

## A View to a Cat

Hello there. I know that the **representation** to the left makes me appear as if I'm a loveable housecat who enjoys a good read, but the truth is to the **contrary**, my friends. I am a top-notch **practitioner** of **espionage**. In other words, I'm a spy.

I've been a spy for as long as I can remember. One **frigid** morning as I was taking in a bit of fresh air at my favourite park a woman approached me. She was wearing the most **ornate** dress I'd ever seen. It was made of gold silk and sewn with violet thread. The collar and sleeve cuffs were made of a very convincing **faux** fur and there were hundreds of small, green buttons forming a **parallel** line down her back. Her hat and handbag were both made of used, blue furniture **upholstery**. I later discovered her strange mode of dress was all part of a grand plot to overthrow a rather greedy **bureaucracy**.

The woman approached me and mysteriously asked me to take her handbag. I was clearly left **aghast** by her request. I'm not at all used to holding ladies' **accessories** and, to be quite honest, I wasn't sure that it would go well with my shoes. She then begged me, saying "I'm in a great deal of **jeopardy**. You've simply got to help me." Then adding, "the fate of the world depends upon it."

What else could I possibly do but follow her instructions? She told me to take her handbag and wait for her behind the fourth tree to the left of the park entrance. I waited for ages until finally she returned. She took back her handbag and quietly said, "Take this package."

Most spies will tell you that they didn't choose the life of being a spy, but rather that the life chose them. And that is exactly what happened to me. When I opened the package I found a tuxedo and a flight **itinerary** with a note inviting me to a party in Switzerland. I never saw the strangely-dressed woman again.

I know you're wondering how I went from being an ordinary **civilian** to being a spy just like that. Obviously, it didn't happen that quickly. When I arrived in Switzerland I found myself at spy school where I learned every trick of the trade. When I started my studies I was completely awkward. I couldn't for the life of me figure out how to unfold, read, and then re-fold a map. I always put my see-in-the-dark night goggles on upside down. I was completely terrible at rock climbing. And I couldn't prepare a **soufflé** to save anyone's life, let alone my own.

Despite making **blunder** after **blunder** the important thing was that I kept trying. After a few months of intensive study I started to succeed. Not only could I rock climb, but I no longer needed a harness. Eventually, I didn't need goggles to see in the dark or silly, little maps. And my **culinary** skills were far superior to those of anyone else in the school. I'd learned and practiced all the spy **etiquette** I was presented with, but I still hadn't yet learned my most important lesson. I hadn't yet learned to **adapt**.

Soon enough though, I had graduated. In a mere few months I'd gone from awkwardly hiding behind a tree and holding a purse to being able to blend in with any crowd. **Despite** my confidence, however, I knew that I'd be **obliged** to learn many more rules and lessons in the field. And, boy, did I learn them.

The first and **foremost** rule of being a good spy is having a fantastic disguise. As you can see, I'm disguised as a cat. I've found this to be my most successful disguise to date, because no one ever suspects a cat of spying. I once made the mistake of dressing up like a cow. My **bovine** appearance made everything incredibly awkward. I couldn't see, I couldn't hear, and I couldn't crawl through any small spaces. And the tail kept getting stuck in elevator doors, so I always had to take the stairs. I'm sure you understand how having to walk up endless flights of stairs dressed as a cow could present a problem. I didn't know how to control those bulky **limbs**.

Before I perfected my **feline** disguise I tried various other means of **camouflaging** my appearance. The time I tried just a simple **goatee** and feather boa I was **denounced** in front of a stadium full of soccer fans. A riot broke out and I barely made it out of Brazil alive. And when I tried a **canine** costume my ankles started to **chafe** just before I was taken **captive** by a group of renegade librarians. Librarians may appear as if they are cool, calm, quiet, and collected all of the time, but let me **assure you**, they can get rowdy and surprisingly violent if they think you're threatening to break into their library's rare books room. It wasn't until I settled on the **chic** disguise of a cat that I really started to **flourish** as a spy. Not only does the disguise offer an **insurmountable** amount of agility, but I also find that it keeps me nice and cozy in cold weather, so much more so than regular spy clothing. Try staying warm in a pinstripe suit in Antarctica – it just doesn't work.

Another very important **component** of being a spy is having an **alias**. I have several: Kitty Kitty Bang Bang, Cat Man Do, Chuck, the list goes on...but my all-time favourite is, The Cat. Why is it my favourite? Because everyone knows that cats have nine lives. The most **essential** part of acquiring a name like The Cat is keeping it simple. You don't want something like Big Bertha or Scissor Legs; those are too specific. No, you want something **austere**, but not **banal**. It has to promote both a sense of **aversion** and **esteem**.

