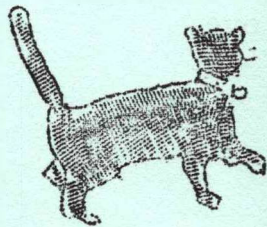


VÁGARY

26



"TIME TO COME HOME MY DEAR"

R E Q U I E M

For SELINA - a much loved cat.

Spring 1958 - 6th March 1973

For nearly fifteen years you were our friend;
Now you are gone, but memories have no end.
So gently, peacefully, that morn you slipped away
From desolate hearts and a grey, weeping day.
But you were old and Mother Bast was kind
To call you home. Those left behind
Grieved sadly for a loving little soul,
Packed your toys and put away your bowl.
And thought of all the years of joy you gave,
All the delight which will outlive the grave.

The gentle pad of paws - the tapping at the door,
How quiet the house now these sounds are no more.
We think we hear your cry borne on the breeze,
Then know it's the wind's sad sighing in the trees.
But happily play in your pussy Parædise,
Still linked with us by ever loving ties.
Perhaps one day in a world beyond pain
We friends shall gladly meet again.
Oh, Selina! Our dearest love.

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A FEW COMMENTS

Eight items in the January mailing from six members, yet a page count of one hundred and thirty eight, which is pretty good going. I am sorry I never contributed to it and that this present offering is such a skimpy one. As a matter of fact, I doubted whether I would contribute at all and told Ken so, as I thought I would not have the heart. Yet in the end I thought I might feel better if I tried to get a few pages in.

Keith - your Intolerance was hell to read, but I managed it after a while. I gathered it was some sort of apology to someone, but right now I can't put my hands on it. Sepulchre was an interesting survey of various water-monsters, but I doubt if the Loch Ness monster will ever be proved or disproved. The Scots probably have no desire to disprove its existence now - it would play hell with their tourist trade. I see you have ironed out the duplicating at last. But let's have a little more of you next time, hunh?

Terry - our steadiest contributor and the one who helps so much to keep OMPA going. I liked your Nartaz skit, but what a Ferdinand Feghoot ending! Read Alan's comments on the Doc Smith stories, but it reminded me of how tastes can change with the years. Would I like them now. The library had one of the Lensman books in some time back, and when I re-read it I did wonder what had happened to my "sense of wonder." I agree with you that Lester del Rey's "Pstalemate" was one of the better offerings on the market, but I do not think it was one of his best offerings. As for drawings - I'm no artist and do not seem to be able to do even simple cartoons these days. I once had a good stylus, but lost it, and none have seemed as good since. Sometimes I do tracings and try to transfer them to stencil, but the results are never very good. I hesitate to ask for drawings from some of the s.f. artists, as there is nothing more infuriating to see one's work botched up on a stencil by someone else and run off on a temperamental duplicator./ Prophets and Loss was put in for amusement, Like I've said before, you tell your friend to write for an analysis and I'll tell him or her the required fee (which is not low as nearly a week's work is involved) and the necessary data required and I'll do it. But as I have clients who pay for the work they get, I am not doing anything free to prove or disprove anything. I did sign the Faculty's Code of Ethics about

this, anyway./ You probably won't like the verse in this issue, but in its way it helped me a little./ I fear there will be no on the floor lay body jokes this time.

Oh, damn! damn.' damn! I forgot to send any votes in. And I cannot even find Whatsit. Sorry, Ken, as there were a few things I did want to say about it.

Sam, there is not much I can think of to say about O.U.R. beyond commenting I liked it. Perhaps the situation in Ulster might be helped if all the fanatical priests and Calvinist ministers were kicked out, and only Episcopalian was left. Not that I think the latter is wonderful - just that it's too damned useless to get fanatical about anything. Or evacuate the kids under fourteen and keep on evacuating them once they are weaned, so they can be brought up in a more tolerant atmosphere elsewhere. Then let them go back when they are adult.

Which brings me to Jim Goadard's Arcanum. Sure, you get what is called left and right in fandom, which I do not think are good descriptions. I don't think that because I don't believe in kid gloves for the Ulster terrorists (or any other terrorists) makes me right wing. I know I'm regarded as a Tory, but I haven't much time for any of the political parties. And I never did see why Guy Fawkes Day should be celebrated - unless we burn the poor chap in effigy because he didn't blow up Parliament. I do get tired of screams of "Nazi" or "Fascist" though, if one is not interested in far left views. Nazi is only short for National Socialist, and I looked up the original meaning of Fascism in the dictionary. It means State control of everything. So what's nationalisation for Christ's sake, and which party is always on about it. And for the life of me I do not see why a sense of values should have any sort of political flavour. I would like to know, though, why we should be so horrified at the thought of executing a vicious murderer (not necessarily by hanging, which is barbaric), yet innocents can be slaughtered every day in the abortion clinics. It is my belief (and no one has to agree or disagree) that what we call the soul, spirit, or what-you-will enters the foetus at about three months, and after that abortion is murder. I know sometimes it is for the best, but why do we condemn innocent babes to death, yet save vicious things who murder and maim, and who may have no souls at all, but are alien entities in a human frame?/ I agree with you about the amateur fiction in some of the so-called prozines - and shall go on putting in Vagary whatever takes my fancy. Vagary, after all, means a wild whim.

