

HERDING CATS

A Play in Two Acts

by

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Synopsis

Stella, a plucky housecat, is willing to do anything to save the career of her beloved but struggling human owner - including deploying the fabled and dreaded "nuclear option." But she'll have to convince her fellow cats to go along with her radical plan. And matters get complicated when Stella's worst fear - a dog - is introduced into the household.

Cast of Characters

STELLA

A twelve-year old female tabby cat, probably 30s to 50s in human years. She's plucky and spunky, and if there's an alpha cat in the group, it's Stella. She's completely devoted to Kelly and cherishes her fellow cats. But she's innately afraid of (and prejudiced against) dogs, due to a traumatic event from her past.

BUDDHA

A large male cat and Stella's litter mate, so also likely in the 30s to 50s human range. He is smart, literate and enjoys the finer things in feline life. He may come off as a tad snobby but he loves Kelly and his fellow cats. A British or upper-crusty New England accent (think Frasier Crane) would suit him well.

LUPIN

A male tabby cat, seven years old, perhaps 20s to 40s in human years. He's a former "street cat" who loves to play. He's proud of his urban, tough-guy upbringing, but he's also sweet and a little naïve. A Brooklyn or Jersey accent would work for him.

CHARLIZE

A female pit bull terrier, four years old, somewhere in her 20s or 30s in human years. Scrappy, loveable and sympathetic to anyone's difficulties in life. She wants to be friends with everyone, even those who behave antagonistically toward her.

KELLY

The human female owner of the pets, 20s to mid-late 30s. She's having a very difficult time at her job, which has her constantly on edge. She's not a "crazy cat lady" but she's concerned about animal welfare and is very affectionate toward her pets.

Scene

An apartment living room in an American city. Furnishings include a dining area and a couch. There are scratching posts, cat toys lying around, food bowls and other hints that we're in a cat lover's place. One of the toys is a turbo scratcher, which is a circular scratch pad surrounded by a track with a ball that a cat can bat around. All the onstage action takes place in the living room. Offstage areas referred to include the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen.

Time

The present.

Herding Cats

ACT I

Scene 1

AT RISE: BUDDHA sits on the couch with one leg over the other, leafing through a copy of *Catster* (or another cat-themed magazine).

LUPIN lies on the floor on his back, tossing and catching a cat toy.

We observe them for a few moments. Then STELLA enters, takes a few steps and catches sight of LUPIN, who is unaware she entered. She smiles mischievously and ducks behind the couch. She pops her head up and looks. She ducks down, and a few seconds later pops her head up on the other side of the couch. BUDDHA sees this and shakes his head. He starts to say something, but STELLA puts her paw over his mouth. Then she moves away from the couch, crouches, wiggles her tush and pounces upon LUPIN! She puts her face right over his.

STELLA

BOOGABOOGABOOGABOOGA!

LUPIN

(completely startled)

Yeaaaggh!

STELLA

Yer catnip or yer life, varmint!

LUPIN

What?!

STELLA

I said yer catnip or yer life, putty tat!

LUPIN

My catnip, my catnip! Wait... Stella?

STELLA

(standing)

Well yeah, who else?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Oooh, Stella, ya got me good that time!

STELLA

I'll say I did. Hey Buddha, did you see that pounce?

BUDDHA

(face in magazine)

M-hm.

LUPIN

Ya got me, Stella, but when ya least expect it, I'm gonna get ya back! Don't forget, yer messin' with a bona fide-

STELLA and LUPIN

Street cat.

STELLA

(cont.)

I know, I know. Well, it looks like the score is: girl cat - one, street cat - zip. *(beat)* Hey, what's that gizmo there? I haven't seen that before.

LUPIN

Oh, wait till ya see this. This thing is incredible.

(LUPIN scratches the turbo scratch pad.)

STELLA

Whoa!

LUPIN

C'mon, give it a try!

(STELLA crouches and scratches the pad.)

STELLA

Mmmm, this is wonderful!

LUPIN

Ain't it the best?

STELLA

Oh, that makes my claws feel so good! Hey Buddha, you gotta try this.

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BUDDHA

No thank you, you two enjoy your plaything.

STELLA

Come on, are you gonna sit on your backside all night looking at that smut?

BUDDHA

What do you mean, smut? This happens to be the definitive periodical for the modern American feline enthusiast.

STELLA and LUPIN

Smut.

BUDDHA

Oh, what would *you* know about it?

STELLA

Let me guess, you're gawking at a *Persian*, right? All fluffy and prissy and luxurious?

BUDDHA

Of course not! I just happen to be looking at photographs of, um, oh, what do you have against Persians, anyway? Persian is a perfectly noble and respectable breed.

STELLA

(scoffs)

Pfft, "Breed." Well I think there's no *breed* more *noble* and *respectable* than us D.S.H.'s. Right, Lupin?

LUPIN

Uh, D.S.H.'s?

STELLA

Yeah, Domestic Short Hairs?

LUPIN

Of course, ain't it the truth!

(*STELLA and LUPIN do a fist bump.*)

STELLA

Let's scratch some more, Lupin.

LUPIN

Okay, but it gets even better. Watch this!

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(LUPIN bats the ball around the track. While the scene plays out, BUDDHA turns the magazine lengthwise, as if he's looking at a centerfold.)

STELLA

No. Way.

LUPIN

Is that the coolest thing ever, or what?! Go ahead, try it!

(STELLA bats the ball around.)

STELLA

That is like, so *compelling*.

LUPIN

Ain't it great? I could do this all day long.

STELLA

It sort of puts you in a trance.

LUPIN

Yeah, it's like, what's the word, uh, "memorizing"? Is that right, Buddha?

BUDDHA

(admiring his "centerfold")

Mesmerizing.

LUPIN

That's it, mesmerizing.

STELLA

Yeah. And you know who would have really loved this? Benji.

LUPIN

Aw yeah, Benji woulda gone to town on this thing!

BUDDHA

(scoffs)

Benji? He would have torn it to shreds within minutes, and that would have been the end of it.

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STELLA

(looking heavenward)

You're probably right, but that would have been worth seeing. Ah, we miss ya, Bengé.

LUPIN

(looking up and saluting)

We sure do, old buddy.

STELLA

(sigh)

Anyhow, where'd this doodad come from?

LUPIN

Kelly got it for us. Just this morning.

STELLA

Of course, Kelly! I should've known. Kelly's the best.

LUPIN

She sure is the best! I heard her say she got it from the Amazon?

BUDDHA

Listen. Firstly, let it be said that I share the opinion that our beloved Kelly is, as you rightfully proclaim, "the best". But let it also be said that yon gadget did not come from the Amazon. The Amazon isn't home to scratchy toys. It's home to rainforests and mangroves and macaws and anacondas and piranhas and tree frogs and cats.

LUPIN

Cats? Cats like us, Buddha?

BUDDHA

Actually, rather large cats, Lupin. Like pumas and ocelots and margays and jaguars.

LUPIN

(mimicking driving a car)

Jaguar? Ya mean like "Jaguar - the art of performance?"

BUDDHA

Well observed lad, but I mean actual jaguars. Now what were we just talking about?

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LUPIN

Um, Kelly?

BUDDHA

Yes, Kelly! Say, Kelly's running rather late again, wouldn't you say?

LUPIN

Yeah, later than usual, even. Think everything's okay?

BUDDHA

I can't think of any reason for concern.

LUPIN

Yeah, but usually she's fed us and gone to sleep by this time. I wonder what's keepin' her out tonight.

STELLA

Well isn't it kind of obvious?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

No.

STELLA

Her *job*, you guys. Her job has been keeping her out late most nights. And I think it's got her pretty stressed out.

BUDDHA

"Stressed out?" I hadn't noticed.

STELLA

Then you haven't been paying attention around here, Buddha. Kelly's just not herself lately.

LUPIN

Ya know, now that ya mention it, Kelly seems pretty wiped out a lot of the time. Ya might be on ta somethin', Stella.

STELLA

Darn right I am.

BUDDHA

Curious. Stella, do you really sense a heightened state of anxiety in Kelly?

STELLA

Yeah Buddha. And it's really unfair, you know?

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LUPIN

Unfair? Whatcha mean, Stell?

STELLA

Well, I have the feeling that some humans work super hard but don't have too much to show for it.

BUDDHA

But Kelly's an intelligent human of high moral character. Surely her employers recognize that.

STELLA

Maybe, but the three of us don't know all the details.

LUPIN

Gee Stell, I *hope* that job ain't too hard on Kelly. Is there anything we can do to help?

STELLA

Well, I think the best thing we can do is be extra cute and snuggly, so that when Kelly gets home, she'll do the lovey-dovey routine with us. That always makes her happy.

LUPIN

Yeah, good call, Stell.

BUDDHA

Agreed. And when she arrives, I shall convey to her my most irresistibly precious countenance, by which I mean—this:

(BUDDHA makes a cute expression.)

BUDDHA

(cont.)

And then, she will bestow upon me a most pleasing chin rub!

LUPIN

Sounds good, Buddha. But *I'm* gonna roll over and show her my belly. And then she's gonna *scratch* my belly.

STELLA

Oh, you guys with your chin rubs and belly scratches. Know what *I'm* gonna do? Do ya?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

You're gonna wiggle your tush.

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STELLA

I'm gonna wiggle my tush! And then I'm gonna pounce! Then I'm gonna nuzzle her, all nice and soft. And later, I'm gonna lie down on her lap and she's gonna pet my head and sing me the Sweetie Darling song.

LUPIN

Hoo boy, that's such a girly song.

STELLA

Well duh, I'm a girl.

BUDDHA

Quite. *(beat)* Oh, I think I hear her approaching! Is everything the way Kelly left it, ere her departure?

LUPIN

(looks around)

Yeah, I think we're good.

BUDDHA

(claps paws)

All right then. Places, everyone!

(BUDDHA puts the magazine down, and starts giving himself a cat bath. STELLA and LUPIN play with the new toy, but after a moment STELLA looks back to BUDDHA.)

STELLA

Buddha, you really think everything's okay with Kelly?

BUDDHA

Of course it is. Just have confidence in her. It's not as if she's doomed, you know.

(KELLY enters.)

KELLY

Augh! I'm doomed. I'm totally screwed! Work sucks! Sucky suck suckity sucks. Bust my tail for four years and every day it's *(silly voice)* "That's not quite what we're looking for, Kelly" or "We don't think the market is trending that way, Kelly" or "You should consult with Madison, Kelly!" Madison?! That *phony*? They're gonna kick my butt to the curb, I just know it. How on earth am I even supposed to—

(KELLY notices the cats.)

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KELLY

(cont., mood instantly brightened)
Aw, hey you guys. Momma's home!

STELLA, LUPIN and BUDDHA

Hi, Kelly!

KELLY

Well meow meow meow to you too! Oh, do you guys like your new toy?

BUDDHA

Well *they* certainly do, but I simply take pleasure in your company.

KELLY

Aw, Buddha, there's my big boy. Who wants a chin rub?

BUDDHA

As a matter of fact *I* would fancy a chin rub!

(KELLY rubs BUDDHA's chin and he scrunches his face in delight. He sprawls out on the couch. Next, she approaches LUPIN, who has rolled onto his back.)

KELLY

Hey Lupin. Oh, how's my loopy little Lupin? Can I scratch that belly?

LUPIN

Well if it ain't askin' too much?

(KELLY scratches LUPIN's belly while STELLA sneaks out of KELLY's view.)

LUPIN

(cont.)

Aaaahhhh.

KELLY

Such a nice fuzzy belly.

(KELLY turns, expecting to see STELLA, who is hiding and shaking her tush.)

Herding Cats

KELLY

(cont.)

And how's uh, Stella? Stell? Oh Stell-lah? Are you hiding, you silly-

(STELLA springs, and tags KELLY's feet.)

STELLA

BOOGABOOGABOOGABOOGA!

KELLY

Oh! Stella, you sneaky little devil! Pouncing your mumma! You got me, you funny bunny. (beat) Aw, who's a good kitty?

STELLA

(nuzzling KELLY)

Good kitty? Let's see, that would be me.

KELLY

Who's my little angel?

STELLA

Um, me again.

KELLY

Who's the sweetest girl in the whole world?

STELLA

Wait, don't tell me. It's me.

KELLY

Hey, tomorrow's gonna be a big day for you guys. And I have just the thing to mark the occasion.

(KELLY exits stage left.)

BUDDHA

"Big day?" "Mark the occasion?" That sounded rather auspicious. I wonder what she meant?

LUPIN

Guess we'll find out, Buddha. Say Stellathat was a really good pounce! Can ya show me again how ya shake yer tuckus like that?

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STELLA

Sure, Lupin. The key is, it starts with the hips. You build up a nice swaying motion. Don't be afraid to shake it... yeah, that's it. Squeeze along the thigh bones, and then engage the booty muscles.

BUDDHA

Gluteal.

STELLA

Huh?

BUDDHA

Gluteal muscles.

STELLA

I like the way I said it better.

(KELLY reenters, holding up a can of tuna.)

KELLY

Okay, who wants tuna?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing; thrilled)

TUNA!! TUNA TUNA TUNA!! YUM YUM!! ME WANT TUNA!! *(etc)*.

(STELLA gets up casually. BUDDHA and LUPIN leap up and swarm KELLY.)

KELLY

Aw, you guys excited for your num nums?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

YES!!

STELLA

Jeez you two, it's just fish in a can.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

FISH IN A CAN!! WOO-HOO!! YUM YUM YUMMY!! YIPPEEEEE!! *(etc)*.

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(KELLY dishes out three bowls of tuna while BUDDHA and LUPIN cling to her. BUDDHA and LUPIN then eat while making sounds of extreme satisfaction. STELLA nibbles much more tentatively.)

KELLY

Bon appétit!

(KELLY's phone rings.)

KELLY

(cont., answers phone)

Hello? Oh hey, Suze... just gave the cats some tuna and it's wall to wall purring. Except Stella's just picking at hers.. that's really not like her... Huh? Oh, come on, do we really have to talk about work...? Yes, I had my annual review, and it totally sucked donkey butt. They're talking about putting me on probation, can you believe that?! After all I've done for them... *probation?* Give me a freakin' break! Can we talk about something else, *please?* *(beat, then smiles broadly)* Yesss, I did see Eric again... yesss, I did... noooo, I didn't, cause I'm not like you. We're going out again this weekend... no, not tomorrow. Suze, where's your brain? I'm *fostering* tomorrow, remember?

(All the cats perk up in attention.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Exactly, the one from the shelter. And Suze, I gotta tell you, she is such a little beauty.

(BUDDHA mouths "She?" with delight.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Anyway, it's just till she gets a forever home. Won't take long for a cat this pretty. Her name is Coco. Isn't that cute?

(BUDDHA mouths "Coco" with joy.)

Herding Cats

KELLY

(cont.)

What? Suze, it's no big deal. I've fostered tons of cats. I'll get the work situation figured out... I don't know how. There'll be a last-second miracle, all right? Well, guess I'd better hit the hay. Yep, still on for Wednesday. 10K, 5K, no K, whatever's okay with me... Love ya, bye.

(As KELLY hangs up, STELLA gets up and lies down on the couch.)

LUPIN

(pointing)

Hey, look over there! A real foxy Siamese!

BUDDHA

Where?!

LUPIN

Dibs!

(LUPIN takes STELLA's abandoned tuna. KELLY sits on the couch and pats STELLA.)

KELLY

You okay, Stella? It's not like you to leave tuna behind.

STELLA

Enhh, just not that hungry.

(STELLA stretches and yawns, then places her head on KELLY's lap.)

KELLY

Awww, that's my Stella. My little snuggle bug.

STELLA

Kelly, you're the best human ever.

KELLY

(singing)

*Close your eyes, snuggle near me,
Let your whiskers gently curl.
Let the dreams come, sweetie darling,
Go to sleep, my sweetie girl.*

Herding Cats

(STELLA naps peacefully. KELLY gets up and kisses her head.)

KELLY
(whispering)

Good night, Stell.

(KELLY kisses LUPIN and then BUDDHA.)

KELLY
Good night, you two. Big day tomorrow.

(KELLY exits left. BUDDHA and LUPIN look at each other.)

BUDDHA
(smiling)

Coco.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT I

Scene 2

AT RISE: (*STELLA is on the couch, aiming a laser toy in front of a crouched LUPIN, who tries to tag the speck of light.*)

STELLA

I don't know, it's just that I've never seen her so nervous - or angry - about her work before.

