

# The Silver Moon:

Reflections on life, death and writing

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Extract

## Muschka: the needy one

If Muschka the cat were to be personified you'd recognise her immediately. She's the scrawny lady in her early forties you invariably see shopping in the mall who wears an orange tracksuit, clean but not new, thongs in the summer, cheap runners in the winter. Her hair is always short, badly cut and unnaturally blonde and in need of a touch-up at the dark roots. She wears a smudge of lipstick, the colour clashing with her tracksuit, and her face has been exposed to too much sun so that premature aging is already apparent around her eyes. She seems never without a cigarette drooping from the right-hand corner of her mouth and it's difficult to decipher the colour of her eyes as she squints from the swirl of rising blue smoke when she looks up.

She refers to both genders as 'darl' and doesn't take any shit from anyone and tells it how it is – or rather, how she perceives it to be. Any psychologist will tell you she's looking for love but has given up thinking she may ever find it. Also that she secretly feels deeply inadequate and uses her tough outward demeanour to conceal her inner needs. She commences getting pissed around five at night with her first glass of 'Sav B' tapped from a cardboard cask.

If you've come across her when in the supermarket then translate her into a feline and you've got Muschka Courtenay, the needy one – the cat that came in from the rain and the cold and the dangerous bush.

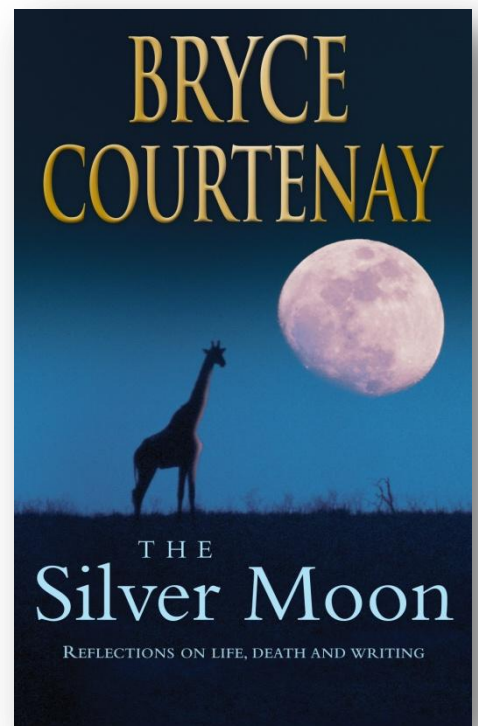
I first saw Muschka while taking Timmy for our morning walk up into the hills some two kilometres away from the farm, when I noticed two sharp green eyes appeared in the undergrowth beside the overgrown pathway.

Tim will run for his life at the mere sight of a cow or a horse and he loves to chase wallabies and wild goats, and I could hear him barking in the distance, displaying (ha ha) the so-called macho side of his character.

I knew at once that the pair of eyes peering at me did not belong to a genuine feral cat, as they are much too wary to show themselves. This was probably a cat that had lost its owners. So I 'puss-puss'd' for a few moments before moving away in the direction of Timmy's excited barking, aware that a domestic cat can roam up to ten kilometres from its home. The following day I left a tin of cat food beside the path where I'd seen the eyes. On our return from our walk it had been eaten. This was definitely a lost cat in the process of going feral.

I repeated the cat food every day for at least a month, calling 'puss-puss' and placing the food a few hundred metres closer to my farm gate each morning. Standing fifty or so metres away I'd wait and she'd soon appear to gulp down the gift of food.

Eventually I drew the shabby, scrawny little grey cat to the gate. It took another two weeks with her hiding among the agapanthus in the garden before one wild and stormy night I passed the front door and saw two little eyes peering hopefully through the glass. I opened the door a crack and left it ajar. The thunderstorm lasted all night and by morning the little cat was nowhere to be seen. Then a little later when I went



upstairs to my study to start my day's writing I discovered a very wet, bedraggled little cat cowering under my desk.

Muschka has never left me since, and sits on my lap or on my desk all day as I write. If any of the other cats – Cardamon, Ophelia (Philly) and Pirate – should decide to approach us while 'we're' writing, she arches her back and snarls and hisses. 'He's mine, piss off!' she snaps, in a distinctly lower-class cat-cent.

I must say the other three cats take absolutely no notice and she fools no one, though, as I said somewhere else, she tolerates Timmy, calls him 'darl', accepting his presence at my feet as part of the essential writing team, even though I suspect she's illiterate.

I know she loves me to bits. Although, if I don't stroke her in her needy moments, which are frequent, she reaches up and gives me a whack on the jaw, though I must say never exposing a deadly claw.

One thing I have to say in her favour is that she's got a lot of internal fortitude. On one occasion the neighbour's rottweiler ventured into the garden while Muschka, as ever, was tailing me. His name is Rocky and he's not a very nice dog. Not as bad as the reputation his breed enjoys, just . . . well, not nice. Timmy is terrified of him and, seeing him approach cowered beside me, his ears flattened, while his warning to me of the approaching presence of the unwelcome visitor more closely resembled a whimper than a protective growl.

Suddenly the rottweiler let out a frightened yelp then turned and took off, fleeing for its life, his tail so far between his legs he was practically using the tip to inadvertently clean his teeth. Mounted astride his neck was Muschka, her claws digging fiercely into either side of Rocky the Rottweiler's jowls. This is a cat that takes no crap when it comes to protecting a loved one, and I feel pretty sure Timmy, the Dog of Dogs, is secretly counted but never openly admitted to be on this very selective list.