

**Short:** "Feline Follies" (1919) by Otto Messmer

**Available At:** <https://youtu.be/7HskWL82GeQ?si=wThdot2vYXLwADWe>

**Short Structure/Segmentation:**

1. Title screen that credits Feline Follies to Pat Sullivan and Paramount Magazine
2. Intro text "narration" that mentions how this film does have a plot to it
3. A black cat is standing in front of a home idly tying his tail into a knot until he hears a meow from another house further away from him (closer to the vanishing point)
4. His tail becomes a question mark as he jumps in shock
5. He runs to the further house
6. Text narration that mentions how "Master Tom" (the black cat) who is an enemy of mice and apparently sought after by other female cats, sees "Miss Kitty White" and immediately falls in love
7. Tom and Kitty stand behind a shed; Tom gives her a flower from nearby, kisses her hand, and blows a kiss to her; Kitty responds in kind
8. Text narration mentions that Tom is standing in front of the mirror and does his makeup and combs his hair, etc.
9. In the interior of a house, Tom brushes himself with a brush and brushes his teeth with his tail as mice emerge from holes in the floor and observe him
10. Text narration that says "And while the cat's away...."
11. Mice emerge from holes, dance to celebrate a lack of Tom
12. Text narration that mentions how Tom and Kitty meet up in a "hallowed spot of feline lovers: The Back Fence"
13. Tom and Kitty sit on a fence, and Tom begins to loudly proclaim/sing his love for Kitty
14. Several people, all silhouetted in the windows of their homes, scream for the cats to stop meowing late at night
15. Tom and Kitty jump off the back fence
16. Tom tells Kitty to meet him tomorrow night at the Ash Can as both cats race away
17. The Text narration calls it the "trysting place"
18. Tom waits for Kitty and says that she is late as Kitty struts in and tells Tom-who is carrying a lute-to play something lively; Tom obliges
19. Back in the home, the mice begin breaking everything and engaging in juggling chicken thighs since Tom is not there to hunt them
20. Tom is playing the lute, while Kitty is dancing
21. The mice have thoroughly damaged the home

22. Tom plays four notes, 2 black notes and 2 white notes. Kitty takes the black notes and rides them behind a fence, while Tom takes 2 white notes and rides them behind Kitty
23. Tom and Kitty ride the musical notes across a field...
24. Tom comes back, tired, as he yawns-not noticing the broken house-and falls asleep
25. Tom's owner comes in, and is shocked by the damage. She sees a sleeping Tom, grabs him by the tail, and throws him out of the house
26. Tom falls outside the door, is really confused as he stares at the camera and shrugs, until a voice from inside tells him to "beat it" and a pan is thrown towards him from inside the home. Tom runs away.
27. He finds Kitty knitting as the camera pans to reveal at least 17 black cats that look like Tom and they all say hello in various ways
28. Tom sees them and runs away
29. He runs across a field until he finds a Gas Works company with a gas pipe coming out of the ground and a hose attached to it.
30. He plugs one end of the hose to the pipe and turns on the gas, and then puts the other end of the hose in his mouth and kills himself.

### **Historical Context and Review:**

Pat Sullivan and Otto Mesmer's *Feline Follies* is less of an avant-garde animation, but a more straightforward animation that teeters the line between dark humor and tragedy. It does reach into absurdism with the way Tom and Kitty are portrayed. Throughout the film, they perform increasingly human-like acts, such as standing on hind legs, giving each other flowers, and even riding musical notes off screen. The short paints Tom-a prototype for the now famous Felix the Cat-as a tragic character that carries the same tone as the earlier Charlie Chaplin cartoons of 1916. Both Chaplin and Tom are tragic figures, hurt by actions and events that were usually out of their control. However, Tom's world engages in more magical whimsy than the early Chapin cartoons. Eventually, Tom would turn into Felix the Cat, who embraced both the whimsical nature of animation and the dark humor of the first cartoon by "[reflecting] contemporary social issues" (Furniss, Page 55).

### **References:**

Leslie, Esther. *Hollywood flatlands: animation, critical theory and the avant-garde*. Verso, 2004.

Furniss, Maureen. *A New History of Animation*. New York, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2016. Print.