LUPIN

Me neither, but ain't Kelly supposed to be a real hotshot at that job? Didn't her old boss say she was a Chevrolet?

STELLA

I think you mean protégé. But times change. And this "probation" stuff has her all worked up, whatever that is.

LUPIN

Yeah, but things can't be too bad if she's fosterin' another cat, don'tcha think?

STELLA

I hope you're right. And I hope Buddha realizes that Kelly's not trying to find him a soul mate.

LUPIN

Whoo, ya sure got that right.

(BUDDHA enters, pacing nervously.)

STELLA

Oh, and speak of the devil.

BUDDHA

Hello there, my name is - no, no. Greetings and salutations, you must be - no, no. Bonsoir madame, tu eres une plus magnifique... no. Why good evening, would you care to groom? No, too forward. Ah, I know: Nice to meet you, now won't you please lick my ears? No - *much* too forward. Um, *what*? What are you looking at?

STELLA

You all right, lover boy?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Of course I'm all right, why do you ask?

STELLA

Well, you seem awfully nervous about—

BUDDHA

Are you sure I'm presentable?! Is my tail properly coiffed?
Are my whiskers straight?

STELLA

They're perfect, but I'm not sure your head is on straight.

LUPIN

Ya sure are girl-crazy, Buddha.

BUDDHA

I'm not girl-crazy, I'm just trying to look respectable for
our distinguished guest.

LUPIN

Yeah, but why are ya—

BUDDHA

Do you suppose she's a Persian?!

(STELLA and LUPIN smirk at BUDDHA.)

BUDDHA

(cont., scoffs)

Fine, savor your "touché" moment, the lot of you.

*(During the following dialogue, LUPIN gets
up and looks out the "window".)*

STELLA

I don't wanna rain on your parade, Buddha. But aren't you
forgetting about something? About a major, life-changing
event from your past?

BUDDHA

No, what do you mean?

STELLA

Well, you know, um... Lupin?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

(beat... makes "scissor fingers")

Snip snip?

BUDDHA

(pained expression)

You would dare besmirch this joyful moment by reminding me of my alteration?

STELLA

Aw, c'mon Bood, we all went through it, and we're better off for it.

BUDDHA

Is that so?

STELLA

Well *I* think so. Don't you agree, Lupin?

LUPIN

Yeah. I think it helped to temper my wild untamed street-cat spirit and instill a sense of inner peace.

BUDDHA

Oh did it now?

LUPIN

(bows)

Yep. Namaste.

BUDDHA

Well bully for you. But for certain cats, though the physical apparatus has been disrupted, the mental virility remains fitfully intact. I am proud to be one of those cats.

STELLA

That's cool, Buddha, but you know how these foster situations work. This cat's just gonna be with us for a little while until she gets a permanent home.

BUDDHA

So?

(STELLA gives BUDDHA a side-hug.)

Herding Cats

STELLA

So, we're on borrowed time with her. Just don't want you getting your hopes up, big bro.

BUDDHA

Duly noted.

STELLA

(beat)

Say Buddha, what's "probation?"

BUDDHA

Beg pardon?

STELLA

Yesterday Kelly said that her bosses might put her on probation.

LUPIN

Yeah, and she sure sounded steamed about that.

BUDDHA

"Probation" refers to a period of enhanced scrutiny, in which one is closely monitored so that his or her performance may be thoroughly evaluated.

STELLA

You think it's anything we need to be concerned with?

BUDDHA

Of course not. This is *Kelly* we're talking about. I cannot imagine a human of higher caliber.

STELLA

Well, I hope you're right, because Kelly really-

LUPIN

Hey! Here comes Kelly now!

BUDDHA

Oh! Is Coco with her?! Is she exquisite?!

LUPIN

(observing, then walking back from the window)

Lessee, um... nope, no cat. Just a big bag of dog food.

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Ah.

(Everyone freezes, wide-eyed.)

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

DOG FOOD?!

(KELLY enters, on her phone. She carries a bag of dog chow.)

KELLY

Yeah, just walked in. Hang on, Suze, got my hands full.

(KELLY exits to the kitchen. The cats just stare after her. STELLA looks stunned. KELLY reenters, without the dog chow.)

KELLY

(cont., on phone)

No no, Coco was adopted early this morning. I'm not surprised. She was such a stunner. But I didn't exactly leave empty-handed. I'm fostering a dog instead. Pretty cool, huh? No, I'm not crazy. No Suze, I am *not* compensating for trouble at work. It's not an easy job - it's like herding cats! And they're all high on *Madison*. Yes, her, the shallow snobby evil backstabber... what? *(grimaces)* Yes. Yes they did. But the probation is only temporary, and when I impress them with my pitch, they're gonna feel like fools for even considering it. Please, no work talk, okay? So anyway, Suze -- you know how it's loud and chaotic in that shelter, right? But when I approach this adorable dog, she doesn't make a peep. She just wags her tail and looks at me with these big soulful eyes, and I pet her, and she gives me kisses. And you know what her name is? *Charlize*. Yes, just like the actress! Huh? What about what? Oh, they'll be fine. They said she gets along great with cats... oh no no no, it's not gonna be anything like that - this dog's a total sweetheart... Well, I'd better go get her... of course I left the windows open a little... Huh? What do you mean, *why*? Duh, because she needs *help*, that's why, Suze. All right, talk to you later.

(KELLY hangs up and puts her phone down.)

Herding Cats

KELLY
(cont.)

Seriously, even sisters can be so clueless.

(*KELLY exits. The cats look stunned for a long moment.*)

LUPIN

You guys, am I hallucinatin'? Did Kelly really say she's bringin' home a, ya know, a-

BUDDHA

A dog. Man's alleged best friend. *Canis familiaris*. You heard correctly, Lupin.

LUPIN

But is that a good idea? A *dog*? In *here*? With *us*? Ya think Kelly's gone meshugganah?

BUDDHA

Perhaps her faculties have been affected by her career difficulties, but... *no*. Of course not. Kelly would never do anything to jeopardize our-

STELLA

What the hell is going on here?

BUDDHA
(beat)

Hm?

STELLA

I said, what just happened?

BUDDHA

You heard Kelly. Apparently we're about to have some canine companionship.

STELLA

"Canine companionship?!" You mean some *mutt* that's gonna tear our faces off?!

BUDDHA

Oh, come now, Stella. You know that Kelly makes informed decisions regarding her foster pets.

Herding Cats

STELLA

What?! An informed decision to have us all slaughtered?

LUPIN

(looking out window)

Hey, don'tcha worry, Stell. If this dog starts any trouble, I'll handle it. Don't forget, I'm a-

STELLA

Street cat, yeah yeah yeah. Famous last words, Lupin? And are you kidding me, Buddha? The foster cats that Kelly's brought home have all been just that - cats. Not some mangy dog that's gonna thrash us.

BUDDHA

Truly, Stella, I'm rather taken aback by your lack of faith in Kelly's judgment. She wouldn't introduce an animal into the home if she thought it would present a menace.

STELLA

(losing composure)

Buddha, do you hear what you're saying?! "Present a menace?" That's exactly what this is! A big nasty flea-bitten cat-stomping *menace*! And... and...

BUDDHA

And, it would behoove you to take a deep breath and let panic give way to reason. Kelly would never do anything to cause us harm. And besides, didn't she say that this dog has an exemplary relationship with cats?

LUPIN

Yeah, she sure did, Buddha. Called her a sweetheart, too.

BUDDHA

"Sweetheart." Now that hardly sounds threatening. You know, it's odd, but I suddenly find myself intrigued with the prospect of receiving such a unique visitor.

LUPIN

Heck, a real dog in the house... who knows, it might be... fun?

BUDDHA

Precisely, Lupin. Fun.

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STELLA

Fun? This is gonna be a disaster! I can't believe you're taking this so casually. I have no idea what I'm gonna do.

BUDDHA

Oh, but Stella, it's not as if this dog is going to do unto you what happened when we were—

(BUDDHA puts his paw to his forehead - he knows he's said too much.)

BUDDHA

(cont., side-hugging STELLA)

Oh dear. I've allowed my memory to lapse. You're preoccupied with what transpired in the past. But I assure you, Stella, what happened then was a purely random—

STELLA

(pulling away from BUDDHA)

I don't want to talk about it.

LUPIN

Ohhhh, ya mean?

(LUPIN makes a snarling expression.)

STELLA

I said I don't wanna talk about it, all right?

BUDDHA

Very well. But I assure you Stella, any animal entering this space will have been thoroughly vetted by Kelly.

LUPIN

Yeah! Don't be afraid. Just be yourself, Stella!

BUDDHA

Exactly. Show her your charm, that Stella magnetism. As Lupin says, just be yourself and I'm sure you'll develop a strong rapport with, what was it now - er, Charlotte? Charlene? Chardonnay?

LUPIN

Charlize.

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Charlize. A rather glamorous name, is it not?

LUPIN

It's awful pretty.

STELLA

Yeah, gorgeous name for a serial killer.

LUPIN

Stella, yer worryin' too much. Kelly wouldn't let nothin' bad happen.

STELLA

And speaking of Kelly - all this stuff about her job? It sure doesn't sound like *that's* getting any better! It actually sounds worse than yesterday! She sounds so freaked out about it! You do realize, if she loses her job, that would be especially bad for *us*?

BUDDHA

Hm, I must concur, that line of discussion did sound somewhat portentous. But Kelly's a sharp-

STELLA

Do we need to deploy the nuclear option?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

Whoa, whoa. No way. Out of the question. Hold your horses. Calm down. *(etc)*.

BUDDHA

(cont.)

There's no need to overreact. As I was about to say, Kelly is a sharp-witted and creative human. She'll work out her issues at her place of employment in short order.

STELLA

Yeah, just in time for us to get eaten by Sharp Teeth.

BUDDHA

Charlize.

STELLA

Whatever.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

(looking out window)

Hey! They're comin' inside! Kelly and... it's her! The dog!

BUDDHA

Oh! What does she look like, Lupin?

LUPIN

She looks, eh, I dunno... cute but tough?

STELLA

Oh, kill me now.

LUPIN

Hey, I think she's one of them pit bull terriers!

STELLA

I'm outta here.

(STELLA tries to exit. BUDDHA blocks her.)

BUDDHA

Stella, this is no time to succumb to fear.

STELLA

Yeah, and it's no time to succumb to murder, either. I'll be under the bed for the next six to eight weeks. Y'all enjoy your relationship with Shark Week.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

Charlize.

STELLA

You bet.

(KELLY enters. BUDDHA quickly lies on the couch, LUPIN goes to far stage right, and STELLA hides behind the couch, with her eyes peering over the top.)

KELLY

(gently, to offstage)

Oooh, that was a nice walk, wasn't it? Come on in, girl. Are you nervous? This is your home too. It's okay, come on inside. Don't be shy.

Herding Cats

(Pause, then CHARLIZE bursts in, sniffing everything in sight.)

CHARLIZE

Oh boy oh boy oh boy oh boy look at this place it's so big wow everything smells so good in here hey look at that oh boy oh boy is that a table *(sniff)* yep smells like a table now look at those things ooh I know what those are those are food bowls oh boy oh boy when's supper time heyyy I think I smell dog chow somewhere oh baby I bet that's for me oh boy oh boy oh boy and that's a couch over there ooh I can't wait to jump on that oh boy oh boy oh boy that's gonna be fun ooh that's a funny looking toy there I've never seen a toy like that before and heyyy you know what it kinda smells like cats in here and-

(CHARLIZE spots BUDDHA and gasps.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

I was right! You're a cat! A real pretty cat!

BUDDHA

Oh, are you - are you referring to me?

CHARLIZE

Of course I am! Look at all that pretty fur!

BUDDHA

(swelling with flattery, getting up)

Oh?! Well *thank* you, pleased to make your acquaintance.

CHARLIZE

Hey, do you mind if I smell ya? That's how I familiarize myself with new things, I smell 'em.

BUDDHA

Then by all means, please do.

(CHARLIZE sniffs BUDDHA all over. KELLY snaps photos with her phone.)

KELLY

Ohmygosh, this is like the cutest thing ever.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Mmmmm, you have such a nice scent, so catlike. Say, would you mind if I, um -

(CHARLIZE whispers in BUDDHA's ear).

BUDDHA

(beat, modestly)

Of course not. It would be my privilege.

CHARLIZE

Oh, thank you.

(CHARLIZE sniffs BUDDHA's tush.)

CHARLIZE

Mmmmm... ohhh, yes, that's nice, that's so good!

KELLY

Hey. Hey hey hey. Hey girl!

(CHARLIZE spins to look at KELLY.)

KELLY

(cont.)

C'mon, sweetie, there's nothing there for you.

CHARLIZE

Oh, I beg to differ!

(CHARLIZE immediately goes back to BUDDHA's backside, but KELLY steps in and separates sniffer from sniffee.)

KELLY

All right all right, c'mon now, no butt sniffin'. Seriously, I don't understand why dogs do that.

CHARLIZE

Well you shouldn't knock it until you've - *(gasps)*. Look! Another cat!

(CHARLIZE darts over to LUPIN. KELLY continues taking pictures.)

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE
(cont.)

Hey there!

LUPIN
Uh, hello! Nice to meet ya.

CHARLIZE
Say, do you mind if I...?

LUPIN,
Uh, no, go right ahead.

(CHARLIZE sniffs LUPIN.)

CHARLIZE
Now you have a very distinct aroma about you. Hmmm, what is that smell? It's so... rugged.

LUPIN
Well thanks! Nice of ya to say.

CHARLIZE
Hmmm, I'm getting asphalt, I'm getting pigeon, I'm getting vehicular emissions, I'm - *(gasps)* You're a *street cat!*

LUPIN
I sure am! Wow, how could ya tell?

CHARLIZE
Easy! I'm a street dog!

LUPIN
Whoa, that's too cool! We gotta trade street stories some time. So it's Charlize, is it?

CHARLIZE
Yeah, that's me all right.

KELLY
Oh, darn it! Stupid battery. Ugh, where's my charger?

(KELLY exits stage left.)

CHARLIZE
Hey, she seems pretty nice.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Kelly? Aw yeah, you're gonna love her. Hey, ya know somethin' Charlize, I think youze was named after a human movie star, or somethin' like that.

CHARLIZE

Really? I was?

BUDDHA

I believe that is correct.

CHARLIZE

How about that! Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank the Academy.

STELLA

Oh brother.

CHARLIZE

Who said that?

BUDDHA

Oh, nobody. We just happen to have a, you know, a, um-

LUPIN

Ghost?

BUDDHA

Exactly. There's a ghost in the apartment.

CHARLIZE

No kiddin'? A real live ghost?

LUPIN

Yeah, one of them supernaturalistical things, ya know?

CHARLIZE

Well ain't that a kick in the head. Anyway, what's your name?

LUPIN

Lupin.

CHARLIZE

Lupin? That has a nice ring to it. What does it mean?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Well, it can mean something that's like a wolf. But it's also a kind of flower.

CHARLIZE

Oh, you mean something wild and strong and free, but also sensitive and beautiful?

LUPIN

Aw c'mon, yer gonna make me blush.

STELLA

Oh *please*.

CHARLIZE

There it is again!

LUPIN

What? Oh yeah. The ghost. Right.

BUDDHA

Ruddy insolent ghost, if you ask me.

CHARLIZE

This place is just full of surprises, I tell ya. What's your name, big fella?

BUDDHA

Buddha.

CHARLIZE

Oh, that's lovely. What were you named after?

BUDDHA

An enlightened teacher, considered by some to be an avatar of the divine path.

CHARLIZE

Well my goodness! (*curtsies*) Oh, sacred one, I pledge my eternal loyalty.

BUDDHA

Rise, rise and be counted, devoted follower!

(*STELLA springs up from her hiding place.*)

Herding Cats

STELLA

Oh, enough with the freakin' love fest already! He wasn't named after some avatar dude! He was named Buddha because when he was a kitten, he had a big belly! And Kelly said "Oh wut a cute wittle Buddha belly." I should know! I was there when he got that name!

CHARLIZE

I knew it! *Another* cat!

(CHARLIZE rushes toward STELLA, who runs to the other side of the couch.)

STELLA

Whoa, whoa, back off.

CHARLIZE

Hey, you're a girl just like me! We're gonna be like sisters! Let me smell you!

STELLA

Look, "sister," you're not smelling anything. If you have to talk, do it from over there.