What is one to do after picking up a fine zine like Lurk, and find time is too short to say much? As for "pot", the

the trouble is that many of the people who push it are interested in getting the buyers on the hard stuff, and often succeed in doing so. I may be wrong, but I think I read somewhere that the trouble occurs if "pot" and alcohol are taken at the same time. I very occasionally have a tot of Scotch, and know I smoke too much, but if I run out of cigarettes or the money to buy them, I feel no urge to go out and mugh someone in order to get the money for them. But I think a lot of what happened in the distant past is being wrongly attributed to pot or peyotl. John Allegro's "Sacred Mushroom and the Cross" for instance, in which he tries to prove that Christ was hopped up to the eyeballs. An interesting theory, except I have been informed that neither mushrooms nor peyotl grew in Palestine./ I would like to go on more about this zine if time were not so short., but it was very much appreciated. I liked your McGonagall review by the way.

And I liked Hell, a well set-out and illustrated magazine, to which I cannot do justice because of this lack of time. It is not much consolation to the editors who have put in a lot of work to be told their magazine was appreciated and left at that, especially when it is one of those which are helping to keep OMPA Going. / The first two Tudors were despots and to all intents and purposes were the country. Therefore (a) it was not an assumption and (b), it was Sepharial's hypothesis, not mine. I wish I had time to comment on the rest of this magazine as it deserves.

OBITUARY

Members will have gathered by now that our little cat, Selina, who lived with us for so long, has died. In our hearts we knew before Christmas that we could not stay with us for much longer. But she seemed to have a such an incredible gift for survival, though by the end she had used up all her nine lives. When she got kidney trouble and vet recommended white meat I asked if she would be in pain, but he assured me she would not. Last Easter, when she had trouble with her teeth, a young - and extremely good - vet told us she would probably last another year.

She loved the pretty coloured things at Christams and used to get quite excited as the season approached, but last time she was rather quiet. Towards the middle of January, we thought the time had come to call the vet, but quite suddenly she perked up. This lasted through February, but the first weekend in March she started going quiet again and not eating much, and her eyes were not as bright as usual. We had suspected for some days her sight was getting bad, but her eyes

reacted to light. Then on Sunday night she sat on her own little table and sang us one of her very special little songs. A purr with a sort of trill in it. On Monday morning she climbed into the surgery window - something she had not done for some time - to watch the world go by. Later that day she walked along the table in the dining bar, put her paws on the window sill, and gazed intently at the small wilderness. We had a sudden feeling that she was saying goodbye. After that I carried her round the house so she could look out all the windows. She settled in front of the fire in my study for a while, then early in the evening I nearly fell over her twice - her sight was beginning to go. We knew then we would have to make a heart-tearing decision. But Selina took the decision out of our hands. By midnight we knew the time would not be long, although I wondered when I held her, as her heart was beating quite strongly - too strongly, I realised afterward.

We did not think we would sleep that night, but Nature has her own way of dealing with things. When I reached that strange half-state between waking and sleeping, the wardrobe seemed to dissolve and I saw - it must have been on a non-physical level - a beautiful white cat on a sort of dressing table. My last conscious thought was "there is something in the legend, after all. The White Cat is the messenger who comes to collect people's pet cats." And Bill dreamed of three kindly young men who told him we would have to let Selina go. That she was too old and was half-way over already. And showed Bill Selina, whose top half had become a dazzling white.

In the morning we knew the time was approaching. The little heart which had been beating too strongly was now only fluttering, and all she could give us was a silent miaow. The young vet came and said she might survive a few minutes or a few hours, but there was no point in letting her try to go on. At 9.45 a.m. on 6th March it was all over. The following day we buried her with her favourite toy - a little wooden mouse Petar Mabey had given her several years before.

Sometimes Selina used to get terribly excited and talkative, and two or three days later I suddenly had the feeling that she was around and was very excited and talkative about something. Then I thought it was only imagination or wishful thinking - until Bill suddenly came out of the surgery and said he felt that Selina was around, excitedly trying to tell us something. So perhaps she was.

Then a few nights ago I was in my study when I heard a lot of funbling and paper rustling in the little dining bar, and turned and saw a piece of paper being chased. The door was shut, the window was shut, and there was no wind to cause a draught. I picked up the three inch square of paper and found it was a cartoon of Bill drawn by Arnold Crowther, and which had been tucked away behind some books. The first words of the caption were "Join me", but I hope someone is around who can explain to her that things do not work out like that. Who raked the paper out on a still evening? Then the following morning, Bill woke with a start about 5 a.m. to hear clearly a questioning miaow, followed by one in a lower key. So clearly did he hear it that he automatically put out a hand to stroke a little furry head - only to realise suddenly that Selina was not with us any more.

Yet the Fates were kind to us all. It was sunny and warm last week, and several times I thought how Selina would have loved to be out in the garden. But on Saturday evening I happened to glance at the wall where the birdseed was - and helping himself was the biggest rat I'd ever seen. It was the first time we had ever seen a rat round here and think it must have come from a nearby warehouse. I had a pot at it with an air pistol, but fired too soon. This weekend the small wilderness will have to be cleared out so can find how a rat the size of a young rabbit broke through into an enclosed area.

If Selina had still been with use she would automatically have had a go at the rat and she would not have stood a chance. So, after all, it looks as though the Fates were kind to take her to wherever the pussy Heaven might be.

And a little verse from Beryl when she heard about Selina's passing.

"Think of me as withdrawn into the dimness -
I yours, you mine still;
And so, to where I wait,
Come gently on."