

Tishala

It is just after midnight. I am alone on the seventeenth floor of our council apartment, looking out over the city of Glasgow. I am a house cat, so I never get a chance to chase mice or birds.

My owner is a man called Walter (Walt) Nieuwoudt. Shortly after he came to Scotland as a refugee from Tanzania, he changed 'Nieuwoudt' to 'Newman'. He has been in Glasgow for twenty-three years. I have been with him for eleven years.

Walt has a taxi, a white Mercedes which he shares fifty-fifty with a woman called Helen Pienaar. She has also changed her name to Newman although they are not married, just pretending. Helen is a refugee from Nigeria. She drives during the day, Walt drives at night. They are part of Uber which means the money from fares goes direct to Walt's bank account.

I suppose I am a refugee too, in a way. Walt rescued me from a dog and cat home. I am called Tish, short for Tishala. In Swahili it means 'strong-willed'. I have long golden hair which Walt combs out every day, always at around nine o'clock before he leaves to drive through the night. While he is combing my hair, he sings to himself, sad songs about his lost family. His wife and five children were massacred in a tribal feud. This happened a long time ago, when he was a trainee veterinary assistant in the Serengeti National Park.

Helen does not like me and I do not like her. She has only been with us for about a year. She says she is allergic to cat hair, but I know she is only pretending. She is jealous of me because I am very beautiful while she is ugly with a big fat bottom and huge widely spaced front teeth.

Since Helen moved in, I have been forced to eat dried food, which I hate.

Another reason she hates me is I listen to her phoning her men friends, talking to them on a secret mobile phone Walt does not know about. When she speaks to them, she tells them Walt is her brother. She is trying to find a good husband, a richer man who will take care of her.

Shortly after Walt went on his shift, she put on her make-up and sprayed her stinking perfume then went out to meet one of her men, as she does on most nights. She is forgetful and, as she often does, she left the television on.

We have cable with lots of channels and I know how to use the changer. I flicked until I found a programme about animals. When I saw it was from the Serengeti, I pressed the 'Record' button, for Walt, then I settled to watch, making myself comfortable in Helen's recliner chair, sprawling out and spreading my hairs on her cushion, just to annoy her.

The narrator was an American, a man who has worked with *The Lions of the Serengeti* for over thirty years. Here is what he told us.

Tishala

"The Serengeti National Park is a vast plain which is home to around 1500 species of animals including around 4,000 lions living in distinct prides. These lions eat mainly Wildebeest, Zebra, Thomson's Gazelle and Warthog. Occasionally they will kill and eat domesticated animals which make them the enemy of the indigenous peoples who farm the perimeter zones of the nature reserve.

Like all wild animals, The Lions of the Serengeti suffer from illness and disease, principal among which is Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), the main killer. The other diseases which affect them are. . ."

At this point I hit the changer, skipped to Netflix and, after a fiddle, found a Tom and Jerry cartoon, one of my favourites.

Just as it came to a good part, Helen's phone started to vibrate on silent, below her cushion. I reached under, swiped it onto the floor. As it skittered across the room the battery popped out and the bits disappeared under Walt's recliner.

When Helen came back the sun was just rising. Looking for her mobile, she searched everywhere, muttering angrily to herself. With my claws ready to slash at her, I watched her from under the TV unit. She soon gave up and went to bed.

Later when Walt returned, she kissed him on the cheek, took the keys for the Mercedes and went out to begin her shift.

While he was showering, I scuttled under Walt's recliner and pawed the pieces of her mobile out from underneath to the centre of the floor then took my place on Helen's cushion and waited.

As I hoped he would, Walt re-assembled her secret mobile. I pretended to be asleep while he looked at it, studying the names of her men and their text messages, sobbing and crying like a man with a broken heart.

After a while, Walt blew his nose and washed his face then went to their bedroom, took out her two large suitcases and filled them with all her clothes and shoes. When the cases were full to bursting, he put the rest of her clothes into black bin bags, tying them with tape.

He made a phone call. Helen returned. They shouted at each other for a while and then she sat in the bathroom until one of her boy friends came to collect her.

After she left, Walt made a long phone call. I heard him say: "Helen is history".

The man called Billy Ncube arrived. He is a refugee from Zimbabwe who used to work for Walt as his dayshift driver before Helen ousted him. Walt and Billy shook hands. Billy took the key for the Mercedes and went out on shift.

Tishala

I have Walt all to myself again. He went to the shop and got me the tasty food I love.

Now I am on his knee.

He is combing my hair, singing his sad songs while we watch *The Lions of the Serengeti*.