BUDDHA

Stella! You're being very rude. Charlize has been nothing but cordial, courteous, and effervescent. You owe her a far better reception than this crude display.

LUPIN

Yeah Stell, she's nice. Youze ain't got nothin' to be scared about.

CHARLIZE

(forehead palm)

Scared? Oh, I should've known. You're *afraid* of dogs.

STELLA

(scoffs)

I'm not afraid of anything.

CHARLIZE

(coy smile)

Really?

STELLA

Really.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE
(beat)

Boo!

*(STELLA scampers behind BUDDHA for cover.
LUPIN snickers.)*

CHARLIZE
(cont., laughs)
Sorry, dumb joke, just couldn't help it. But you've got nothing to worry about. I love cats.

STELLA
What, for breakfast?

BUDDHA and LUPIN
Stella!

CHARLIZE
Nah, it's all right guys. It's just how it is with some cats. But if I may say so, Stella – can I call you Stella?

STELLA
Call me whatever you want, or don't call me at all. Just don't come any closer, all right?

BUDDHA
Oh good gracious, Stella. Charlize, we don't intend to make you feel unwelcome. I can see that we'll have to work our way out of a rather deep-seated bias. Won't you please continue with your discourse?

CHARLIZE
Well, I was gonna say that I got to be friends with a lot of really cool cats at the shelter, and if they were here I'm sure they'd vouch for me.

STELLA
What are you talking about? What cats?

CHARLIZE
Well, let's see, there was Rajah, and Pumpkin, and Edison, and Mercedes, and Coco, and—

BUDDHA
You knew Coco?

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yeah, and she sure was a real looker. Anyway Stella, me and cats have always been tight. But if you want me to keep my distance, then that's what I'll do.

STELLA

Smartest thing you've said all day.

BUDDHA

Oh Stella. Charlize, please accept my humble apology for my sister's behavior.

CHARLIZE

No sweat.

LUPIN

Hey uh, hey Stell? Can I try something? Something that might change your mind a little?

STELLA

(beat)

Knock yourself out.

LUPIN

Charlize, could ya please open yer mouth real wide?

CHARLIZE

Um, sure.

(CHARLIZE opens her mouth wide.)

LUPIN

Wow, look at them choppers.

(STELLA's jaw drops and she gasps loudly.)

LUPIN

(cont.)

Nah, it's all right. Okay Stella, watch this.

STELLA

Wait, no - what are you doing? Lupin! Are you crazy? Don't do that!

(LUPIN puts his paw into CHARLIZE's mouth.)

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Uh oh, the big bad doggy's got me!

CHARLIZE

Grr, grr... thath righth, I gothya now, kithy kath!

STELLA

I think I'm gonna pass out.

LUPIN

Stella! We're just jokin' around here!

CHARLIZE

Yeah Thtella, ya goth nuthin ta worry about.

(LUPIN frees his finger from CHARLIZE.)

LUPIN

See, Stella? Ain't nothin' to be afraid of.

STELLA

Oh, thank goodness.

(STELLA heaves a sigh and flops backward onto the couch.)

LUPIN

Whoa, that was kinda freaky.

CHARLIZE

Yeah, that was a trip!

(LUPIN and CHARLIZE attempt a high-five.)

LUPIN

Hey, that's funny. Our paws don't fit.

CHARLIZE

Ohhh, right. But it's not you, it's me. I'm double-toed.

BUDDHA

Double-toed? Do you mean to say you're affected by polydactyly?

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yep, got an extra piggy on my right paw. It's rare in dogs, but I hear it's a little more common in cats?

BUDDHA

Indeed it is. Stella also has the polydactyl condition.

CHARLIZE

Really Stella, you've got it too?

STELLA

Yeah, my left paw. I thought I was the only one who has it.

CHARLIZE

Will you show me?

(STELLA looks at BUDDHA, who nods. CHARLIZE raises her right paw. STELLA raises her left paw in response.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

I mean, will you show me up close?

(STELLA again looks to BUDDHA, who smiles and nods. STELLA gets up and takes two cautious steps toward CHARLIZE. But KELLY enters, breaking the moment. STELLA, startled, scurries back to where she was. KELLY hides something behind her back.)

KELLY

Well I can't find that silly thing. Guess there'll be time for videos later. But I've got a better idea anyway, and you guys are gonna love it.

(KELLY reveals a bag of cat food.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Okay, who wants kitty food?

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

KITTY FOOD!! WOO-HOO! OH YEAH KITTY FOOD!! YAHOOOO!! *(etc).*

Herding Cats

KELLY

Okay you guys, hang on. You know, I think it's best if you cats eat on the couch tonight.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

EAT ON THE COUCH!! YAHOO! YIPPEE!! EAT THE COUCH!! (etc).

(KELLY dishes out three bowls of cat food. BUDDHA and LUPIN eat happily, while STELLA again just picks at hers. KELLY exits.)

CHARLIZE

Wow, you really love your cat food, huh guys? Um, guys?

STELLA

You're wasting your breath on them. They're totally food-crazy and they tune the real world out.

CHARLIZE

Yeah, I hear you. I've had my share of friends who go bonkers at dinner time.

(KELLY reenters, with the bag of dog food.)

KELLY

And who wants doggy food?

CHARLIZE

DOGGY FOOD! OH YEAH!! I LOVE DOGGY FOOD!! ARROOOOOOO!!!

KELLY

You must be hungry! Charlize, I think you'll eat over here at the table tonight.

(KELLY pours food for CHARLIZE, who then eats happily.)

KELLY

(cont., laughs)

One big happy family of little piggies. Stella? Aw sweetie, you're hardly eating again. Is your belly bothering you?

(KELLY gently presses STELLA's tummy. She gives a slight groan.)

Herding Cats

STELLA

Unnnngh. Nah, just not too hungry, no biggy.

KELLY

Aw Stell, I think the vet should check you out. Oh, where is that stupid charger? Wait a minute - did I flake out and leave it in the bathroom?

(KELLY exits. Something catches STELLA's eye and she glares at CHARLIZE.)

BUDDHA

Mmmm! Oh, I must say, tuna or no tuna, these feasts of Kelly's are simply scrumptious! Delectable! The perfect culinary capstone for a true epicure.

LUPIN

Yeah, and they taste good too. *(beat)* Hey Stella, whatcha lookin' at there?

STELLA

What the hell does that dog think she's doing?

LUPIN

Uh, I dunno. Eatin'?

STELLA

But that's *Benji's* bowl.

LUPIN

Yeah, so?

STELLA

So *nobody* eats out of *Benji's* bowl.

(STELLA takes a step toward the happily unaware CHARLIZE.)

LUPIN

Yeah, but I really don't think he'd mind.

STELLA

I mind. That bowl is sacred. I'm not gonna sit back and watch that mutt slobber all over it.

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Stella, what difference does it make what bowl Charlize eats from?

LUPIN

Uh, I ain't sure I like where this is goin.' Stella, what are you fixin' to do here?

(STELLA starts to crouch.)

STELLA

Put that dog in her place, that's what.

BUDDHA

Stella, I do not think disturbing Charlize would be prudent at this moment. Please, stop and reconsider.

STELLA

No, I'm gonna do what I gotta do. It was your idea, remember? "Show her that Stella magnetism?"

BUDDHA

Stella, I meant for that to happen under the proper circumstances and you know it.

LUPIN

Gee Stella, what's gotten into ya? Ya seemed so scared of her a couple minutes ago.

STELLA

That's ancient history. I'm not gonna let her drool all over Benji's memory any longer.

(STELLA wiggles her tush.)

BUDDHA

But Stella, some dogs prefer not to be interrupted while they're eating. Stella, no—!

(STELLA "pounces" CHARLIZE, as KELLY reenters.)

STELLA

BOOGABOOGABOOGABOOGA!

(CHARLIZE, completely startled, roars in STELLA's face.)

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

DON'T TOUCH MY FOOD!!

(STELLA gasps and winces.)

STELLA

Stay away! Don't hurt me!

CHARLIZE

NOBODY TOUCHES MY FOOD!! NOBODY!!

(STELLA raises her claws in defense.)

STELLA

Leave me alone!

CHARLIZE

DO YOU WANT ME TO BITE YOU?!!

(STELLA slashes at CHARLIZE with her claws.)

STELLA

Aieeee!!

CHARLIZE

AIIGH! YOU SCRATCHED ME!

KELLY

Ohmygod!

CHARLIZE

YOU SCRATCHED MY FACE, CAT! HOW DARE YOU! I TRY TO BE NICE TO YOU AND THIS IS WHAT YOU DO? YOU WOUNDED ME!!

(STELLA displays her claws and "hisses".)

STELLA

Stay awayyy. Stay away from meee..

KELLY

(rushing toward CHARLIZE)

Oh no, you're food-aggressive.

CHARLIZE

DID YOU SEE WHAT SHE DID?! SHE ATTACKED ME!! SHE SLASHED MY FACE!!

Herding Cats

KELLY

Come on, come on girl! Let's go outside, it'll be all right, let's go outside.

(KELLY corrals a still-ranting CHARLIZE and they exit. STELLA levels a furious look at BUDDHA, then storms offstage.)

BUDDHA

Oh dear.

(BUDDHA and LUPIN share a nervous look. After a few moments, LUPIN picks up STELLA's remaining cat food.)

LUPIN

Uh... dibs?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT I

Scene 3

AT RISE: (*STELLA is behind the couch, staring at CHARLIZE, who is lying on a dog bed. CHARLIZE looks back at STELLA with a half-guilty, half-frustrated face. BUDDHA, on the couch, and LUPIN, playing with the turbo scratcher, flash curious looks at STELLA, CHARLIZE and one another. KELLY enters from the kitchen, wearing running-appropriate attire, on her phone.*)

KELLY

Oh, she's adorable. And Buddha and Lupin really like her... no, she's fine, just a scratch... yeah, it was kinda scary, a lot of hissing and barking. Still, I'm surprised that Stella went all Wolverine on her... it's just how some dogs get when they're around food. It's an innate thing. Everything's calmed down, although Stella's been watching her like a hawk since their little episode. So I've been separating them at meal time - cats in the kitchen, dog in the living room. What? Yesss, last night was very nice. Eric is awfully fun to be around... What's that...? No, work blows... it's worse than herding cats! They put Madison in charge of my focus group. MADISON! She's a total fraud, she's completely unscrupulous and now I'm supposed to answer to *her*?! Are you kidding me - I *trained* her and she's my supervisor now?! What a load of bull! No Suze, the other networks aren't hiring. Believe me, I've looked. You know, it's fortunate the cats and dog don't understand me, 'cause if they did they'd mutiny... Look, let's continue this discussion at the park, okay...? No Suze, I am not a hot mess. Bye.

(*KELLY clicks off her phone.*)

KELLY

(cont.)

I'm a hot mess. (*beat*) Okay, mumma's gonna get all sweaty and winded now. You're gonna be good, right?

STELLA

(long beat)

Well don't look at me.

Herding Cats

KELLY

All right, see you later.

(KELLY makes four kissing sounds, then exits. There's a long awkward pause.)

LUPIN

Uh, what's "mutiny" mean?

BUDDHA

It means insurrection.

(LUPIN nods, then shrugs with a puzzled look. Another awkward silence follows.)

CHARLIZE

I said I was sorry, you know.

STELLA

I hate eating in the kitchen.

CHARLIZE

But that wasn't my idea.

STELLA

I'd rather eat in the litter box.

LUPIN

But youze ain't been eatin' much at *all* lately, Stella.

STELLA

That's not the point, Lupin. It's nasty in there.

LUPIN

Aw, c'mon. It ain't too bad.

BUDDHA

Really, it's just the kitchen. There's no need for fuss.

STELLA

Oh yeah, what about the two giant roaches living under the stove?

BUDDHA

Urgh, you're right about that. Repellent.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

C'mon you guys, that's Frank and Mary you're talkin' about!

STELLA

So gross.

CHARLIZE

I said I was sorry, all right? Look, if it means that much to you, then you three can eat here, and I'll have my dog chow in the kitchen, okay?

BUDDHA

That is a gallant gesture, Charlize. But I assure you the environment in which we consume is of no importance to us.

STELLA

Easy for you to say, Buddha! You and Lupin go hog-wild every time food is stuck under your noses, no matter where you are. I like having supper in here, because I like being around *Kelly*, all right?

CHARLIZE

Look, it's settled then! You cats eat in the living room. I'll eat in there, with... Frank and Mary.

LUPIN

That's big of ya Charlize, but it ain't up to us. That's somethin' Kelly would hafta decide.

CHARLIZE

In that case, can we drop it for now, *please*?

STELLA

Uh, sure. Can you *drop* nearly biting my face off?

CHARLIZE

C'mon Stella, I'm trying to be friends here. Can't you give me a break?

STELLA

Break? Like how you tried to break my neck?

BUDDHA

Stella! That's quite enough from you! Charlize has been genuine and forthright in her apology, and you owe her the courtesy of respecting her sincerity. And do not forget that this all arose from an incident of *your* instigation.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Yeah, Stell! Charlize didn't mean nothin' by it. It's just in her dog DNA or somethin'.

CHARLIZE

That's all right, guys. You don't have to defend me. I'll just keep out of Stella's way. But can I ask you about what Kelly was saying?

BUDDHA

A change of topic would be most welcome. Please do.

CHARLIZE

Who's this "Suze" that Kelly's always talking with?

BUDDHA

Suzanne, Kelly's sister. Currently pursuing studies of the legal profession.

LUPIN

Yeah, Aunty Suze. Not as keen on cats and dogs as Kelly but a pretty nice lady, ya know?

CHARLIZE

I see. And Eric?

BUDDHA

Ah, he is Kelly's romantic interest. If you ask me, she appears to be rather smitten with this chap.

LUPIN

Yeah, they've been hittin' the town together. She sure does get cow eyes when she talks about that guy.

CHARLIZE

Gee, that's pretty sweet, I guess. But Kelly talks about her job a lot, too. I guess that's not going so good?

LUPIN

Naw, her job's been really hard on her lately. She says it's like "herding cats," whatever that means.

CHARLIZE

Huh, I've heard that expression before, at the shelter. But what exactly does Kelly do? You know, for work?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Our dear Kelly has a most captivating profession. She works in the entertainment industry.

CHARLIZE

Entertainment industry? Wow, you mean like she's a singer, or an actor, or an acrobat?

BUDDHA

(laughs softly)

No. Kelly works for one of the major broadcast networks. She's involved in the cultivation of new programming.

CHARLIZE

You mean TV shows? Those things that humans are always looking at?

BUDDHA

Yes. Kelly's job is to develop such shows. But to hear her describe it, it's an arduous undertaking. She works hard but she finds herself at odds with supervisors who don't share her creative inclinations. Or worse, colleagues who would appropriate her ideas for their own. Apparently, it's a rather dog-eat-dog enterprise. If you'll please pardon the expression.

CHARLIZE

Sure, no problem. So how long have you all been with Kelly?

BUDDHA

Just over twelve years for Stella and myself. We've been with her since our kittening. And Lupin joined us five years ago.

CHARLIZE

Has it always been the four of you?

LUPIN

Nah, up until a coupla years ago there was Benji, too.

CHARLIZE

Benji... Benji... hey, I know that name!

LUPIN

Really, ya do?

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yeah! That's a dog, right? A famous movie dog!

STELLA

(scoffs)

Leave it to a *dog* to say that. I don't know who you're talking about.

CHARLIZE

Well who was Benji, then?

STELLA

He was a cat. He was *all* cat.

LUPIN

Yeah, he was a cat that Kelly got a long time ago. Way before Stella and Buddha in fact. He was a good fella, a little kooky maybe.

BUDDHA

"Kooky?" That's putting it mildly. He was a blooming lunatic.

LUPIN

Aw, Buddha, he wasn't a bad guy. He just had his own way of doing things.

BUDDHA

Yes, if by "his own way of doing things" you mean being a loony.

LUPIN

Nah, ya got him all wrong, he wasn't a loony, he was-

BUDDHA

Unbalanced?

LUPIN

No, he was, uh-

BUDDHA

Unhinged?

LUPIN

Nah, I wouldn't say that, he was just-

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Deranged?

LUPIN

Nah, he wasn't deranged. He was, uhhh, he was—

STELLA

He was *great*.

CHARLIZE

(beat)

Tell me about him.

STELLA

Toughest cat I ever met. Always had your back. Always stuck up for you. Never took any crap from anyone. No matter *what* species they were.