How did I get my alias? It's a rather funny **anecdote** involving a bag of kitty litter and a car full of clowns. You see, I was setting up a net in an abandoned pet store called the Scratching Post. It was, at the time, the known headquarters for a group of murderous clowns, and I wanted to catch them. As I didn't want to get caught while setting up the net, I spread a layer of kitty litter on the floor that would alert me with a scratching sound if anyone stepped on it. I was hoping to get in and out without an incident, but the clown arrived and the second one of their big shoes hit the ground I was warned. Of course, they were curious about the sound underneath their feet. "What's that noise?" the clown with the polka-dot necktie yelled.

"I don't know, turn on the lights," the clown with the ridiculously large trousers shouted in reply.

Then, the third, slightly smarter clown with an IQ of nearly 100 bent down and said, "I think it's kitty litter. There's kitty litter all over the floor."

"But why?" asked the clown with the polka-dot necktie.

"Yeah, how come there's kitty litter all over the floor?" chimed in the clown with ridiculously large trousers.

"I don't know," answered the smarter clown with the IQ of nearly 100. "We haven't even got a cat."

"Oh, yes you do," I yelled triumphantly as I jumped from my hiding place, "and you're all under arrest." With one tug of my hand I pulled the net around the clowns. The clown with the polka-dot necktie and the clown with the ridiculously large trousers surrendered in mere seconds, but the smarter clown with the IQ of nearly 100 wasn't willing to go without a fight. Despite being trapped in a net, he thought that he could get away with being **gruff**.

"You won't get away with this, Cat," he screamed as he tried to wiggle free from the net. "You'll be sorry you ever dared to capture me! When I escape from this net I am going to skin you alive!"

"But you can't skin The Cat," said the clown with ridiculously large trousers.

"Yeah," agreed the clown with the polka-dot necktie. "he's The Cat!"

"Well, The Cat is going to be sorry one day," threatened the smartest clown of the three. "Maybe not today, but someday."

Of course, I wasn't worried. I was happy. Not only had I captured a group of ruthless villains, but I'd also received a wonderful new alias.

A lot of spies talk to each other in what seems like an absolutely nonsensical language, but it's actually a clever spy **jargon** used so that others can't understand what we're talking about. Of course, respond, "Yes, apples are in season." The words, "fruit" and "apples" are similar. IN other words, they are synonyms. If the spy didn't agree with me, they'd say, "I prefer asparagus." As you know, asparagus is not a fruit, it's a vegetable and fruits and vegetables aren't the same, so that makes them antonyms rather than synonyms. It's tricky, I know.

The first time I tried talking in spy code was an absolute mess, and the whole mission turned out to be a giant **kerfuffle**. I was sitting at a café in Alaska waiting for a piece of halibut and reading a local newspaper when a man with a bushy mustache came near me and whispered, "The salmon is undercooked and spawned early this year."

As I was trying to be polite I responded, "Thank you for that information, sir. I appreciate it. You'll be happy to know that I ordered the halibut."

The man looked at me strangely and tugged at his mustache a few times before saying, "Rainbow trout do not swim in these waters."

"But, sir, I ordered the halibut," I insisted.

My response only seemed to upset him and in a slightly angry tone he said, "You cannot swallow a goldfish."

"I will not be swallowing any goldfish, you idiot, I ordered the halibut," I whispered in an irritated voice. By this time all I wanted was a plate with a piece of halibut, some steamed vegetables, and maybe a lemon wedge. I didn't care about salmon, rainbow trout, or goldfish. I was annoyed by this crazy man with the mustache who was overly obsessed with different kinds of fish. It didn't dawn on me that he was trying to give me a message which is most likely why I said, "Sir, this is a café not an aquarium. Are you lost? Perhaps the kind waitress can assist you with directions. Now would you excuse me please, I'm waiting for some halibut and a big boat.

"You imbecile," he finally blurted out, "the boat you were expecting left 20 minutes ago while you were waiting for your halibut and now we'll never find the shipment of stolen caviar!"

I jumped up to look out the nearest window. Wouldn't you know it, the boat I was waiting for sailed out of the harbour with the stolen shipment of caviar and the suspects, but just then my halibut arrived with a lemon wedge.

Like all good spies, I have had a **nemesis** or two over the years. However, most of my sown enemies had been captured, all but three anyway.

