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What Cat 1.docx

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What Cat?

Uh, oh...oh, no...or . . . maybe . . .

Cast of characters:

One or two children in a costume of a big black cat. One should be able to make a loud meowing sound. When the cat purrs, the children alternate purring sounds to create a continuous, undulating purr.

Cleo – must be the oldest child. About 13.

Nadia—9 years old.

Lucy—11 years old

Ian—12 years old.

David—12 years old.

Miles – must be the youngest of all the children. About 6.

Emma—9 years old.

Rowan—8 years old.

Sam—10 years old.

Set: A horseshoe-shaped stage with sets of steps leading down to the audience. There is a front porch downstage left. There is a large tree downstage right. Most of the background set consists of a large field with at least three bushes and two trees standing out. One is a big tree in the woods for the children to hide behind, and the other is the tree downstage right. This tree is the home of the cat.

When the children pantomime the end of the play, they run in slow motion to suggest distance. Or they could run into the audience. Or they could run across the stage, down the steps and back up the same steps. They should not run in front of the cat.

Time: Summer, in the present; just before dusk and then a slow nightfall.

Scene I

Dusk

[Cleo, 13, and Nadia, 9, enter from behind the porch into the field and walk slowly towards the large tree stage right.]

Nadia: We've come pretty far, Cleo. We're 'way past the Smith's backyard. That's too far, and it's getting dark.

Cleo: We just have to cross this field. It'll be there, in front of that big oak tree.

[A huge black cat with green eyes, about the size of a small car, suddenly appears in the tree. It's not clear how the cat got there.]

Cleo *[pointing]*: There it is! Now do you see it? I told you so. Look up there, against the biggest branch!

[To herself, almost mystically] It's here!

[The cat is slowly and mysteriously licking her paw, as they do, and glancing in the direction of the two girls. She looks harmless but big.]

Nadia: Oh, oh! Oh, no! I see it, I see it! Run! *[She starts to run away.]*

Cleo *[grabs Nadia by the arm]*: Run? Did I bring you all the way here to run? I'm telling you, this is BIG! The biggest thing that's ever happened to us! *[Lets her go.]*

Nadia: That's why we oughta run. It's too big. No cat is that big. Oh, no! Look at it now! I think it's watching us.

Cleo: Well, now you've seen one that big. C'mon. It won't hurt us. It's just curious.

Nadia: And how do you know that???

Cleo: I've been coming here for a month and sometimes I see it and sometimes I don't. But it's never hurt me.

Nadia: Yet. *[She gets behind Cleo.]*

Cleo: Admit that you're as curious about it as I am. How did it get so big? It looks like a regular old black cat but it's as big as. . . help me out, as big as . . . what? I can't even see its tail.

[The cat stops licking its paws and proceeds to wash its ears.]

Nadia: It's watching us.

Cleo: It's grooming itself. But, yes, it watches me when I come here. And it isn't scary. Sometimes I think it's smiling.

Nadia: I don't know if I like it watching me. That thing could eat us. What if it thinks we're super-sized mice . . . or . . . something . . . or . . . bowls of cream or . . .

Cleo [*Looks at Nadia*]: Bowls of cream? You don't look like a bowl of cream! More like a mouse. I wonder what cats eat in the wild? Anyway, we don't smell like mice. That's important. Smell. At least, *I* don't smell like a mouse.

Nadia: This isn't the wild. In fact, we're not all that far from Grandma's. Which is where I think I'll go now if you don't mind.

Cleo: Well, I do mind because I went to a lot of trouble to bring you here and you're staying. I want to see what the cat does with two of us here before I tell the others. [*Laughs*] You couldn't find your way back to Grandma's if you tried.

Nadia: That's what you think. I left a trail of breadcrumbs. Just like Hansel. I know my fairy tales!

Cleo: Oh, good. Then maybe the cat will follow us home! If the birds haven't eaten the crumbs.

Nadia: NO! [*The cat pricks up its ears*] Yikes! It moved!

Cleo: Shush. Don't scare it . . . It's just settling in to a comfortable pose. [*Sighs.*] It's beautiful.

Nadia [*Pause*]: But cats don't eat breadcrumbs. Do they?

Cleo [*Scarily*]: Mom's friend Beth had a dog that ate carrots! So cats might . . .

Nadia: Oh, stop it. . .

Cleo: . . . Seriously, how could you forget that part of the story? Everybody knows that birds ate the bread crumbs and Hansel and Gretel never got back home and . . .

Nadia: I should've thought it through. But now I've seen the big cat and I believe you, so can't we go home?

Cleo: I want to see what it's going to do. It might be magical. It *must* be magical!

Nadia: It isn't doing anything. And it's as big as Grandma's car.

Cleo: You're right! That's it! Grandma's car!

Nadia: So we can go now.