BUDDHA

Really, Stella, he used to climb the curtains.

STELLA

That's what they're there for.

BUDDHA

He would chew Kelly's toes while she was on the commode.

STELLA

Those were love bites.

BUDDHA

He would claw gashes into the screen door.

STELLA

And the breeze felt nice. Buddha, just 'cause you didn't see eye to eye with him, that didn't make him a nutjob.

CHARLIZE

Where's Benji now?

LUPIN

Well he... he crossed the rainbow bridge.

CHARLIZE

Crossed the rainbow bridge? You mean he passed away?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Yeah.

CHARLIZE

I'm so sorry to hear that. What happened?

LUPIN

Nothin' really. He just got old. Nineteen years - that's a long time for a cat to hang around.

CHARLIZE

Sounds like he was really special. I would have liked to meet him.

STELLA

(getting hostile)

Oh, just listen to you - "I would have liked to meet him." You know something? If he'd been here, when you pulled your stunt on me? A little scratch on your precious little nose would have been the least of your problems.

BUDDHA

Stella! This hostile grandstanding is pointless! Charlize apologized, must I remind you again, for a disturbance that you initiated. It is *you* who should be apologizing to *her*!

STELLA

Well I'm not talking about *her*, I'm talking about *Benji*. And if he were here, he'd be taking action. He wouldn't be sitting on his duff waiting for miracles that never happen.

BUDDHA

What in heaven's name are you talking about?

STELLA

I'm talking about doing something about Kelly's job situation.

LUPIN

C'mon Stell, there ain't nothin' we can do about that.

STELLA

Of course there is. There's the nuclear option.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

Whoa. No way. Don't say that. We can't do that. (*etc*).

Herding Cats

STELLA

You two are really disappointing, you know that? We're supposed to be related to lions and tigers and big tough predators, and here you are acting like total chickens!

CHARLIZE

What's the nuclear option?

STELLA

Well *Charlize*, since no one has the guts to do it, I guess it doesn't matter, now does it?

CHARLIZE

I was just asking a question.

STELLA

You're better off asking something else. Something like, "What's gonna happen after Kelly gets fired and she can't support me any longer?" Your being here only complicates things, dog.

CHARLIZE

Fine, fine! I'll just get out of your face, then! I'd rather hang out with the roaches than take this abuse. I thought it was going to be nice being here with all of you, but I guess I thought wrong. Living here is worse than herding cats!

LUPIN

Herding cats? Are ya gonna tell us what that means now?

CHARLIZE

You want to know what "herding cats" means? Well here's a few thoughts on that. Maybe it means that you're up against an impossible situation and you have no control over it. Like when you think you're finally getting a little peace in your life but everything is really *chaos*. Or maybe it's when you try to help but you're not wanted. Or maybe - just maybe - "herding cats" means that finally - finally! - a nice human like Kelly is willing to take a chance and stick her neck out for you. But it doesn't matter, because when you try to be nice, all someone else does in return is *hate* you. It means everything is *bad*.

(CHARLIZE exits, storming off to the kitchen and leaving the others to silently react.)

Herding Cats

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT I

Scene 4

AT RISE: *(BUDDHA is on the couch, looking at a copy of The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss. LUPIN is on the floor, playing with a ball that lights up as it moves around.)*

LUPIN

I don't get it. I don't get how it does that. It's blowin' my mind, ya know?

BUDDHA

You're referring to the luminescence?

LUPIN

Nah, I mean the way it lights up.

BUDDHA

Would you care for a primer on optics?

LUPIN

Ya mean yer gonna tell me how it works?

BUDDHA

If you'd care to know.

LUPIN

Hmmm, nah. Wouldn't wanna spoil the mystery of it. *(beat)* Hey, where are the ladies at?

BUDDHA

I imagine Kelly is preparing for work, as per usual. And perhaps Stella and Charlize are sleeping in this morning?

LUPIN

Yeah, I guess so. *(beat)* Hey, I think Kelly's coming! Better put that away.

BUDDHA

(putting the book down)

Oh! Right indeed. *(claps his paws, whispers)* Places!

Herding Cats

(BUDDHA starts another cat bath and LUPIN plays with the ball. KELLY enters, dressed for work and on her phone.)

KELLY

Hi Buddha. Hi Lupin... uh, hello? Hi, this is Kelly Larson. I'd like to make an appointment for Doctor Thompson to see my cat, please... Stella... yes. Well, she hasn't been eating much for the past few days. She only picks at her food and then goes to lie down. And she spent last night tucked away in the bathroom, away from the other cats. That's really not like her... changes? Nothing I can really think of... Well, I've been fostering a dog for a few days, and Stella wants nothing to do with her yet, so I guess it's been a little stressful. But the lack of appetite began before I got the dog, so I'd like her to be seen as soon as possible... yes... oh, you have a cancellation... right now? Mmm, I can't make that. What's her next availability... ooh... I see. I'll come in now then. I can be there in fifteen... yes, my boss will be cool with it, I'm sure... thanks for squeezing us in. I'll get her now. Bye.

(KELLY hangs up and exits stage left.)

LUPIN

Gee Buddha, ya think something's wrong with Stella?

BUDDHA

Hard to say, Lupin. I certainly hope not. But you and I have had issues with gastric upset in the past, and the vet patched us up in short order. So let's not worry just yet.

LUPIN

All right, Buddha.

(KELLY reenters, leading a sleepy STELLA.)

STELLA

Unnnnngh, where we goin'? I'm tired.

KELLY

Come on, Miss Princess. We're seeing the vet this morning.

STELLA

Noooo, I feel fine. She's gonna poke my tummy and talk to me in that silly voice. "Hewwo, Stewwa."

Herding Cats

KELLY

Okay, you boys be good and we'll be back in a little while.
(to kitchen) Charlize? Come on girl, you don't have to stay
in there all day. Come play with Buddha and Lupin.

STELLA

Come onnnnn, Kelly. I don't need to see the vegetarian.
She's gonna stick her fingers in my mouth.

KELLY

Yeah, meow meow meow. Let's go, fur face, no more
protesting. Vet's gonna get you straightened out.

STELLA

I wanna see her diploma this time.

(KELLY and STELLA exit.)

LUPIN

I dunno, Bood. Stella's actin' pretty wacky there. Hope she
ain't delirious or nothin'.

BUDDHA

Hmmm, I don't think so, Lupin. After all, she spent the
entire night feeling out of sorts - in the lavatory, no
less. She's bound to be a bit less than lucid.

LUPIN

Yeah, I guess you're right. (to kitchen) Hey Charlize, ya
comin' outta there? Ya can join us in here, ya know.

(CHARLIZE enters).

CHARLIZE

(humbly)

Did you know that in the event of an atomic detonation,
roaches would outlast every other species on earth?

LUPIN

Frank and Mary been braggin' again, huh?

CHARLIZE

They sure have some stories to tell. Hey - where's Stella?

LUPIN

Stella ain't feelin' right. Kelly's takin' her to the vet.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Oh? Well I hope she's all right. Wait! Oh no. Does this have to do with what I did?! I didn't mean to-

BUDDHA

No Charlize, don't worry. This is routine digestive distress and nothing more.

CHARLIZE

You think so?

BUDDHA

Of course. Don't be alarmed.

CHARLIZE

(sighs)

Well, that's a relief. I still feel bad about what happened. I just - I just can't help it, you know? If someone gets near me when there's food around, I just blow a fuse. It's like I'm not even myself.

BUDDHA

We understand.

CHARLIZE

I wanted to say I'm sorry, but also wanted to give Stella her space.

LUPIN

Smart thinkin', Charlize. Stella can get kinda hot under the collar sometimes, so good idea to let her cool off.

BUDDHA

(eye roll)

Perhaps. But as I recall, you already issued an apology. And don't forget that Stella had a significant role in the unpleasantness.

CHARLIZE

Maybe. It's just a shame that some cats get so uneasy around dogs.

LUPIN

Yeah, but Stella wasn't always like that.

CHARLIZE

She wasn't?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Nah, she wasn't 'fraid of dogs until this thing happened, back in the day. Back when we was—uhhh—

(LUPIN covers his mouth.)

CHARLIZE

Back when you were what? *(beat)* C'mon you guys, don't leave me hanging here!

LUPIN

Mmmm, Stella don't want nobody talkin' about it. Sorry, Charlize. Hey, ya wanna play with some cat toys?

CHARLIZE

C'mon, Lupin, wouldn't it be helpful if I knew how Stella got to be the way she is?

LUPIN

Well, yeah, I guess yer—

CHARLIZE

Tell you what - you tell me about Stella, and then we'll play with cat toys.

LUPIN

(beat)

All right, but look. Ya gotta promise ya won't say nothin' to Stella about this, okay?

CHARLIZE

Of course, I can keep a secret if you can.

BUDDHA

Heavens, must we relive that dreadful experience?

CHARLIZE

C'mon Buddha, how bad could it have been? Please, tell me.

(BUDDHA shakes his head, but then he sighs and nods.)

BUDDHA

Very well.

CHARLIZE

Thanks, guys. So, why is Stella scared of dogs?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Four summers past, we were in the process of relocating. Kelly, Stella, Lupin, Benji, and myself.

LUPIN

Yeah, we was movin' from Kelly's folks' house to this here place, ya follow?

CHARLIZE

Yeah, sure. Did something happen while you were moving?

BUDDHA

Yes. We four cats were settling into our new space, getting ourselves familiar with our new environs.

LUPIN

Scopin' out the pad, ya know?

CHARLIZE

Sure, I gotcha.

BUDDHA

And whilst we were acclimating ourselves, Kelly was moving her belongings from her vehicle into the living space. She'd left the front door open in order to facilitate the process. So, as a measure of safety, Kelly confined us to the kitchen.

CHARLIZE

I see. So, what were you guys doing in there?

LUPIN

Nothin', really. Stella caught a nice sunny spot near the stove. Me an' Buddha found some shade under the table. And Benji - well, he jumped right on top of the fridge. He was perchin' up there, like one of them gargoyle things? It was safe in there, or so we thought.

CHARLIZE

Or so you thought? You mean... someone got inside?

BUDDHA

Yes.

CHARLIZE

Well, who? Oh, you mean...?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA
(beat)

A dog.

CHARLIZE
A dog got inside while Kelly was moving her things?

LUPIN
Yeah, some stray roamin' the neighborhood. Musta strutted right in while Kelly wasn't lookin'.

CHARLIZE
But wasn't the kitchen door closed?

BUDDHA
Yes, but unbeknownst to us, the door was in a state of disrepair. The dog breached it with ease.

LUPIN
Yeah, he burst right into the kitchen! And he was a *big* bruiser, believe me. And I tell ya, there was somethin' not right about him.

CHARLIZE
Oh no... how could you tell?

BUDDHA
From his eyes. It was the eyes that I remember most - a vicious, yet vacant stare, as if the senses were intact but the mind was in decay. He must have been unwell, though I cannot say what was afflicting him.

CHARLIZE
How awful... what happened next?

LUPIN
So, this dog's sniffin' and lookin' around, and the first cat he sees is... Stella., just floppin' in the corner by the stove. And before she even knows what's happenin', he gets right in her face! He's growlin' and snarlin' and barkin', and she's tryin' to crawl under the floor. All she can do is start hissinn'... and then he rears his head back, opens his mouth real wide, ya know? And then he SNAPS - wraps his big ol' jaws right around Stella's neck! She's too stunned to make a sound - oh baby, we thought she was a goner right then and there. He's ready to crunch her right in half! Me an' Buddha are shakin' like a coupla leaves... But then...

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

(beat)

But then what? What happened?!

LUPIN

Benji. That's what happened.

CHARLIZE

Benji interfered?

LUPIN

And how! Benji jumps all the way down from the top of the fridge, fast as a cheetah! An' he says: hey you, uh-*darn*-dog, let go of my friend, or I'm gonna belt you in your-*fluffy*-face and kick the livin'-uh, *stuff*-right outta you! Only them ain't the words he used, if ya get my drift.

CHARLIZE

Right! Go on.

LUPIN

So, the big brute just spits Stella out, ya know? Ptooeey, right onto the floor! An' he says "Yer dead meat now, pussycat." An' he lunges at Benji-gives him a good chomp right here, on the shoulder! Drew blood on him... Boy, that musta smarted somethin' fierce. Now this is the point where any cat with half a lick of sense in him-even a street cat-would try to high-tail it outta there. Either that or keel over and pray for a quick kibosh. But not Benji.

CHARLIZE

What'd he do?!

LUPIN

(beat)

He laughed. Can ya believe that? He laughs at the big behemoth! Laughs like a maniac! An' he says, "All right, dog, ya wanna dance? Then let's dance." And then-pow! He cuffs 'im right on the nose! An' then pow pow pow! Three lefts, right to the kisser! An' then pow-a right paw to the ear! An' pow! Another left to the mug! He's workin' him over with ones and twos and rights and lefts and combos! Dog's face is all scratched and scuffed up, and he runs right outta the kitchen, yippin' and whinin' all the way outta the building, and we hear Kelly goin' "Get, get! Get outta here!" An' we ain't never seen him since.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

My goodness. Was everyone all right?

LUPIN

Well, Benji and Stella needed a couple shots after that. And from that day forward Benji walked with sort of a limp, ya know?

CHARLIZE

Oh, that must have been so frightening.

LUPIN

Yeah, it sure was scary when it went down. And we was all really shook up for a while. I mean, everyone but Benji.

CHARLIZE

Wow. It's unfortunate... but I understand why Stella feels the way she does about dogs... and the kitchen. And about Benji, too. He was a real hero to her.

LUPIN

Ya can say that again.

CHARLIZE

(beat)

What's wrong, Buddha?

BUDDHA

(pouty)

Nothing.

CHARLIZE

I'm not sure I believe you.

BUDDHA

I said nothing's wrong.

CHARLIZE

Are you ashamed of what happened?

BUDDHA

Of course I'm not ashamed. What gave you that ridiculous idea?! I'm—I'm just—

CHARLIZE

You are ashamed, aren't you?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Well, she's my sister! It should have been *me* rescuing her.

LUPIN

Hey, not every cat's a fighter, Bood.

BUDDHA

(scoffs)

Poppycock.

CHARLIZE

No, Lupin's right. But if you want to protect Stella, isn't there something else you could be doing? Something we *all should* be doing?

BUDDHA

Something else? To what do you refer?

CHARLIZE

Helping Kelly with her job situation! Stella's obviously super worried about that. And frankly, you should be too. Look guys, I happen to know that when a human loses her job, it doesn't always work out well for the pets.

BUDDHA

Yes, but what could we possibly do? We're three cats and a dog, not a *deus ex machina*.

CHARLIZE

But what about that thing Stella mentioned? The nuclear option?

LUPIN

Oy! No way!

BUDDHA

Oh, not *this* again.

CHARLIZE

Well why not?!

BUDDHA

Look, I know Stella means well, but deploying the so-called nuclear option would involve invoking unknowable forces of unspeakably dangerous powers. There's every reason to believe we wouldn't all survive.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

But isn't Kelly worth the risk? And Stella? And the joy of living your lives together?

(BUDDHA and LUPIN just look around, embarrassed.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

Silence, huh? Great. *(beat, sighs)* Well a deal's a deal. I'm ready for the cat toys, Lupin.

LUPIN

Nah, that's all right. I don't feel much like playin' now.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT I

Scene 5

AT RISE: *(KELLY is sitting at the table, trying to do some work on her laptop [or a notepad]. CHARLIZE is on her dog bed. Offstage, BUDDHA and LUPIN are making a ruckus.)*

BUDDHA (OS)

Please Kelly, let us out! Liberate us, we beseech you!

LUPIN (OS)

Yeah Kelly! We wanna play! C'mon, let us out, pleeeeeeease!

BUDDHA (OS)

Kelly! Grant us this day our freedom! Viva la libertad!

LUPIN (OS)

Yeah, Kelly! Freedom!

BUDDHA (OS)

Free as the gazelle runs! Free as the whippoorwill soars! The freedom which releases the soul from the shackles of degradation and sets it aflutter with the exuberance of anticipation!

LUPIN (OS)

Yeah, what he said!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN keep ad-libbing and making noise. KELLY gets up and stomps offstage.)

KELLY (OS)

Guys! Chill out, please! Mumma's trying to work so that we don't get kicked out of here, okay? Thank you!