I find that I have a great deal of suspicion when it comes to people wearing sunglasses, which is all due to one person in **particular**. Her name is Asha Bloom. It is said that Asha's ancestors are part of the Peloponnesian **monarchy**, but her royal blood doesn't stop her from being an infamous crook. Ms. Bloom has very expensive tastes, and when she wants something she doesn't save up her allowance like you and I. Instead, she plots and schemes to steal things. She's normally fond of jewelry and often has her sunglasses encrusted with stolen jewels, but that's not all she likes. Asha is also known for other forms of **debauchery**. I once heard that Asha was so **enamored** with the pet leopard of a French Canadian **dignitary** that she used a special **concoction** made with three crushed rubies to **intoxicate** the poor creature. Naturally, the leopard began to **hallucinate** and was **duped** into running away with Ms. Bloom.

The second **culprit** goes by the name of Little Lola and frequently  **dons** a baseball cap. She may appear to be a **timid** thing, but I assure you, she is not. I've heard her say that she wears the cap so that she doesn't look **conspicuous**, but she really wears it to hide large amounts of loot.

Little Lola **hails** from a rather **rustic** mountain town west of the Mississippi River and grew up the youngest member of 13 children. Faced with the **plight** of flipping burgers for a lifetime, Lola turned to a life of crime at an **impressionable** age.

And now, although I absolutely **loathe** having to do this, it is my duty to tell you about Dr. Science. Dr. Science started out as a member of a top secret **clergy** who were known for the **forgery** of historical documents and priceless works of art. There's no telling how many paintings and sculptures he's **duplicated** and replaced. His replica statue of *The Venus de Milo* caused an international scandal when it was found **in lieu** of the real one doing a headstand in the Louvre. I'm **dismayed** to say that making fakes isn't his only skill. In fact, there really is no telling what Dr. Science can or will do. He's been involved in plots to transplant all penguins from their natural habitats to inner city zoos. He laid plans to dig a sink hole underneath the Parliamentary building in Victoria, Canada. He always hogs the popcorn at the movies. He stole a lifetime supply of multivitamins from a retirement home in Cape Cod. He's been spotted among whales with a harpoon in his hand. He kidnapped a movie star and held her for ransom. He left a candy bar wrapper on top of the Empire State Building. He's mugged a golfer and a tennis player. He poured food dye in the canals of Venice. He filled the Paris Metro with bubbles. He covered Buckingham Palace in toilet paper. He never finishes his vegetables and gives chocolate to dogs. He's robbed at least seven banks in Texas. He hates skateboards. His hair is always notably **unkempt**. And he's been in **cahoots** with Asha Bloom and Little Lola.

Most recently, I've been on a case in Northern Ireland tracking a well-known **plagiarist** who would claim that he was **ad-libbing** when really he was copying the poems of William Shakespeare. Having just put him behind bars, I was feeling a slightly **peckish** and decided to

stop for a cup of tea and some cakes. Cakes are one of my few weaknesses, especially when they come with a cup of tea. So, off I went to Aunty Claire's Tea Shoppe feeling quite satisfied and quite hungry. I asked Aunty Claire for a table near the window and she warned me against sitting there. "There's something very strange happening over there, but you know me, I like to keep my mind on my own affairs." I looked near the window and saw a man in a white lab coat with incredibly messy hair, a woman wearing expensive looking sunglasses, and a waitress in a baseball cap. "You'll have to excuse me," Aunty Claire said, "our new waitress likes to gab a little too much with the customers." With that she was stomping toward the table near the window and I had to seat myself.

As soon as I sat down and saw her face, I knew that the new waitress Aunty Claire was talking about was Little Lola, but I had no idea why such a criminal mastermind would **feign** being a waitress in a small tea shop. When I looked more closely at the customers and realized they were none other than Asha Bloom and Dr. Science, I came to conclude that Aunty Claire was right; something strange was going on over there. I wasn't sure what it was, but I was determined to find out.

It was clear to me that I could not arouse any suspicion, so I ordered my cakes and tea from Aunty Claire and began to **eavesdrop** on what was doing on at the table over by the window. It was almost impossible for me to hear what Asha, Little Lola, and Dr. Science was discussing, so I had to take slightly more drastic measure. Just then I remembered that I keep a wonderful little device in my briefcase that looks like a crumb. If I could get that device closer to the table then I'd be able to hear what was going on. **Nonchalantly**, I started to rummage around until I found the device, and just as I was trying to figure out how to get the device over near Asha, Little Lola, and Dr. Science, I sneezed and the crumb flew out of my hand and right under their table. Success!

"Did you get my note?" Dr. Science asked Asha.

"Of course I got it, you dimwit. How else would I be meeting you ehre?"

"Why didn't I get a note," Little Lola chimed in. "All I got was a lousy phone call. You never write me notes."

