

THUNDERPAWS

All that most maddens and torments;
all that stirs up the lees of things;
all truth with malice in it;
all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain;
all the subtle demonisms of life and thought;
all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified,
and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.
He piled upon the whale's white hump
the sum of all the general rage and hate
felt by his whole race from Adam down;
and then, as if his chest had been a mortar,
he burst his hot heart's shell upon it.

- Herman Melville,
Moby Dick

An evening drizzle fell soft on the castle.

The darkened sky was a turbulent tableau of billowing immensity that occasionally flared up in fleeting brilliant illuminations.

The Boubou was laid out on the couch in the bedroom, withdrawn in silent reverie as the rain thickened.

When the first flat crack of thunder blasted down from straight overhead, the whole castle shook like a bomb had gone off. Before the walls even stopped shaking the tiny Bou was already on his feet and bounding out the door into the courtyard, yelling at the insolent sky.

"*You motherFUCKER! This is an outrage! How fucking DARE you!*" the tiny Bou screamed at the sudden onslaught, completely beside himself with fury at the stratosphere that was now unloading its whole arsenal upon the ancient village.

The rain was a blanket of cold needles that pelted him like wet, accusing fingers. His entire being was a conduit for a rage as primal and electric as the storm itself. Each new flash of lightning was a personal insult, each rumble of thunder a public taunt.

"You think this is *funny?!'*" he shrieked, shaking a tiny, drenched paw at the churning clouds as he scampered around the courtyard looking for a

ladder, a stool, anything to get closer at the offending firmament, "You think you can just unload on *my* home? Over *my* peace?!"

Another titanic blast of thunder, this one a prolonged, gut wrenching roar that seemed to shred the very fabric of the sky. The Boubou didn't flinch. He leaped forward, water recoiling around his body like a muzzleblast denying the rain its trajectory.

He piled upon the sky's black clouds the general rage felt by his whole species since Lassie down; and then, as if his body had been a cannon, he blasted his heart at the heavens.

"**LOUDER!**" he screamed. "I can't *hear* you! *You're a goddam KITTEN!*"

He paced the slick stones of the courtyard, a miniature general surveying a battlefield against an enemy of incomprehensible scale.

A jagged fork of lightning lanced down, striking somewhere far beyond the courtyard walls, and for a split second, the Boubou was silhouetted against the brilliant white flash - a tiny, ferocious snapshot of defiance.

"Ha! *Missed, you sneaky FUCK!*" he yelled into the downpour.

The ensuing thunderclap drowned his words in an ear-splitting detonation. A concussion of air hit him like a physical blow, lifting him off the ground and propelling him backwards - he landed in the spray of his claws digging in, head bowed against the fury, and slid to a grinding, reverse halt.

"You call that *aim*? *Christ you're an amateur!*"

He was soaked to the bone, chest trembling with pure adrenaline. The sky, momentarily stunned by his audacity, offered a low, grumbling roll instead of an immediate cataclysm.

The Boubou seized the moment. He took a final, deep breath, summoning every ounce of his being for a concluding verdict.

"This is your *ONLY* warning!" he bellowed, his voice hoarse but cutting through the drumming rain. "You *clean this up*, you *apologize* to the village, you keep your celestial theatrics to *yourself!* Or so help me, I will

climb up there and tie your cloudy ass up in *KNOTS like a goddam PRETZEL!*"

He stood there, chest puffed, waiting. The rain began to soften. The thunder retreated, mumbling to itself in the distance, a grumpy old giant bested by the psycho terrier.

A last, faint flicker of lightning pulsed within the clouds like the fleeting flare of a dying ember.

The Boubou surveyed the storms retreat and gave a single, sharp, satisfied sneeze.

"That's what I *thought*," he muttered.

He turned on his heel - a sodden, victorious little furball - and marched back inside, leaving the vanquished storm to weep softly against distant hillsides.

He'd won. The sky had been put in its place. He trotted back into the bedroom and shook himself from one end to the other like a wet towel in a centrifuge.