(KELLY reenters, heads back toward the table, then catches herself. She turns back to the offstage bathroom area.)

KELLY

(cont., OS)

Stella? Come on baby, it's time for your medicine.

(KELLY reenters, leading STELLA to the couch and holding a small syringe.)

Herding Cats

KELLY
(cont.)

Come on, silly goose. The couch is way more comfy than behind the toilet. All right, let's open up.

(KELLY gives STELLA the medicine.)

STELLA

Bleah, tasty.

(KELLY kisses STELLA on her head.)

KELLY

Rest up, Stell.

(KELLY heads back to the table, but the racket at the bedroom door starts again.)

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(OS, ad-libbing)

KELLY! LET US OUT!! RELEASE US!! FREEDOM!! (etc).

KELLY

GUYS!!

(Silence. KELLY sits at the table and makes a phone call.)

KELLY

(cont., on phone)

Hey Suze...? No, just trying to get some work done but Buddha and Lupin are going gonzo, so I locked them in the bedroom... I don't know why, it's a boy-cat thing, they just do that sometimes... so anyway, did you read it...? All right then, what did you think?! Yeah... yeah... uh-huh... What? No, it's not...! No, it's not just like *Stranger Things*! Because that show's set in the eighties, and mine... isn't. And my show has werewolves and that one has vampire lizards or something... What do you mean, werewolves aren't cool anymore? Everyone loves werewolves...! What? Well I'm totally screwed then! No, no Suze... yes, I wanted your honest opinion... sorry.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(OS, ad-libbing)

KELLY!! LET US OUT!! RELEASE US FROM BONDAGE!! (etc).

Herding Cats

KELLY

Wait, hang on... BUDDHA! LUPIN! PLEASE!

(The racket stops.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Suze? Look, I'm calling because... well, Stella's vet bill was more than I expected... they did an x-ray and I had them do bloodwork too, just to be sure. I couldn't say no - it's *Stella!* They gave her antibiotics and some pain medicine. Anyway... I was hoping you could help with a teensy-weensy loan...? Well screw it, then about a handout? C'mon Suze, you're gonna be a big rich lawyer someday...! What? What school expenses? All right, I guess I'll have to sell body parts, then... no, I know it's not your fault. Look, I'd better go. I'm not gonna get any work done here tonight... I don't know, Starbucks I guess. Bye.

(KELLY plunks her face on the table.)

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(OS, ad-libbing)

C'MON KELLY LET US OUT!! WE WANNA PLAY! WOO-HOO-HOO!!

(KELLY gets up, goes to the bedroom door.)

KELLY *(OS)*

HEY! If I let you guys out, are you gonna calm down?

BUDDHA and LUPIN *(OS)*

YES!!

(KELLY frees BUDDHA and LUPIN.)

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(ad-libbing)

WOO-HOO-WOO-HOO-WOO-HOO!! YIPPEE! PLAY PLAY PLAY!! *(etc).*

KELLY

All right all right all right! I swear, you guys should have your own cartoon. Come on, you two.

(KELLY leads BUDDHA and LUPIN offstage to the kitchen.)

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

(beat)

What on earth has gotten into those two?

STELLA

I dunno. Just happens sometimes. Especially with the males. Vet says they just go "crazy cat."

CHARLIZE

Does the vet have a name for it?

STELLA

(beat)

Crazy cat.

CHARLIZE

Oh. What's Kelly gonna do about it?

STELLA

She's gonna give them some kitty ganja. I'm kinda surprised she didn't think of it sooner.

CHARLIZE

Kitty ganja?

STELLA

Yeah. You know, catnip?

CHARLIZE

Oh. Right. I've never actually seen a cat on catnip before.

STELLA

(eye roll)

Well, you're in for a real treat.

(KELLY reenters, with BUDDHA and LUPIN on her heels.)

KELLY

I can't believe I didn't think of this sooner.

(KELLY sprinkles catnip on the turbo scratcher, then goes to the table and gathers her things.)

Herding Cats

KELLY
(cont.)

Charlize? Stella? Have I ever told you what *angels* you are?

(KELLY exits. BUDDHA and LUPIN alternate taking deep sniffs from the scratcher.

MUSIC starts: the instrumental version of "The White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane. BUDDHA and LUPIN speak between sniffs.)

BUDDHA

I'm not getting anything (*sniff*) - are you getting anything?

LUPIN

No I ain't gettin' anythin' (*sniff*) - are you gettin' anythin'?

BUDDHA

No, I'm not getting anything - are you getting anything?

LUPIN

No I ain't gettin' anythin' - are you-

BUDDHA and LUPIN

(pointing at each other)

Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

LUPIN
(cont.)

Whoa, man! That is some really good stuff, man!

BUDDHA

My goodness, I find myself aloft with whimsy!

LUPIN

I'm so high, man!

CHARLIZE

Um, what the -

STELLA

Just keep watching.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

(pointing at the turbo scratcher)
Whoa, check it out, man!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN bat the ball around.)

LUPIN
(cont.)

Whoaaaaa...

BUDDHA

Amazing!

LUPIN

Whoaaaa, man...

BUDDHA

(starting to get up)
Wait, what's this? What's this feeling in my limbs?

LUPIN

(starting to get up)
What's happenin' to ya, man?

BUDDHA

I'm suddenly filled with the urge to twist and gyrate!

LUPIN

You're so high, man!

BUDDHA

I'm not high! How dare you insinuate that I am intoxicated!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN freeze and gawk at each other for another beat)

BUDDHA and LUPIN

Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahaaaa!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN start doing a slinky rhythmic dance.)

CHARLIZE

Oh. My. Goodness.

STELLA

Glad you stuck around for this?

Herding Cats

LUPIN

Whoa, man! I'm dancin'! I'm dancin'!

BUDDHA

I'm possessed of the terpsichorean muse!

LUPIN

Yer dancin', man!

BUDDHA

Look at me! I'm doing the "crane!"

LUPIN

I'm doin' the mashed potato!

BUDDHA

I'm doing the "swan!"

LUPIN

I'm doin' the funky chicken!

CHARLIZE

How long are they gonna be like this?

STELLA

Don't worry, not too long.

(BUDDHA plops to the floor and starts snoring. LUPIN follows suit, landing his head on BUDDHA's belly. Music stops.)

CHARLIZE

Well now. That was different.

STELLA

Worth the price of admission, I hope.

CHARLIZE

(laughs softly)

Those two are a hoot.

STELLA

Um, yeah. They have their moments.

CHARLIZE

Living with male cats is kinda like living with puppies.

Herding Cats

STELLA

You've lived with male cats before?

CHARLIZE

No, puppies.

STELLA

You've lived with puppies?

CHARLIZE

Yeah.

STELLA
(long beat)

You mean you *had* puppies?

CHARLIZE

I did.

STELLA

When?

CHARLIZE

Just last year.

STELLA
(long beat)

Tell me about them.

CHARLIZE

Really?

STELLA

Yeah.

CHARLIZE

Well, I was living as a stray – street dog, right? And as summer's coming around, I'm feeling more and more hungry... and thirsty, and tired. And oh, I was getting *big*—you should've seen me. I spent a lot of time hanging around this little restaurant. There was a lady who worked there who would sneak me scraps out the back door. She was nice... she was really nice. Anyhow, one night, I felt so exhausted that I just lay right down behind that restaurant, and next thing I know, I wake up and I'm at the vet's. And the lady from the restaurant is there. And so are four tiny, adorable, perfect little pit bull puppies.

Herding Cats

STELLA

Wow.

CHARLIZE

Three boys and a girl. A little girl puppy who looked a lot like me. Boy, they were a rowdy little bunch. Growlin' and tusslin' with each other and nippin' at me. They were so stinkin' cute! And they drank me dry, let me tell you! Until they all fell asleep underneath me, of course.

STELLA

Where are they now?

CHARLIZE

I'm not sure, Stella. But the restaurant lady said she was gonna work hard to get them all adopted. She was dedicated, you know? I can't be positive but I've got this feeling deep inside that they're okay. I think they were lucky.

STELLA

I guess we've all been lucky. But how did you end up at the shelter?

CHARLIZE

The restaurant lady already had two dogs - older dogs - and a little human child, too. She was spending a lot of time and money on us. And one day I heard her say something about how her boss just couldn't keep her on board if she was gonna miss more time from work. So she took me to the shelter and told them to take good care of me.

STELLA

Geez, that stinks.

CHARLIZE

Yeah. But if that hadn't happened, I never would've met any of you! Right?

STELLA

(shakes head gently)

You sure have a positive way of looking at things.

CHARLIZE

I try. So, you and Buddha have been with Kelly since you were kittens?

Herding Cats

STELLA

Since we were a few weeks old.

CHARLIZE

How'd you all get together?

STELLA

Well, our mom didn't really want much to do with humans. I heard Kelly refer to her as a feral cat. She would roam around finding stuff for us to eat... birds, mice. She was a good hunter. But Kelly would leave her cat food in her dad's barn behind the house. We were born in that barn, in the hayloft. Me, Buddha, and three brothers and a sister. Anyway, one day our mom stopped showing up to feed us.

CHARLIZE

Oh no.

STELLA

And Kelly knew we didn't have much of a shot out there on our own. So, she raised us from the ground up - she bottle-fed us, she took us to the vet - she worked so hard to keep us healthy. Eventually she got some friends to adopt the rest of the litter, but she kept me and Buddha.

CHARLIZE

Wow. Kelly's really amazing.

STELLA

Yeah.

CHARLIZE

What about Lupin?

STELLA

Lupin? Well, a few years ago Kelly was shopping at the pet supply store, and they had a few cats there available for adoption. They'd picked up Lupin as a stray, you know, a-

STELLA and CHARLIZE

Street cat-

Herding Cats

STELLA

(cont.)

Right! Anyway, he's there in his cage, and when he sees Kelly he starts acting like a big old ham. Rolling onto his back, showing his belly, purring real loud, and tagging her between the bars. She knew right away she had to have him.

CHARLIZE

(laughs)

I love it. And... Benji?

STELLA

(beat, more somber)

Kelly found Benji in the woods behind her folks' house. She had no idea where he came from or how he got there. He was pretty wild, but he took a liking to Kelly. She decided that he'd be better off with her than out there by himself. It took him a while to adjust, but he got used to being a house cat. He became totally devoted to Kelly. And later, he was, he was...

CHARLIZE

He was really special to you, wasn't he?

(STELLA nods.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

Aw, Stella!

STELLA

What?

CHARLIZE

All this talk about family is getting me choked up!

(CHARLIZE gets up and heads toward STELLA.)

STELLA

Whoa, whoa! What are you doing?!

CHARLIZE

I wanna hug you!

(STELLA scrunches defensively and displays her "claws." CHARLIZE sees this and stops.)

Herding Cats

STELLA

We're not there yet.

CHARLIZE

(beat, disappointed)

Oh... oh. I should have known better. Sorry.

*(CHARLIZE slogs back to her bed, while
BUDDHA and LUPIN begin to stir and yawn.)*

STELLA

Looks like the two flower children are waking up.

CHARLIZE

Huh? Oh, right.

(BUDDHA and LUPIN sit up and stretch.)

BUDDHA

Aaaaaaaahhh. What a delightful siesta.

LUPIN

Aaaaaaaahhh. Yeah, that was a good snooze.

BUDDHA

I feel fully refreshed and ready for a good catnap. *(beat)*
Oh, hello Charlize, hello Stella.

CHARLIZE

Hey.

STELLA

Hey.

LUPIN

Heya, ladies. Whatcha been up to?

CHARLIZE

Nothing. Just girl talk.

LUPIN

Ohhh, girl talk. Can't say I ever engage in much -

*(KELLY bursts back into the apartment. She's
on her phone and she's breathless.)*

Herding Cats

KELLY

Ohmygod! Suze! Suze! She's stealing my idea... she's stealing my idea...! I said, my evil *bitch* supervisor is stealing my idea...!! What?! I AM CALM!! Andy just called me... Andy - the director of new programming. He said that they have to downsize, and they're ending my probation early, and if I don't make a killer pitch tomorrow, then I'm out on my ass...! YES!! No, those weren't his exact words, but do you know what he told me?! He said that I should look to *Madison* for inspiration, because she made such a good pitch for her werewolf show. *Her* werewolf show?! MY WEREWOLF SHOW!! She's scamming everyone and there's nothing I can do about it... what? Because it's her word against mine... oh Suze, what am I going to do? If they fire me, I won't be able to keep all the cats, and Charlize will have to go back to the shelter! I'll never find a cheap place that allows pets. And technically I'm only allowed to have two cats! Lupin isn't even supposed to be here!

LUPIN

What?!

KELLY

And neither is the dog. No, I can't move back home - Dad's allergies would kill him. Suze, I have no idea what I'm gonna do. I can't lose my pets! Can I come over, *please...?! I'm on my way. Bye.*

(KELLY hangs up and looks one at a time at STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE. She begins to sob and exits the apartment.)

LUPIN

(long beat)

Oh, man. I'm an undocumented illegal.

(STELLA gets up, and marches to the center of the room.)

STELLA

(to LUPIN)

Are you in?

LUPIN

Yeah, I'm in.

Herding Cats

STELLA
(to BUDDHA)

Buddha?

BUDDHA

Yes.

STELLA
(to CHARLIZE)

And you?

CHARLIZE

Heck yeah, I'm in.

STELLA
All right then. Let's do this. The nuclear option.

(BLACKOUT)

(END ACT I)

Herding Cats

ACT II

Scene 1

AT RISE: *(BUDDHA and LUPIN are on the floor, doing sit-ups. STELLA holds BUDDHA's feet to the floor and CHARLIZE does so for LUPIN.)*

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

STELLA

C'mon, one for Morris!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

CHARLIZE

One for Lassie!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

STELLA

One for Rum Tum Tugger!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

CHARLIZE

One for Rin Tin Tin!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

STELLA

And one for Kelly!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

UNNNNGGGHH!!

(STELLA lets BUDDHA go, and CHARLIZE follows suit with LUPIN.)

BUDDHA

(exhausted)

Are you... are you going to explain... why this is necessary?

Herding Cats

STELLA

Because you need to be strong. You're the brawn of the operation. That's your role. And Lupin is recon.

BUDDHA

When the devil was this decided?

STELLA

Just now.

BUDDHA

Well if I'm the brawn, and Lupin's reconnaissance, then which role are you?

STELLA

I'm the brains. And Charlize is moral support.

LUPIN

(thumbs-up from floor)

Roger that.

CHARLIZE

What? Wait - moral support?

STELLA

Yeah.

CHARLIZE

Are you saying I'm some kind of cheerleader or something?

STELLA,

Look, it's a good job. Are you in, or aren't you?

CHARLIZE

(frustrated sigh)

I'm in.

LUPIN

(getting up)

All right, we got brains, we got brawns, we got recon, and a bonus moral support dog. So all we're missing is our-

STELLA, LUPIN, and BUDDHA

Point man.

CHARLIZE

Um, did you say "point man?"

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Correct. A vital role, that of the point man.

CHARLIZE

What's the point man responsible for?

BUDDHA

Amongst other things, the point man completes the procession of unity.

CHARLIZE

"Procession of unity?" What's that?

BUDDHA

In the deployment of the nuclear option, the procession of unity refers to the—

STELLA

Guys, we're short on time, so save the explanations for later. Lupin, you're recon, so you're in charge of recruitment. Who do you want to enlist as point man?

LUPIN

The way I see it, there's only one choice. It's gotta be Rocko.

STELLA

Rocko? Who's Rocko?

LUPIN

He's this cat I knew from back in the day, but he lives in the neighborhood now, a couple blocks over. Tough guy - stocky, ya know? Anyways, I got a favor to call in, so I know he's good for it. Code of the street, and all.

STELLA

All right... all right, that could work. But how are you gonna get out of here? Kelly's got the place secured so that we can't get out - so that we're safe in here.

LUPIN

I got it all worked out, Stell. I squeeze through the old mouse hole behind Kelly's bed, the one she ain't never had fixed - then I climb up that ventilation whatchmacallit, and I run across the roof—

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Guys—

LUPIN

Slide down the rain spout, run through the yard and scale over the fence—

CHARLIZE

Guys—

LUPIN

And then I'm free and clear, all the way to Rocko's place.

CHARLIZE

Guys!!

BUDDHA

Yes, Charlize?

CHARLIZE

This is ridiculous! Why would you send Lupin on some dangerous mission to find some cat you don't even know, when I'm *right here*?! Forget about Rocko! I'll be your point man!