Cleo [*sighing*]: Next time I'll bring Lucy.

[They leave, Cleo reluctantly looking back at the cat; The cat stands up and watches them walk away, its tail twitching. Nadia tugs at Cleo to make sure they're going the right way.]

Nadia: Isn't this the way? C'mon! Did we cross that stream? Pay attention, Cleo!!
[Exit behind the field set.]

Scene II
Late afternoon, next day.

[The next afternoon, Cleo, Nadia, Lucy, and Emma are sitting on Lucy's porch. They talk about the strange cat.]

Lucy: I just don't believe you. You're probably seeing shadows or . . . the wind blowing in the tree.

Cleo: I'm telling you, it's as big as my grandma's car! Well, nearly. It's hard to get a good look at it when it's getting dark. But I know a cat from a shadow!

Emma: I saw the wind blowing in a tree once, and it made the tree look just like a big bear.

Cleo: Oh, please . . .

Nadia: I've seen it, too. It's so big but it isn't scary. You really have to come and see it with us.

Cleo: What??

Nadia: It looks like a real nice cat, all snuggled up in a tree. It kept licking its paws. Poor thing. Maybe it can't get down. We should call the fire department.

Cleo: Hey! Look who's talking! You were scared to death!

Lucy: Did it make any noise? Purr or anything like that?

Cleo: She just won't admit it. She was terrified. And, no, I haven't heard it meow. So far.

Emma: I've never seen a big cat around here and I've been across that field a few times.

Cleo: Only *I* know the way . . . it was my special secret. And now I'm letting you in on it.

Nadia: And now I've seen it, too.

Cleo: Lucy, it took me weeks to convince Nadia to come see it! Now just listen to her. The expert on finding enormous cats living in trees far, far away . . .

Lucy: Why don't we go during the day so we can see it better?

Cleo: You can't see it during the day. I've tried. Anyway, lots of cats sleep all day and roam around at night. Maybe that's why.

Lucy: I'll go. I'm not afraid. Are you coming, Emma?

Emma: [*hesitant*]: Well . . . yeah. Sure.

Lucy: Why not?

Emma: Why not?

Nadia: Why not?

Cleo: Right now is the best time. We'll get there just as it's turning dusk.

Nadia: But what about Mama? We'd better tell her.

Cleo: C'mon, it's summer. She won't mind if we stay out till it gets dark. She knows we're all together. Lucy, I'm telling you: It's now or never!

Lucy: Let's go. Emma?

Emma: I'm ready. Nadia?

Nadia: [*Sighs.*] OK.

[The lights dim on the porch and then slowly rise on the girls, suggesting that a little time has passed. They cross behind the porch and stealthily cross the field until they can see the big tree. No cat.]

Cleo [*whispering*]: There's the tree. There—at the other end of the field. Let's go closer.

Nadia: But the cat's not here. So why should we go closer?

Cleo: Hum. [*Pause*] You don't see anything?

Lucy: It's big enough to see from here??!!

Cleo: Yep.

Emma: Gosh. [*Pause.*] Well, I believe you, Cleo. I like this secret. But . . .

Lucy: So do I. Now, if this had been *Nadia's* idea . . . I'm not so sure I'd believe. . .

Nadia: Huh. Takes one to know one.

Lucy: That was a compliment. I'm just saying that you have a good imagination.

Nadia: Yeah, sure.

Emma: . . . but where is it?

Cleo: Let's wait. It's not that dark yet.

[Something rustles in the surrounding trees and bushes. It seems like it's coming from three different directions.]

Nadia: I hear noises! Something's in those bushes over there . . .

Cleo: Ssh! C'mon, back to the woods. Head for that tree! But be quiet!

[The girls quickly and quietly edge themselves off the field and gather behind the smaller tree.]

Cleo: Freeze!

[They huddle behind the tree. As they watch, three young boys—Ian, David, and Miles—come out of the bushes from three different directions. David awkwardly carries a bat, and a catcher's mitt. Miles carries two softballs.]

David *[in a stage whisper]*: Found 'em! Now let's get out of here.

Lucy: Ha! It's only them. Let's scare 'em good! Make a deep, ugly sound like a mad dog! One, two, three . . .

Cleo, Nadia, Lucy, Emma: Roar, growl, snarl, snap! Woof, woof, woof!

[David and Miles drop what they are holding and each boy runs back to where he came from. The girls burst out laughing. The boys return, rather sheepishly.]

Ian: Very funny. We knew it was you all along.

Nadia: Why'd you run then? Ha, ha!

Ian: I went back for my other bat, that's all.

Miles: You scared me. Why did you want to scare me?

Lucy: It's fun to scare people.

Miles: No, it isn't.

Lucy: You must be a blast at Halloween.

Cleo: We're sorry, Miles. OK?

Miles: OK. [*Sighs*] I guess I have to get used to it. Now I've lost my ball again.