"Pipe down, Lola, and pretend to do your job," demanded Dr. Science. "I need to talk to Asha about The Green Dragon." Little Lola disappeared into the kitchen.

"Alright, Dr. Science, where is it? Where is The Green Dragon," Asha asked greedily.

"I can't tell you just yet, Asha, but follow the instructions on this note and I will meet you soon," Dr. Science whispered as he handed Asha a note tied with a green satin ribbon. He

then bit the head of a gingerbread man, smiled **menancingly**, and left Aunty Claire's Tea Shoppe in a rush. Asha **discreetly** untied the ribbon and began to read the note when she was rudely interrupted by Little Lola.

"What did he tell you? Did he have The Green Dragon with him?"

"No, you **ignoramus**. He knows where it is and we've got to join him to find it. Now go and get your things so we can blow this joint. And don't forget your baseball cap – we're going to need it to hide The Green Dragon."

Little Lola left quickly and began gathering up her things while Asha took out her compact mirror and admired herself. It wasn't until after she had reapplied her lipstick that Asha realized the note and her cakes have been removed from the table by Aunty Claire. When Little Lola returned to the table Asha looked at her, slightly panicked.

"I can't find the note Dr. Science gave me, Lola."

"What do you mean, Asha? He just gave it to you."

"I know, but it's gone now. I guess it's not that hard important, I remember what it said. Now get a move on Lola, this place is starting to bore me."

The two of them got up and left. Luckily the note was still in Aunty Claire's Tea Shoppe. All I had to do was find it. I glanced under the table near the window to see if I could spot the green satin ribbon with which the note was tied, but it wasn't in sight. It was then that I noticed Aunty Claire had a green ribbon tied around her finger.

As she approached my table all I could do was concentrate on the green ribbon, so it startled me when she asked me if I'd like another piece of cake. "Oh, no thank you, Aunty Claire," I said. Then, trying to change the subject, I asked, "Have you forgotten something recently?"

"I certainly hope not," she said. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just noticing that you had that lovely, green ribbon tied around your finger. Sometimes when people are trying to remember something they tie a string around their fingers."

"Oh, of course, silly me!" I just tied this around my finger a few moments ago. It's such a pretty color that I'd wear it as a ring for the day. It was wrapped around some little note, but I just threw that in the trash," Aunty Claire replied.

"It is a very lovely color, Aunty Claire. It goes so well with your eyes."

“Oh, you old sweet talker, let me get you another piece of cake, or at least a cup of tea.”

“That’s really very kind of you, Aunty Claire, but I’m quite **satiated**. Let me help you clean up.” I picked up my tea cup and brushed away the crumbs from the table top and followed Aunty Claire into her cozy tea shop kitchen. There it was, on top of the little trash basket, the note Dr. Science had written to Asha Bloom. I needed to create another distraction so that Aunty Claire would think it was odd that I was going through her trash. Suddenly, I dropped my tea cup and sent it crashing to the floor.

“My goodness, I can be so clumsy sometimes. I’m terribly sorry. If you show me your broom, I’ll gladly clean up this mess.”

“That isn’t necessary. Teacups break by the dozen around here,” Aunty Claire said trying to put me at ease.

“Aunty Claire, I really must insist on cleaning up this mess. I’d feel absolutely terrible if I just left it there. Now, where do you keep your broom?” Aunty Claire smiled sweetly at me as she handed me her old broom and dust pan. Even though I absolutely hate sweeping, I swept the mess, and as I dropped the broken little pieces of china in the trash can I stole the note without anyone noticing. Sometimes a spy has to do what a spy has to do.

Clearly what this spy now has to do was get out of Aunty Claire’s Tea Shoppe and read the note Dr. Science had written Asha Bloom as quickly as possible. And that is just what I did. I put the note in my pocket, thanked Aunty Claire for the lovely cakes, and apologized again for breaking her tea cup, and as soon as I left I hid behind a large tree and read the note. It said:

*Dear Ms. Bloom,*

*If you want to tame The Green Dragon you’ll have to meet the elephant with a memory like an elephant. Take a train to the Jolly Old, you’ll find him in the Menagerie.*

*Yours truly,*

*Dr. Science, M.D., Ph.D., Esquire*

Obviously, my three foes were headed to a place where there’d be a lot of animals, but what was I to make of the phrase, “The Jolly Old”? I knew I’d heard or seen it somewhere before, but I couldn’t remember exactly where. I suddenly remembered and took out the necktie I keep in my briefcase. I read the label closely, *Smith & Sons, Making Jolly Old neckties since 1907, London, England*. “That’s it,” I said to myself. “They’re going to London to meet the notorious Elephant King, and I’d better get there before they do.”