STELLA

(beat)

Huh?

CHARLIZE

I said, let *me* be point man.

STELLA

(beat)

But you're not a cat.

CHARLIZE

So?

STELLA

So, the nuclear option requires four *cats*. Everybody knows that.

CHARLIZE

Are you sure? (beat) Buddha?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Hmmm, yes, Charlize, According to all the classical folklore and oral histories, deploying the nuclear option necessitates the exclusive participation of four cats. I know you mean well, but it's best that we do not tamper with the prescribed methodology.

CHARLIZE

Seriously?

BUDDHA

Yes.

CHARLIZE

(sigh; hugs LUPIN)

Fine... well I guess you should get going, then. Oh, please be careful, Lupin.

BUDDHA

Yes. Better be on your way, Lupin. If Kelly returns home to find you absent, that will put additional strain on her frayed faculties.

STELLA

C'mon Lupin, I'll see you to the mouse hole!

LUPIN

Right!

(STELLA and LUPIN exit to the bedroom.)

CHARLIZE

Oh Buddha, I don't know about this. Lupin out there on his own? It seems so risky, you know?

BUDDHA

I share your apprehension, Charlize. But if anyone is up to the task at hand, it is Lupin. He is, after all, a resourceful and very agile cat.

CHARLIZE

You really think he can do it?

BUDDHA

I do. Please share in my confidence.

Herding Cats

STELLA (O.S.)

(screams)

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!

BUDDHA

Then again, perhaps my conviction was premature?

(STELLA bursts back in. As the next line is spoken, LUPIN enters.)

CHARLIZE

What happened?! What's wrong?!

STELLA

We... we can't... we can't get out! We're trapped in here!

LUPIN

The mouse hole. It ain't there no more. It's been fixed.

BUDDHA

Fixed?!

LUPIN

Yeah, somebody musta patched it up. That Eric guy, I bet.

(STELLA runs about the space, looking for another way out.)

STELLA

Kelly's lousy rotten goody-two-shoes wanna-be boyfriend fixed our only way of getting out of here?! But we can't do the nuclear option without another cat! We have to find another way! Buddha, grab Lupin's feet! I'll take his arms and we'll throw him through a window!

LUPIN

No way! Are you crazy?!

BUDDHA

Stella, please... you know we can't do that.

STELLA

Then our plan is ruined! We're done for!

CHARLIZE

Stella! We're not done for! Let me be point man! So what if I'm a dog?! You've got nothing to lose at this point!

Herding Cats

STELLA

No! It won't work if you aren't a cat!

LUPIN

Yeah, ya gotta be a cat, Charlize. Tell her, Buddha.

BUDDHA

Charlize, I'm afraid Stella is correct. Everything that has been told throughout the ages regarding this radical undertaking says that it can only possibly work if-

CHARLIZE

(firmly)

Benji would have done it.

STELLA

What did you say?

CHARLIZE

You heard me.

STELLA

(anger growing)

I'm not sure I did.

CHARLIZE

I said, *Benji* would have done it.

STELLA

You have no business talking about-

CHARLIZE

Oh, like hell I don't, Stella. And you know that if he were in your place, he'd have the guts to include *me* in your exclusive little party.

STELLA

You've got some nerve, *dog*.

CHARLIZE

Damn right I have, *cat*. Look, Stella. I know about what happened, with you, and *Benji*, and that dog that attacked you. And I know that-

STELLA

WHAT?! You know about *THAT?!*

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yeah, that's right.

STELLA

(to BUDDHA and LUPIN)

You told her! You told her about THAT?!

LUPIN,

Well, we uh—we better do more exercises!

BUDDHA

Righto!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN flop to the floor.)

STELLA

I can't believe you told her! BUDDHA! LUPIN! GET UP! GET UP AND LOOK AT ME!

CHARLIZE

Oh, knock it off, Stella. Quit yelling at them. How about you look at me instead.

(STELLA, furious, faces CHARLIZE.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

As I was saying, I know that — hell, you know that Benji would have done anything to protect you. Anything to keep you all together. Anything to help Kelly. Even if it meant risking everything by including a dog.

(STELLA does a long slow burn at CHARLIZE.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

What do you wanna do about it, Stella? You wanna fight me?

(After a tense moment, KELLY enters, on her phone.)

KELLY

Yes. Yes, of course I understand. I fully understand the gravity of the situation. No, I'm not being sarcastic... Yes, I know that you're in charge now, Madison. *(beat, eyes closed, teeth gritted)* I mean, I know that you're in charge now... Miss von Teufel.

Herding Cats

(KELLY hangs up.)

KELLY
(cont.)

Guys, I know that you can't understand what I'm saying to you, but if you could, I would want you know that I tried. I really tried always to do what's best for you and keep you happy. And no matter what happens, or where you end up, I'll always love you. All of you... no matter where you are.

(KELLY hugs BUDDHA, LUPIN, CHARLIZE, and STELLA in succession, then takes her things and exits the apartment, crying. The pets are silent for a long moment.)

STELLA
You've got it.

CHARLIZE
What?

STELLA
You've got it. The job. You're point man.

CHARLIZE
Thank you.

STELLA
(to LUPIN, pointing at CHARLIZE)
When it's time for physical contact - with her - you do it, all right?

LUPIN
Yeah, no problem - understood.

(STELLA gets on the couch.)

LUPIN
(cont.)
What do we do now, Stella?

STELLA
Grab some rest while you can. Tonight, we're going nuclear.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT II

Scene 2

AT RISE: *All the pets appear to be asleep: STELLA and BUDDHA on the couch, LUPIN by the turbo scratcher on the floor, and CHARLIZE on her dog bed. STELLA opens her eyes, stretches, and then she puts her paws to her belly and makes a pained sound.*

STELLA

Unnggh. Guys you awake?

LUPIN

Yeah, I couldn't sleep. Been too busy thinkin'.

BUDDHA

Doubly so for me.

CHARLIZE

Same here.

STELLA

Guess that makes four of us.

CHARLIZE

So what happens now?

STELLA

Buddha, you explain it as well as anyone.

BUDDHA

And to think I'm the brawn of the operation. Anyhow, Charlize - are you familiar with the disparity in the comprehension of vocalizations, between humans and their pets?

CHARLIZE

I'm - I'm not sure. How do you mean, Buddha?

BUDDHA

Take Kelly, for instance. You understand everything she says perfectly well, correct?

CHARLIZE

Sure, why wouldn't I?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Ah, but therein lies the imbalance. For you see, whilst you understand human speech perfectly well, humans in turn merely hear from us an assortment of wordless utterances. In cats, this is known as "meowing." And in dogs, it's referred to as "barking."

CHARLIZE

Oh, sure. I've heard humans talk about meowing and barking plenty of times.

BUDDHA

But have you considered *why* humans hear these sounds without perceiving language, semantics, or syntax?

CHARLIZE

Gosh, no. I've never really thought about it. It seems to me that most humans seem to know how we're feeling - if we're happy, or scared, or hungry. I haven't really paid much thought to the idea that humans don't understand us word for word. Why do you think that is, Buddha?

BUDDHA

No one knows for certain, Charlize. Humans are such a curious species. Perhaps they're so preoccupied with their own problems and fears and aspirations that they've drained themselves of the energy required to truly hear us.

CHARLIZE

Wow, you really think so?

BUDDHA

Well, it's a theory held by some cats. But alas, Charlize. Therein dwells the mystery - and the secret.

CHARLIZE

Secret?

BUDDHA

Yes! For you see, there are a select few - a very limited number - of humans who comprehend cats and dogs perfectly well.

CHARLIZE

There are?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Correct! And these humans are known as...

CHARLIZE

(beat)

Known as what?!

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

Eccentrics!

(Music: something sci-fi-ish.)

CHARLIZE

Eccentrics?

BUDDHA

Yes. Most unusual, idiosyncratic humans, each invested with a particular strangeness, quirk, and charm.

CHARLIZE

Strangeness, quirk, and charm?

BUDDHA

Strangeness!

STELLA

Quirk!

LUPIN

And charm!

CHARLIZE

And these humans are called eccentrics, you say?

BUDDHA

Yes. And every era brings its own eccentrics, who solely can bridge the gap between human, *canine* and *feline*.

CHARLIZE

Like, wow! But who started it all? Who was the first eccentric?

BUDDHA

Now *that* is a very perceptive question.

CHARLIZE

Um, thanks. But what's the answer?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Well let's see, what would be the most efficient and illustrative means of edifying you... hmmm. I suppose we could try pantomime, or interpretive dance, or - ah, I know - a protracted series of detailed lectures!

STELLA

We don't have time for a protracted series of detailed lectures.

LUPIN

Hey, wait a second youze guys - look!

(LUPIN takes KELLY's phone from the table, which she's forgotten to take with her.)

LUPIN

(cont.)

This thing'll show ya all ya need to know, Charlize.

BUDDHA

Of course! Kelly's omni-directional data transceiver!

STELLA

Phone. She calls it her phone.

BUDDHA

I like the way I said it better. Gather round, everyone.

(LUPIN sits on the couch with STELLA and CHARLIZE at his sides. He holds the phone up so all the pets can see what's on screen. BUDDHA paces behind them. The audience sees projections behind the pets, representing what's seen on the phone.)

BUDDHA

(cont.)

Now Charlize, do remind me, what was your question?

CHARLIZE

I was asking who the first eccentric was?

BUDDHA

Yes. The identity of the first eccentric is a matter of speculation and rumor. But there are some who believe it was an ancient Greek scribe known as Aeschlyus.

Herding Cats

STELLA

Siri, show me Aeschylus!

(Optional SFX: Siri's voice: "Okay.")

(We see a projection: a statue of the playwright Aeschylus, with a cat superimposed.)

CHARLIZE

Um, Esk-ill-uss?

LUPIN

Yeah, the father of classical theatrical expression, ya know?

CHARLIZE

(huh?)

Um, sure.

BUDDHA

Yet others contend that it was a sainted French noblewoman of the fifteenth century called Jeanne d'Arc.

STELLA

Siri, show me Jeanne d'Arc!

(Optional SFX: Siri's voice: "Here you go.")

(We see a projection: a painting of Joan of Arc, with a dog superimposed.)

CHARLIZE

Uh, Jeannie Dark?

LUPIN

Yeah, defeated the British at the Siege of Orleans during the Hundred Years War, ya know?

CHARLIZE

I did not - I did not know that.

BUDDHA

And still, there are others who say that the first eccentric to receive the divine gift was Neanderthal man -

Herding Cats

STELLA

Siri, show me Neanderthal man!

(Optional SFX: Siri's voice: "You got it.")

(We see a projection: a picture of a Neanderthal and a saber-tooth-cat.)

BUDDHA

Who did battle with the mighty *S. Fatalis*—

LUPIN

A.K.A. the saber-toothed cat of pre-historiological times—

BUDDHA

Before being fossilized in the tar pits of La Brea.

CHARLIZE

Uh, so the person who's gonna help Kelly is a Greek theater guy or a French war lady or a fossilized tiger dude?

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

No!

CHARLIZE

No?!

BUDDHA

No! If an eccentric is to help Kelly, then it must be one of *her era* - of the present day. And *in* the present day, eccentric humans are only found in the most eccentric industry of all.

CHARLIZE

Which is what?

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

The performing arts.

CHARLIZE

The performing arts? You mean like singers, and actors, and acrobats?

BUDDHA

Yes. And musicians, and artists, and authors. Even a professional athlete or two.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

But what do these – eccentrics – have to do with how we're gonna help Kelly? The nuclear option?

(Music starts: Also Sprach Zarathustra, aka the theme from 2001: A Space Odyssey. A montage of projections begins: photos of celebrities posing with cats or dogs.)

BUDDHA

Because the nuclear option entails that the four of us make contact with an eccentric whom Kelly herself holds particularly fond and dear.

CHARLIZE

You mean we go visit some famous human that Kelly's a fan of, and ask them for help?

BUDDHA

Yes, but not physical contact. *Psychic* contact.

CHARLIZE

Psychic contact? But how?

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

Through the *ritual*.

CHARLIZE

The nuclear option is the *ritual*?

LUPIN

Yeah, and they say it's dangerous!

CHARLIZE

Dangerous? But why?

BUDDHA

Because traversing the spiritual plane of thought is said to unleash great quantities of pure, unbridled energy.

STELLA

And they say there's always a sacrifice involved.

CHARLIZE

There *is*? Oh man, you guys have turned my brain into kibble. But which eccentric are we supposed to contact? Who's the famous human that Kelly admires so much?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Well, there's the question of the hour. Who, indeed?

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN
(paws on chins)

Hmmm.

(A long moment passes as the cats think.)

CHARLIZE

Well come on you guys, don't leave me on a cliff here!

(All the cats gasp ["eureka!" moment].)

BUDDHA

Yes! Of course! The answer is obvious! Stella, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

STELLA

Yes! Yes I am! Lupin, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

LUPIN

Yeah! I'm thinkin' what youze thinkin', and youze thinkin' what Buddha's thinkin', which means that I'm thinkin' what Buddha's thinkin', which means that were all thinkin' what everyone else is thinkin', and so-

CHARLIZE

GUYS! The suspense is killing me! Who?! Who is the eccentric that we must contact in order to save Kelly?!

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN

Siri, show me HASSELHOFF!!

(The theme from 2001 crescendoes, and we see a projection of actor David Hasselhoff.)

This continues into a montage of Hasselhoff photos, the last one showing him holding a cat [Google it!] The cats raise their arms in reverence, until the music stops.)

CHARLIZE

Wait, who?

STELLA

Hasselhoff! Respected by men! Desired by women!

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Hasselhoff! Canonized by half of western Europe!

LUPIN

And he's got a talking car, too!

CHARLIZE

So let me get this straight: to help Kelly, we hafta do the *nuclear option*. And the nuclear option means doing the *ritual*. And the ritual means spiritually contacting the *eccentric*. And the eccentric is this Hasselhoff guy?

LUPIN

Yeah, and Kelly sure loved him.

BUDDHA

Loved him she did! She viewed the entire output of his *curriculum vitae* via an on-demand telemetric service known as Nutflex.

STELLA and LUPIN

Netflix.

BUDDHA

Quite.

CHARLIZE

And this guy can help Kelly? Through *psychic contact*?

BUDDHA

The odds of success may be low, but if we find ourselves in his favor, then just perhaps.

CHARLIZE

Well this is something you don't hear every day.

BUDDHA

And we must prepare for action, as time is obviously short.

LUPIN

Yeah, and we gotta start rehearsin' like right now, youze guys! This is gonna hafta be one slam-dunk heads-up laser-focused practice session, and I mean like pronto!

CHARLIZE

Okay, gotcha. But what was that you were saying before, about a *sacrifice*?

Herding Cats

STELLA

Exactly what I said. It's what all the legends say about the nuclear option. One of us is going to fall.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT II

Scene 3

AT RISE: *(We hear moody, perhaps primitive sounding music. STELLA, BUDDHA, and CHARLIZE are pacing nervously. We hear rain outside.*

STELLA doubles over, clutches her belly, and lets out another groan of pain.)

STELLA

Unnnnnnnnggggh...

BUDDHA

Stella, are you well enough for this?

STELLA

(a bit irritable)

Yeah, I'm fine! I'm just trying to stay focused for the mission. I'm... unnnnnnggggh.

CHARLIZE

Stella, if you're not up to this, we don't have to do it.

STELLA

No. I'm all right. This is our chance. We're doing this.

(LUPIN enters from the bedroom area, carrying a big box full of props.)

STELLA

(cont.)

Did you get everything?

LUPIN

Yeah, I think so! We sure are lucky Kelly didn't lock them doors before she left.

STELLA

All right, then, let's get started. Buddha? Phase one.

BUDDHA

(nervously)

Phase one: benediction. We gather here tonight, within the confines of this outhouse—

Herding Cats

STELLA

Townhouse!

BUDDHA

Er, within the confines of this townhouse, as friends and allies, supplicants and petitioners, canine and feline, one and all!

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE

(speaking the words)

Woof woof, meow! Woof woof, meow!

BUDDHA

And we do so with the aim of protecting the livelihood, restoring the confidence, and preserving the sanity of our beloved guardian and protector: the human known as Kelly!

STELLA, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE

HAIL KELLY!!

(LUPIN takes a framed photo of KELLY from the box and holds it overhead. He and everyone else look upward, then at each other, not knowing what to expect next.)