David: I'll tell you something I bet even *you* don't know, Cleo. There's a real reason we were scared and it's sure not because of you. You won't believe it anyway. But there's a big cat living near here. And I don't just mean an ordinary fat cat; I mean a really big cat! We had to come back to get our softball gear because Miles forgot and left it here. Wasn't my idea.

Miles: You make me carry everything. I was tired.

Girls [*simultaneously*]: What??!! A cat? Did you say a cat?

David: It only comes out at night. Otherwise, you won't catch me playing ball in this field! It's huge. I mean really, really huge! With big green eyes that glow in the dark and . . .

Ian: He means it's not a regular cat. This one is so big it could eat any one of us! And you know what? It's getting dark. That's when we've seen it, most of the time.

Nadia: We'd better go.

Cleo: Not just yet! [*Sighs*] But I bet it won't show up with all of us here shouting at the top of our lungs.

David: You mean you *want* to see it? You're not scared of it?

Cleo: I *have* seen it. Tons of times.

Miles [*hurt*]: Why didn't you tell me? I thought you didn't keep secrets from me.

Cleo [*Gently*]: I wanted to make sure it was real. And, honestly, I didn't think any of you would believe me.

Miles: I would have believed you.

Cleo: I know, Miles. But after Nadia made fun of me for about three weeks . . .

Nadia: I did not!

[*The cat appears but no one notices it until . . .*]

Cat: Meow!

All: Huh??

Ian: There it is!!! Run! [*He pantomimes running across the field.*]

Lucy: Wait! I wanna see. You guys have seen it but not me. That's not fair! [*Pause.*] Uh, oh. That's . . . BIG. [*She pantomimes running after Ian.*]

Nadia: Hey, it's moving! Oh, no! Let's go! [*Nadia walks fast in any opposite direction, away from the rest of the children, but keeps her eye on the cat.*]

Cleo: Nadia! This way!

Lucy [*Shouting over her shoulder*]: Oh, my gosh! I don't believe it! Oh, my gosh! Look at that thing!

[*Meanwhile, the cat starts climbing out of the tree, somewhat clumsily. Everybody panics.*]

Ian: [*Slows down, turns around and runs back to Cleo. Shouts, gesturing to the girls to follow him*]: Come on! Don't scatter. Run into the woods to that big tree. It might get one of us in the field!

David [*Edging backwards with his eyes on the cat*]: Stay together! That way we have a chance. I've got my eye on it.

Cleo: Miles, you stay close to me! [*Miles doesn't move.*]

Cat: Meow.

Ian: C'mon! Hurry up! Get to that tree in the middle of the field. We can hide and see what it's doing from up there.

Lucy: What big tree? Oh! I don't know how to get back. Wait for me!

David: It's stopped moving. It's just looking at us. [*He stops.*]

Ian: But we don't know what it's going to do next.

Cleo: Miles, come on! Don't just stand there. Come on! Cats can run fast, you know. [*To the others*]: They can climb trees too, you know!

Miles [*Stands rooted to the spot. He doesn't run*]: It's not going to hurt us.

Cleo [*shouts*]: Nadia, stay with the others. I have to get Miles!

Nadia: No! Cleo!

Cat: Meow!

David [*hurries past Cleo toward Nadia and grabs her by the arm*]: We have to stay together.

Nadia: Cleo!

Miles [*turns his back on the cat and shouts*]: I'm telling you, it's not going to hurt us. It looks sad that we're all running away. [*Turns back towards the cat.*] I think . . . I think . . . It wants to play with us.

Cat: Meow. Meow. Meow. [*It stretches with a big cat stretch.*]

Miles: It's only relaxing.

Ian [*yells back*]: Miles, they play with their prey! Before they eat them! Oh, my god. What are we gonna do? We have to save Miles!

[*Spotlight on a tree, backstage right. By now, everyone except Cleo—stage left—and Miles—center stage—have huddled together behind a tree, backstage left. Or center stage?*]

Nadia [*David and Ian are holding her back*]: And Cleo!

Ian: Look! It's moving again! It's out of the tree; it's at the end of the field. The cat is on the field!!

[*Miles starts to approach the cat, slowly*]

Nadia: What is he doing?

David: Miles! Get back here!

Ian: And now Cleo is heading toward the cat!

David: She's after Miles. He's still in the middle of the field!

Ian: I think Cleo's got him! Whew! [*Slight pause.*] No! He's running away from her! What's he doing?!

Lucy: I don't believe this! He must want that ball he left. [*Shouts*] Miles! The stupid ball doesn't matter! We'll buy you another one! Promise!

Nadia: Cleo! Get him!

[*Light on Cleo and Miles. Miles picks up his ball. Cleo stops moving toward him and stands there, just looking at the cat.*]

Lucy: Miles, you've got your ball! Get yourself back here! *Now* what's he doing?

