that is an understatement. She catches my eye. Three fingers emerge from her folded arms and wiggle a recognition. I glow. Delight disappears into the shadows.

The cacophony of horns and shouts has now reached a crescendo. A refuse collection vehicle is slowly pushing its way through the traffic. No more progress can be made until Tum Tum and her entourage of sympathisers clear the Road and Coco's remains are quietly despatched into the creeping refuse cart.

Suddenly, to everyone's surprise, Delight emerges from the shop with three mewling kittens looking as though they have been dipped in marmalade. She crosses to Tum Tum who gives a cry of delight. 'Let me, let me', she shouts, 'Oh, let me'. Her hands reach out for the bundle. A kitten sneaks from Delight's arms and disappears into the cavernous bosom of Tum Tum. 'The Almighty has answered by prayers,' cries Tum Tum, looking skywards with a thankful expression.

'Ere, not so fast,' says Razor Sharp. 'Zay not free these kittens. Thay's not ordinary. Bred special'.

'How much?' says Tum Tum.

'Forty,' says Razor Sharp. A buzz of disapproval runs through the crowd.

'You shut yourselves up, you lot,' says Razor Sharp. 'All this fuss you make cost me two shaves and a haircut. Forty is my best.'

Tum Tum starts to cry. The crowd makes ungenerous hostile sounds. Tum Tum pauses and looks to threaten a sitting position in the road. Cars, Amazon delivery vehicles, an Ocado truck and the jingle bell of an ice cream van playing 'One Cornetto' add their dissonance to