STELLA

(through gritted teeth)

Keep. Going.

BUDDHA

Er—and to achieve our goal, we dare make this intrepid call, to transcend the barriers of space, time, and species—to humbly beseech the one human who might answer our invocation, a paragon of artistry and masculinity—the noble eccentric known as Hasselhoff!

STELLA

HAIL HASSELHOFF!

(From the props, LUPIN holds up photo of Hasselhoff [or magazine with his picture.]

LUPIN

HAIL HASSELHOFF!

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

(Southern revival voice)

Hallelujah and hail, ah say! Ah say haaaaaillll him in his glory! Haaaaaillll him in his grandiosity! Ah say haaaaillll to the mighty Hasselhoff!

(*Everyone stares at CHARLIZE nervously.*)

CHARLIZE

(beat)

What? I thought we were supposed to be enthusiastic!

STELLA

C'mon, go on!

BUDDHA

Er-yes! Hasselhoff! Who captured the hearts of ladies and gentlemen, of boys and girls of all ages!

CHARLIZE

Who so gallantly performed in *Jekyll and Hyde: Direct from Broadway!*

STELLA

(sophisticated "Jekyll" voice)

How do you do, good sir?

CHARLIZE

(scary "Hyde" voice)

Mwahahaha!

STELLA

(sophisticated "Jekyll" voice)

I say how do you do, good sir?

CHARLIZE

(scary "Hyde" voice)

Mwahahaha!

LUPIN

And who did go triple platinum in the proud nation of Disneyland!

(*There is a CLAP of THUNDER and all the LIGHTS GO OUT for a moment.*)

Herding Cats

LUPIN
(cont.)

Wha-what just happened?!

CHARLIZE
(gulp)

Did we do something wrong?

STELLA
Switzerland, you doofus! Not Disneyland! C'mon, you have to say it right!

LUPIN
Uh - who did go triple platinum in the proud nation of Switzerland?

STELLA
(after a beat)
I think we're okay... keep going, Buddha!

BUDDHA
Um - Hasselhoff, who set the Guinness World Record for the most observed human on television!

LUPIN
Who ably portrayed Michael Knight, crimefighter and master of automotive artificial intelligence!

CHARLIZE
And Mitch Buchannon - lifeguard, heartthrob, and noble protector of the peaches of Los Angeles!

(Another CLAP of THUNDER. LIGHTS GO RED.)

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE
AAAIIIIIEEEE!!!

CHARLIZE
What - what was that?!

STELLA
Yeah, what was that weird color?!

LUPIN
Oh jeez, I think that was red! Wasn't it?

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

I don't know, I'm a dog! Dogs can't see red!

LUPIN

Well neither can cats, but I'm pretty sure that was red! Oh man, I don't think this is workin'!

CHARLIZE

But what – what'd I do?!

STELLA

You said *peaches* of Los Angeles! It's *beaches*, not peaches!

CHARLIZE

What? I didn't say peaches.

(CLAP of THUNDER. LIGHTS GO RED again.)

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE
AAAAIIIIIEEEE!!!

CHARLIZE

(after a beat)

Uhhh, protector of the *beaches*? Of Los Angeles?

(The gang ducks and covers again. After a moment of calm, LUPIN speaks.)

LUPIN

Uh, are we okay? Are we still alive?

STELLA

(puffs a couple breaths into her paw)

Yeah, alive here.

CHARLIZE

(pats herself down)

Yeah, me too.

BUDDHA

(lightly slaps cheeks with both paws)

I am also still functional.

LUPIN

(pinches himself)

Ow! Okay... I'm good too. But uh, are we doin' this right?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

I can't be certain. We'll have to hope that our benediction has been accepted.

STELLA

Yeah. But we have to keep moving. Buddha. It's time for phase two.

BUDDHA

Yes... phase two: the homage. Props, Lupin?

LUPIN

Props, gottem right here.

(MUSIC starts: the theme from "Knight Rider".

Lupin rummages through the props and hands them out: a spacy-looking visor or glasses for BUDDHA, toy guns for STELLA and CHARLIZE, and a leather jacket for himself. LUPIN and BUDDHA put on their props, while STELLA and CHARLIZE hide behind the couch. BUDDHA gets on all fours and LUPIN sits right on top of him, pretending to drive him around like a car.)

BUDDHA

Vrrrooom! Vrooom vrooom vrrrooom!! Screech!

LUPIN

Why'd you stop, Kitt?

BUDDHA

My sensors are detecting trouble up ahead, Michael. I think we'd better investigate.

LUPIN

Good thinking, Kitt. say, who's that over there?

(STELLA and CHARLIZE spring up.)

STELLA and CHARLIZE

Help! Help! Help us!

LUPIN

Who are you?!

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

We're defenseless socialites from Beverly Hills!

STELLA

And we're on the run from corrupt government agents!

LUPIN

Corrupt government agents? Then you'd better come with us!

BUDDHA

No Michael, it's a trap!

LUPIN

Trap?!

(STELLA and CHARLIZE wield their guns.)

STELLA

(Russian accent)

Hahaha! Zat ees right, American. Vee are not socialites.
Vee are sexy Soviet spies.

CHARLIZE

(Russian accent)

Da, American. And vee are here to steal talking Pontiac
Firebird for make benefit of glorious Kremlin!

STELLA

But first, you vill die, courtesy of our glorious Soviet
engineered laser guns.

BUDDHA and LUPIN

Laser guns?!

CHARLIZE

Zat ees correct, Meester Agent Knight! Now say "dos
vedanya" to wretched capitaleest republic!

BUDDHA

Duck, Michael!

*(LUPIN spins off BUDDHA and shields himself
behind him.)*

STELLA and CHARLIZE

Pew pew! Pew pew pew!

Herding Cats

LUPIN

These sexy Soviet spies mean business, Kitt!

BUDDHA

But my molecular bonded shell plating will only withstand so much laser fire, Michael!

LUPIN

If only a beach-based rescue squad were here, maybe we'd stand a chance!

BUDDHA

You mean—?

LUPIN

That's right, Kitt!

(LUPIN scrambles out of his leather jacket and everyone puts their props down. The animals all surround the heap of props, backs to the audience.)

MUSIC starts: the theme from "Baywatch."

After a few moments of fumbling around, all four characters turn around and face the audience in a line. BUDDHA is now wearing red swimming trunks. The other characters are wearing luxurious wigs. LUPIN's wig is long and blonde. He also has a whistle around his neck.

The animals smile at the audience and toss their heads back like fashion models. BUDDHA flexes his muscles while the others run their fingers through their hair. Then everyone runs in place in slow motion, like in the Baywatch opening titles. After a few moments of this, STELLA and CHARLIZE hide behind the couch while BUDDHA and LUPIN speak.)

BUDDHA

Another safe morning at the shore, C.J. No incidents reported.

Herding Cats

LUPIN

(girlish voice)

That's right, Mitch! We're the best lifeguards in all of Los Angeles County!

BUDDHA

And the best looking, too! Say-what's that over there? Sounds like trouble!

LUPIN

Trouble? Where?!

(STELLA and CHARLIZE spring up and take center stage. They're hiding something behind their backs.)

STELLA and CHARLIZE

Help! Help! Help us!

BUDDHA

Look, C.J.! Defenseless swimsuit models!

STELLA

Help! We lost our surfboards-

CHARLIZE

And the totally gnarly California riptide is dragging us out to sea!

LUPIN

We have to rescue them, Mitch!

(BUDDHA and LUPIN "swim" over to the flailing STELLA and CHARLIZE.)

BUDDHA

Hurry, ladies! Take our hands... wait! You're not swimsuit models!

STELLA

That's right! We're-

(STELLA and CHARLIZE throw off their wigs, and put on what they'd hidden - little caps that make you look like a shark.)

Herding Cats

STELLA and CHARLIZE

Great white sharks!

LUPIN

Oh no, Mitch! If these sharks eat us, that might be bad!

BUDDHA

(flexing his muscles)

But these sharks are no match for my deltoids.

LUPIN

(flaunting his wig)

Or my naturally sun-bleached hair.

CHARLIZE

Arrgh! Curse you, Baywatch! You win this time, but—

STELLA and CHARLIZE

(Russian accents)

Ve'll be back!

BUDDHA and LUPIN

Soviet sharks!

(The LIGHTS TURN BLUE for a moment and a CHIME sounds, as if from a clock tower.)

CHARLIZE

Hey! The light! That was *blue* just now! But why did that happen?

LUPIN

Yeah, and what was that bell?

BUDDHA

I'm not sure - but it may have been a signal, to let us know that we are finding favor!

LUPIN

Good! But that storm sure is gettin' stronger, ya know?!

BUDDHA

Yes! As our ritual proceeds, the elements become unmoored and threaten to careen into chaos!

CHARLIZE

Then we'd better hurry! It's time for the last part, right?

Herding Cats

STELLA

Right... the final phase! Buddha?

BUDDHA

Final phase: the attestation of our guardian and protector—the human Kelly Larson!

STELLA and CHARLIZE

HAIL KELLY!

LUPIN

C'mon guys, grab your stuff!

(The pets rummage through the props again, and each one comes away holding a different item. From left to right stand BUDDHA, STELLA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE.)

BUDDHA

And so that our eccentric benefactor may know precisely the human whose honor we pray he restore, we hereby offer an attestation of Kelly Larson, via this presentation of her most preferred personal effects!

(BUDDHA holds a bottle of hair spray aloft.)

BUDDHA

(cont.)

I present: Kelly's favorite follicular elixir!

(BUDDHA sprays his head, then drops the hair spray.)

BUDDHA

(cont.)

And now we convene the procession of unity!

(BUDDHA and STELLA clasp paws together. With her free paw, STELLA holds a makeup brush.)

STELLA

I present: Kelly's favorite facial cosmetic!

(STELLA daubs a bit of the powder onto her face, then drops it.)

Herding Cats

STELLA

And now we extend the procession of unity!

(STELLA and LUPIN clasp paws. With his free paw, LUPIN holds up a bag of turkey jerky.)

LUPIN

I present: Kelly's favorite food, a tasty bag of-

STELLA

Wait! That's not right, Lupin! *Point man* gets the food!

LUPIN

What, are ya sure?!

BUDDHA

Yes, Lupin! The comestible is for the point man! The wearable is for you! Quickly, switch with Charlize!

STELLA

Yeah, switch with *her*!

LUPIN

Oh jeez, all right!

(LUPIN hastily switches items with CHARLIZE, so that she now has the turkey jerky, and he has a pair of underwear, which he holds up.)

LUPIN

I present: Kelly's favorite... bloomers!

(LUPIN looks on cluelessly for a moment.)

STELLA

Hurry, Lupin!

(LUPIN shrugs, then slips on the undies.)

LUPIN

And now we extend the procession of unity!

(LUPIN tries to clasp paws with CHARLIZE.)

LUPIN

(cont.)

What? Oh no! Our paws! Our paws don't fit!

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

It's because I'm double-toed, remember?!

BUDDHA

It's your polydactyly! But Stella has the same condition! Stella, you must join Charlize in procession!

STELLA

No... I can't... I can't! Buddha, you do it!

(The LIGHTS FLASH RED as THUNDER sounds.)

BUDDHA

But I cannot, Stella! Only you can make the physical connection! Change places with Lupin!

STELLA

But I can't! She's a dog...

LUPIN

Guys! Ain't Charlize supposed to eat the food first?!

BUDDHA

You're right Lupin! Make haste, Charlize! Consume the food!

CHARLIZE

I present Kelly's favorite food—a bag of tasty organic turkey jerky!

(CHARLIZE takes a bite of the turkey jerky. LUPIN quickly switches places with STELLA. He's now between BUDDHA and STELLA, holding their paws.)

CHARLIZE

(with a mouthful of food)

And now we complete the procession of unity!

(CHARLIZE offers her free paw to STELLA.)

BUDDHA

Stella, now! Complete the procession before we lose favor!

STELLA

I can't! I can't! She's a dog... I'm afraid!

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

Stella, you must!

(STELLA weakly reaches out to the still-chewing CHARLIZE. CHARLIZE adopts a look somewhere between brokenhearted and wildly vicious.)

CHARLIZE

DON'T TOUCH MY FOOD!

STELLA

I can't do it!! She'll attack me... she'll hurt me.

CHARLIZE

NOBODY TOUCHES MY FOOD!!

LUPIN

Oh no! Charlize's food aggression is actin' up again! She can't help it! Stella, ya gotta get past it!

STELLA

I can't get past it!

CHARLIZE

DO YOU WANT ME TO BITE YOU?!!

BUDDHA

Stella! You must complete the procession now! It's the only way to save Kelly! STELLA - PLEASE!!

STELLA

All right! I'll do it! FOR KELLY, I'LL DO IT!

(With a shout, STELLA lunges and clasps the paw of the snarling CHARLIZE.)

The LIGHTS GO BLUE as we hear a clock CHIME TWELVE TIMES.

The animals freeze in awe. When the clock stops, the lighting goes back to normal, and the sounds of the storm fade out. The pets continue to stare in amazement, still locking paws together.)

Herding Cats

BUDDHA

We've - we've done it.

STELLA

The nuclear option.

CHARLIZE

The ritual.

BUDDHA

We've completed it.

LUPIN

(pinching himself again)

Yeah, and none of us are dead! Ow!

CHARLIZE

Did we - did we really help Kelly?

STELLA

I guess we'll find out. What happens now, Buddha?

BUDDHA

We wait. And I know how I plan on passing the time, that's for certain.

(BUDDHA lets go of LUPIN's paw, and flops on the couch to sleep.)

LUPIN

Man, you said it, Bood.

(LUPIN takes off the undies and drops them. He picks up KELLY's phone and puts it back on the table. Then he plops on the couch beside BUDDHA.)

LUPIN

(cont.)

I gotta hand it to ya Buddha, youze a pretty strong guy, proppin' me up on your back like that. You really was the brawns of the operation.

BUDDHA

Really?

(BUDDHA flexes his arm.)

Herding Cats

BUDDHA
(cont.)

Thank you, Lupin.

(BUDDHA smiles and closes his eyes. STELLA and CHARLIZE turn their attention away from the boys and realize they're still clasping paws. With a long look at each other, they slowly let go.)

CHARLIZE
What are you gonna do now, Stella?

STELLA
I think these two have the right idea.

(STELLA plops on the couch.)

CHARLIZE
(yawns, goes to her dog bed)
Mmmm, sounds good to me. But wait a second, shouldn't we clean up first?

STELLA, BUDDHA, and LUPIN
(sleepily ad-libbing)
Oh yeah. That's right. We gotta clean up. We'd better get to it. Better get the lead out. (etc).

LUPIN
(sleepy)
Hey Stella, would ya start cleanin' up now... and I'll join ya in a jiff? (snores).

STELLA
(sleepy)
Sure Lupin. Hey Buddha, would you mind giving me a hand? (snores).

BUDDHA
(sleepy)
Certainly Stella. Charlize, would you please assist me... with the life-changing magic of tidying up... (snores).

CHARLIZE
(sleepy)
Sure, Buddha. I just need a little nap first (snores).

Herding Cats

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT II

Scene 4

AT RISE: *(LIGHTS UP on the sleeping pets with the room a mess. KELLY enters, huddled in her raincoat and/or holding a soggy umbrella. She sees her phone right away but does not notice the animals or the mess.)*

KELLY

Oh, there you are.

(KELLY picks up the phone and dials.)

KELLY

(on phone, exhausted)

Hey Suze... no, I missed your messages. Forgot to take my phone with me. No, last night was *not* conducive to getting work done. You know it seemed that like every time a semi-reasonable thought started to pop into my head, the lightning would go off...? Boy, that storm was intense... was it as bad on campus, too...? Really, and you were still able to study through that racket...? What can I say, Suze - you're a freak of nature... oh, and speaking of freak of nature, my neighbor was just telling me that the storm was making all the lights go kablooney... yeah, you remember that civic alert system they installed here, back in the fifties...? Exactly, with the colors... blue for "all clear", yellow for "whoa Nelly" and red for "kiss your butt goodbye"? Well apparently the storm was wreaking havoc with it last night... real Twilight Zone sort of stuff... I dunno Suze, they built this place during the Cold War - guess they thought we all might go nuclear. Like in that YouTube video that Dad showed us, the one with the little cartoon turtle. What was that called...? "Duck and Cover," right. Oh, and apparently the bell on the old clock tower went on the fritz too... yeah, it hasn't rung for years! Where's Marty McFly and Doc Brown when you need them? Oh geez, Suze, I hope it didn't freak out the cats and dog... yeah, I'd better go check on them. Ok, bye.