Ian: He's rolling the ball towards that cat! He's gonna be killed!

[The cat smiles and bats it back with its paw. Then Miles rolls it again. Same thing. This happens a third time.]

Cat: Purr.

David: The cat's toying with him! It's luring him! We need a plan and fast.

Lucy: You all join hands and rush the cat. I'll throw that other ball and distract the cat while somebody grabs Miles. C'mon! Make yourselves look big and maybe it will run away.

Ian: Good idea. Everybody grab hands and hold them high. Let's go. And roar!

[They rush toward the cat while Lucy grabs the other baseball and throws it behind the cat. The cat turns and pounces on it, picks it up with its mouth, then sets it down and bats it back to Lucy, who seems frozen. She watches, fascinated, and then throws the ball back to the cat. The cat joyously bats it back to her, meowing with pleasure. Lucy tosses the ball to Ian, who throws it to the cat. The cat jumps up, twirls in a circle of cat happiness, then bats it back to Ian. Miles tosses the ball again, and the cat hesitates, smiles, then bats it to Cleo. Miles laughs and takes the ball from Cleo.]

Cat: Meow!

Cleo: Could Miles be right?

Miles: She likes baseball. *[He smiles.]* Her name is Yogi Berra.

[Blackout]
End of Act I.

Act II

In the field. The porch, the bushes, and the smaller tree are gone,
which will give the players more room.

[*Pantomime. Ian is the pitcher, Rowan is at bat, and David is the catcher. Emma is on first base, Cleo is on second base, and Miles is on third base. Lucy, Nadia, and Jonny –an adult--are the first, second, and third basemen. Sam is the umpire. Yogi, the cat, is stretching and pacing alone in the outfield. Rowan hits the ball into the outfield. Miles makes it to home base, but the cat stops the ball and bats it to Johnny in time to put Cleo out.*]

Sam: Out!

Yogi, the cat: Meow!

Lucy, Nadia, and Jonny [*simultaneously, stopping on their way off the field to tickle Yogi behind the ears before they go to bat*]: Yay! Good for you, Yogi! You've done it again! You're the best! The score is now 15 – 3! Our favor.

Yogi: Purr . . .

Cleo [*walking out into the field*]: I want to be on Yogi's team.

Ian [*passing her*]: Next time.

Jonny: We all have to take turns. She's good!

Miles: If they'd let her play, we could beat the Red Sox.

Jonny: Do you think that would be fair, Miles?

Miles: Yes.

Jonny: Miles! You do?

Miles [*puzzled*]: No?

Jonny: No. She's too fast. No human can keep up with her.

Miles: OK. I'd rather be fair. I won't tell them about her.

Cleo: Good for you, Miles!

Rowan: She's too good at batting! I can't catch the ball when she hits it.

Emma: But somebody else has to run for her. I've tried to teach her that there are *three* bases she supposed to run!

Miles: I guess her mother didn't teach her how to count.

Rowan: I've got an idea. What if we let her play outfield for both teams?

Jonny: That's an excellent idea, Rowan. And it's really fair.

Cleo: Starting now! She's now our outfielder!

[The other team groans.]

Lucy: Thanks, Rowan!

Emma: When can we tell our parents about her?

Lucy: Jonny knows about her.

Emma: That's not the same thing.

Sam: I didn't exactly tell my dad, but I dropped a few hints. He smiled at me the way he does when he doesn't believe me, but he likes it that I have a creative mind.

Jonny: "If the world was perfect, it wouldn't be." And that includes dads.

Sam: Huh?

Jonny: Let's just enjoy playing with her for now. OK, batter up! Final stretch! Places, everyone!

Nadia: Dad, you don't say "places" in baseball! This isn't a stage, you know.

Jonny: Sorry, hon. What should I say?

[Nadia hits the ball far into the outfield. Yogi stops it with her paw. She bats it fast enough for Emma to put out Rowan and throw the ball to Jonny, who puts out Nadia. Then Lucy hits the ball, and Yogi catches it in her mouth.]

Sam: Out three!

Yogi: Meow!

[The other team cheers]

All: Yogi's the winner! She did it all! Yogi's the winner!

[Everyone claps and strokes Yogi.]

Johnny: Ok, everybody, gather up your gear and let's head home. Yogi, time to go. It's getting too dark to see.

[Yogi pads rather sadly back to her tree.] Meow.

All: Goodbye, Yogi. Good night! See you tomorrow! Bye!

[Everyone saunters across the field toward home, talking about the game. Miles lingers and turns to Yogi.]

Miles: Don't you worry, Yogi. We'll be back. It ain't over 'til it's over.

Emma: Come on, Miles!

Miles *[Turns to catch up with the others, and shouts over his shoulder]*: You can quote me on that one!

End of Play.