(KELLY hangs up and finally turns to see the sleeping animals and the mess.)

Herding Cats

KELLY
(cont.)

Oh my goodness. Oh. My. Goodness. Did you do this? I totally left all the doors open, didn't I? And you guys had a crazy pet party.

(KELLY picks up the bag of turkey jerky.)

KELLY
(cont.)

I guess I won't be eating this now.

(As KELLY surveys the area, BUDDHA awakens, and with a horrified look sees that the mess is still there. He nudges LUPIN, who will in turn look freaked out and awaken STELLA. KELLY picks up the hair spray.)

KELLY
(cont.)

I don't know, you guys. Maybe mousse would be better for you, or - I know. Styling putty.

(CHARLIZE wakes up. KELLY picks up the undies.)

KELLY
(cont.)

All righty then. You got into everything, didn't you?

(KELLY picks up a wig and giggles.)

KELLY
(cont.)

Oh my gosh. Suze and I used to play with this stuff years ago. When did we have that Baywatch party? I pretended to be C.J. and she pretended to be Summer.

(KELLY picks up one of the shark caps. She snickers and puts it on her head. She turns and sees the nervous-looking pets.)

KELLY
(cont.)

Well hello there, naughty doggy and crazy kitties.

Herding Cats

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE
Hiiii, Kelly.

KELLY
You guys had a grand old time tonight, didn't you?

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE
Noooo, Kelly.

KELLY
Don't worry, I'm not mad. I needed a good laugh and you gave me one. So thank you for that.

STELLA, BUDDHA, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE
(puzzled)
You're welcome, Kelly?

KELLY
Hmmm, maybe I could attach little brushes to your paws and you could help clean up? Or I know, I could get one of those roombas and you could ride around on it.

LUPIN
Hey, that'd be kinda fun.

KELLY
(cont.)
Anyway, I guess I'd better... hello, what's this?

(KELLY notices something from the mess of props - an envelope. She opens and reads the letter inside. She sighs and smiles.)

KELLY
(cont.)
Oh my, I haven't seen this in ages. I thought I'd lost it!

(She sits in the middle of the couch.)

KELLY
(cont.)
Hey Charlize, you want to join us up here? It's okay girl, come sit next to Lupin.

(CHARLIZE gets up and sits beside LUPIN, so that from left to right it's BUDDHA, STELLA, KELLY, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE.)

Herding Cats

KELLY

(cont.)

Good girl. You know, if we're not going to be together much longer, then this is how I want to remember us. I can't believe you found this. It goes back to when me and Suze were kids. We decided to write letters to our favorite celebrities. Suze sent a letter the state attorney general, and I sent mine to, well...

(KELLY clears her throat and reads.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Hey, Kelly! How's it going? Caught any good waves lately? I have to say - I've been in this business a long time but I've never received a fan letter like yours. Have you really seen all two hundred forty-two episodes? Kelly, you rock! You have great taste in TV, and I'm proud to declare you an honorary member of the Baywatch. But seriously, I'm flattered that you asked for my advice. So, you want to be a producer some day? Perfect - we need more sharp young minds in the biz. And my advice is simple - never give up. This industry is a tough one. One day you're on top of the world, and the next you're herding cats as far as you can see. But if you can dream it, you can do it. So think big - take chances - go nuclear if you want to! I hope I'll get to see you accepting an award on stage someday, but until then I hope these words give you the encouragement to animate your success. Yours truly - Hoff.

(KELLY pauses, scanning over the letter.)

KELLY

(cont., sigh)

Wow, I must have read this a thousand times when I got it. I always meant to have it framed, but it got lost. And you guys found it? You're the best pets ever.

(KELLY tousles all the pets' heads, then looks back at the letter.)

KELLY

(cont.)

Think big - take chances - go nuclear if you have to... animate your success... herding cats... animate... animate. I've... I've got it. *I've got it, you guys!* I know what I have to do! It was right here all along!

Herding Cats

(KELLY hurriedly hugs and kisses each pet.)

KELLY
(cont.)

Love you! Love you! Love you! Love you!

(KELLY takes her things, starts to exit, but turns back to the pets.)

KELLY
(cont.)

No one's breaking us apart. No one. Not now, not ever. Did you hear that?! SUCK IT, MADISON!!

(KELLY makes a fist, then exits.)

LUPIN

Wow, youze guys.

STELLA

Wow is right, Lupin. Did - did we...

CHARLIZE

Did we really have something to do with that?

BUDDHA

We shall see, Charlize. We shall see.

(CHARLIZE looks over at STELLA, who half grimaces-half smiles, holding her belly.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Herding Cats

ACT II

Scene 5

AT RISE: *(The place has been cleaned up. The
pets rest in their usual places, while
KELLY speaks on the phone.)*

KELLY

(on phone)

So anyway, I'm just calling to let you know that, oh, you knowww - they love it! They love my pitch! What? No, not them. Screw them! I've defected to Cartoon Network! You know, Adult Swim? Yes, it's an animated show! It's about these three cats, right? And they get into all these crazy adventures, right? Oh, all sort of things... they conspire against Russian agents, they wrestle sharks, they hobnob in Hollywood, all sorts of stuff. And-get this - their headquarters is inside the mouse hole in their harried owner's bedroom... what? No, I fixed it... yes, I mean me - look, give a girl a trowel and some drywall and she's pretty handy, okay? Anyway, I've got the perfect title. Are you ready? Ahem - "Cats on Catnip..." isn't that cute? I know! Oh, and there's another character too - this totally cool pit bull who joins them on their missions! Oh, Suze - they wanna meet with me next week. I mean, I know it's just a start, but it's a start, right...? Thanks! And hey, kick butt on those exams for me, okay, Counselor? Love ya sis... bye.

*(KELLY hangs up and giddily goes toward her
bedroom area.)*

CHARLIZE

You guys... I think we really might have done it... I think we might have saved Kelly!

LUPIN

Just like Kelly saved all of us.

BUDDHA

Well put, Lupin. And I have a compulsion to do the most unusual thing, as means of celebration.

CHARLIZE

What's that, Buddha?

Herding Cats

BUDDHA
(beat)

Dance.

LUPIN
Then what are we waitin' for? Let's boogie!

CHARLIZE
Yeah!

(BUDDHA, LUPIN, and CHARLIZE get up and dance. STELLA starts to get up, but clutches her tummy and sits back on the couch.)

CHARLIZE
(cont.)
Hey Lupin, show me that chicken thing you do.

LUPIN
Oh, ya mean like this?

(LUPIN does the "funky chicken" and CHARLIZE imitates.)

CHARLIZE
We did it, you guys! We're heroes! And it was Stella's idea all along. Stella, come celebrate with us!

(STELLA weakly stands, clutching herself.)

STELLA
Celebrate? Yeah, let's celebrate... uh... I... I ... better lie down... oh no.

(STELLA lets out a long groan and collapses down on the couch. The other pets rush to STELLA's side.)

BUDDHA, LUPIN and CHARLIZE
(ad-libbing)
Stella! Oh no! Are you okay? What's happening? (etc).

STELLA
I don't think I can move, you guys.

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

You can't move? Oh no! The sacrifice! The sacrifice you talked about! Oh please Stella, don't let it be you!

STELLA

(calmly, smiling through pain)

No. That's not it at all. I think that part about a sacrifice was all made up. Gosh, seeing you all celebrate like this? That's the best thing I think I've ever seen in my life. But I don't think it's in the cards for me, you guys.

LUPIN

(starting to choke up)

Not - not in the cards? But what's happenin' to ya, Stella?

STELLA

Nothing, Lupin. It's just my time, that's all

BUDDHA

Your time? Oh no. Don't say that, Stella.

STELLA

(taking BUDDHA's paw)

It's okay, big bro. It's okay.

BUDDHA

Oh, my dear dear sister. Is it really so?

STELLA

Yeah Bood, I think so. We sure had a great run together, didn't we guys?

LUPIN

But Stella... ya can't cross the bridge just yet. You're the brains of the operation.

(KELLY reenters, and sees the animals at STELLA's side. She rushes over.)

KELLY

Anyway, it's time for - what? Oh no. Stella? Stella?!

(KELLY tries to move STELLA, but she resists.)

Herding Cats

KELLY

(cont., distraught)

C'mon baby, we gotta get you to the vet. Oh no, Stella, please! Let me help you! I'll get your medicine!

(STELLA puts a paw on KELLY's shoulder, smiles and looks right into KELLY's eyes.)

STELLA

It's okay, Kelly. It's okay. I'm - I'm ready.

(STELLA and KELLY share a long gaze.)

KELLY

Oh, Stella.

STELLA

You're gonna be okay, Kelly. I know you are. And I've got a good feeling about that Eric guy.

BUDDHA

Stella, my heart is breaking.

STELLA

Hey Buddha, if I see any cute Persians, I'll put in a good word for you.

LUPIN

(sobbing)

See you over the bridge someday, Stell?

STELLA

Lupin, you gotta take care of Kelly for me, okay? She's gonna need a good street cat.

LUPIN

You bet I will.

KELLY

(singing through tears)

*Close your eyes, snuggle near me,
Let your whiskers gently curl.
Let the dreams come, sweetie darling,
Go to sleep, my sweetie girl.*

Herding Cats

STELLA

Hey, you know something? You really are a sweet dog...
Charlize.

(STELLA smiles, then closes her eyes and is still. The others hug and stroke her for a long moment, then quietly get up and exit offstage. The lights isolate STELLA, who remains still until a voice is heard.)

CHARLIZE (O.S.)

Stella... Stella?

(STELLA stirs and sits up with a stretch.)

STELLA

Mmmm, where am I?

(The lights reveal CHARLIZE.)

CHARLIZE

Hey Stella, over here!

STELLA

What, where? Who's there?

CHARLIZE

I'm right here, Stella.

STELLA

(beat)

Charlize?

CHARLIZE

Yeah, it's me.

STELLA

But where are we?

CHARLIZE

Well, I'm back home, and you're on the rainbow bridge.

STELLA

I am?

(The LIGHTS cycle through different colors.)

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yeah, see? Isn't it beautiful?

STELLA

But if I'm here, and you're there, then how can we be meeting like this?

CHARLIZE

You know, I'm not really sure how this works? I just know I'm here to have a conversation with you.

STELLA

But – the rainbow bridge – that means I... I can't! I can't be! I have to go back!

CHARLIZE

Stella, it's too late now. You can't go back.

STELLA

No, I have to! I have to make sure Kelly's all right!

CHARLIZE

Stella, you don't understand. It's been four years.

STELLA

Four years?! But how is that even possible?

CHARLIZE

Well, I think time passes differently for you than it does for the rest of us now.

STELLA

But is this conversation even *real*?

CHARLIZE

Search your heart, Stella! Does it *feel* real?

(*STELLA puts a paw to her heart.*)

STELLA

It does. This *is* real. But, is everyone okay back home? Kelly – is Kelly all right?

CHARLIZE

She sure is, Stella.

Herding Cats

STELLA

She is? But her job – she was so worried! She thought she was going to be–

CHARLIZE

No Stella, Kelly did it! She's a real producer now.

STELLA

She is? But her TV show idea – was it successful?

CHARLIZE

Yeah, and it still *is* successful. "Cats on Catnip" has been on the air for three seasons now. It's a really fun show. It's what they call a cult classic. They got that Hasselhoff guy do a cameo as a schnauzer.

STELLA

They did? That's amazing. But what about that – that werewolf show? The one her boss stole from her?

CHARLIZE

(scowl)

Ugh, you mean "A Howling in Muncie?" Not so good. Got the ax after two episodes. Y'know, Kelly was gonna sue for plagiarism, but Aunty Suze said it wasn't worth it.

STELLA

Aunty Suze?

CHARLIZE

Yeah, she graduated and became an entertainment attorney. Buddha says that's what you call an oxymoron.

STELLA

(little gasp)

Buddha! Buddha and Lupin. Are they okay, are they still–

CHARLIZE

(smiles)

They're as awesome as ever. They've put on a few years, but still find all sorts of fun ways to get into trouble.

STELLA

I miss them. I really miss them already. But how do you know all this, Charlize?

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Well, I never left.

STELLA

You mean you're – you're still with Kelly?

CHARLIZE

I am.

STELLA

(beat, smiles)

She adopted you.

CHARLIZE

Yeah, she sure did.

STELLA

I always knew she would.

CHARLIZE

She really is the best. But it's not just us, you know?
There are others now.

STELLA

Others? Who?

CHARLIZE

Well, Kelly married Eric two years ago. He's such a great
guy. You'd adore him.

STELLA

I knew he was the real deal.

*(BUDDHA and LUPIN appear on stage, going
through the actions of telling stories to
young children.)*

CHARLIZE

And it gets better. They adopted a little pit bull puppy
named Wilby, and a kitten named Xena.

STELLA

Aw, they did? That's so sweet!

Herding Cats

CHARLIZE

Yeah, and they're tons of fun to have around. We love telling them stories, especially about the nuclear option.

STELLA

The nuclear option, right. But, did we really *do* anything to help Kelly? I mean, all that happened is she found that old letter.

CHARLIZE

Did we really do anything to help Kelly? C'mon Stella, search your heart again. I think you know the answer to that question.

STELLA

(beat, smiles)

You're right, I think I do know the answer. And now you have a puppy and kitten, and you tell them stories about us?

CHARLIZE

Yeah! They love hearing about what we did, and how you fought so hard for Kelly. They say "tell us about Aunty Stella again!"

STELLA

Aunty Stella. Gosh.

CHARLIZE

But that's not all. There's someone else, too.

STELLA

There is?

CHARLIZE

Yeah, there sure is.

(KELLY appears on stage, holding a bundle wrapped in a blanket. She smiles and shows the bundle to BUDDHA and LUPIN.)

CHARLIZE

(cont.)

Her name is Laura. She's a really beautiful baby.

STELLA

This is the most wonderful news I've ever heard.

Herding Cats

(KELLY, BUDDHA, and LUPIN quietly exit.)

STELLA
(cont.)

But how are *you* doing, Charlize?

CHARLIZE

I'm doing great, Stella. I love my family. Oh, and I still go to doggie therapy once a month.

STELLA

Um - doggie therapy?

CHARLIZE

You know, for my food aggression? It's going really well. Kelly does clicker training with me. It's sort of fun.

STELLA

I'm so happy for you, Charlize.

CHARLIZE

(beat)

You know, Stella... we mourned you. We really did. And we'll never forget you.

STELLA

I'll never forget you, either.

CHARLIZE

You know something? Kelly put up a photo on the front door - this is at our new house, I mean. It's a picture of you, and you're crouching down, getting ready to pounce on Lupin, on the day Kelly brought him home.

STELLA
(smiles)

I remember that day.

CHARLIZE

And every morning when she leaves for work, Kelly blows that picture a kiss and says "Love ya, Stell."

STELLA

Thank you, Charlize. Thank you for sharing this with me.

CHARLIZE

You're welcome, Stella.

Herding Cats

STELLA
(beat)

What... what happens now?

CHARLIZE
Cross the rainbow bridge, Stella. Cross the bridge.

(After a long beat, STELLA nods, smiles, and raises her left paw.)

STELLA
Polydactyly.

(CHARLIZE smiles and raises her right paw.)

CHARLIZE
Extra piggies on our paws.

(CHARLIZE clasps STELLA's paw, and then STELLA pulls CHARLIZE into an embrace. After a few moments they separate.)

CHARLIZE
See you around, Stell.

STELLA
See you around, Char.

(CHARLIZE exits.)

STELLA
(cont.)
All righty then, I guess I'd better be going, um, forward? Yeah. Forward's a good way to go. Wow, what a magnificent place this is. And hey, what's that smell? Oh, is that tuna? *(sniffs)* Wow, it *is* tuna. That's the best smelling tuna I ever smelled! Can't wait to have me some of that. It's just I'm not quite sure where to, um-

(STELLA spots someone ahead in the distance. She waves.)

STELLA
(cont.)
Oh hello, you over there? Hi! I'm uh, I'm kinda new here, and I'm not really sure what I should-

Herding Cats

(STELLA gives a little gasp.)

STELLA
(cont.)

Benji?

(STELLA begins to smile as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

(CURTAIN)