

# Felis Catus, SUPERHERO

It happened at the Corporate Retreat

— by Rick Butts —



Plan B and the spider that kills people  
**but not cats.**

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It happened at the corporate retreat

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

JASPER, a cat formally known as Felis Catus, Superhero. She is ALISTER's pet.

ALISTER, CEO of the firm, pet owner of JASPER.

JULIE, vice president of HR at the firm.

## SCENE

A campground at the edge of a forest. A single tall plant in a pot sits centre stage. On stage left, two folding chairs.

## TIME

Now.

## SYNOPSIS

ALISTER wants to hire his cat JASPER for a senior executive role at the public relations firm he runs as CEO. The partners are opposed, and ALISTER has agreed to discuss it at the campground corporate retreat for the senior team. Unknown to the partners, he has also brought JASPER along. JULIE, the vice-president of HR, has influence with the partners and together ALISTER and JASPER scheme to win her support. After a discussion of how employment discrimination practices pertain to the hiring of cats, JASPER gets impatient and decides to win JULIE over by saving her from an attack of the deadly Sydney funnel web spider whose venom is highly toxic to people but harmless to cats.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES ABOUT JASPER

JASPER is extroverted and curious. The actor should have fun with this role, allowing her to express her large feline personality. Indifferent to corporate norms of social interaction (for example, no biting or scratching colleagues, no killing birds) JASPER takes notice of people only on her terms. Costuming can be as simple as a tail, cat ears, fur mittens and stick-on whiskers.

SETTING: A campground. A large plant and two folding camping chairs. Noon.

AT RISE: Lights come up. JASPER stands staring off right into the forest. At left, ALISTER sits in a folding chair looking at his phone. No signal. He picks up his chair and moves a few feet closer to JASPER.

ALISTER

Jasper, are you getting a signal?

(JASPER stares at nothing.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

We'll need our phones for the meeting.

(JASPER races to the edge of stage right, chatters.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

Some partners are calling in to vote on confirming your appointment.

(JASPER rushes to the plant, shakes it.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

Yes, there are birds here. Don't kill any. What are you doing?

(JASPER turns to look at ALISTER, blinks.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

Do you understand how important it is to be nice to Julie? Get her on board and the rest of the partners will follow.

(JASPER chews on a claw.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

No, she's not a cat lady. But she's a progressive. Let her think she's leading the parade and she'll start beating the drums for you.

(JASPER rushes stage left, picks up a stick.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

If that doesn't work, we'll have to come up with plan B.

(JASPER gives him a pad with writing on it.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

This is Plan B? Pounce on her. Hit her on the head. Knock her out. You're kidding, right?

(JASPER gestures to flip the page.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

(Scanning the pad.)

When she wakes up, pound on her chest. Pretend you've saved her life. She'll be grateful. And then put her in a cat carrier? Seriously, that's what you've come up with?

(JASPER hears noise left. ALISTER looks left.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

Okay, let's leave this as . . . plan B for now.

(JASPER gestures with paws up, licks her lips.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

You can't want to eat already! I fed you a whole can at home.

(JASPER walks off right.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

(Calls after JASPER.)

I absolutely need you to *charm the pants*—

(JULIE enters left with a suitcase and shoulder bag. She's wearing anti-bug head gear, jacket and pants.)

JULIE

—*Disarm the ants?* I hope they're not armed. I've never seen so many bugs.

ALISTER

Julie.

JULIE

I went into your tent by mistake. I thought it was our conference center.

ALISTER

Did you close the door? The air conditioning's running. I don't want to let the cold out.

JULIE

It's a *tent*. You have air conditioning? Why aren't there bathrooms at this campground?

ALISTER

Outhouses are bathrooms. Private one on each site.

JULIE

You have a hot tub in your tent! And a shower.

ALISTER

The hot tub package includes the shower.

JULIE

The flatscreen TVs in your tent? Not exactly roughing it. Was that in the package too?

ALISTER

Different package. TVs are free with the hospitality suite. Comes with massage recliners.

JULIE

You're the boss.

ALISTER

Julie, I thought you'd be okay with camping.

JULIE

I'd prefer a little less roughing it in the bush. And bathrooms.

ALISTER

Another twenty minutes up the path to get to your site. You're right beside where they wash out the outhouses. Ask one of the guys to pick out a nice one for you.

JULIE

I hate camping.

ALISTER

You're HR. It's part of your job to be cheerful.

JULIE

I have to pee.

ALISTER

You better get moving then. If you're at the trash dump, you're too far. Watch for bears.

JULIE

I'm not sure I can make it. Can't I use the ensuite in your tent?

ALISTER

Take your shoes off first. I just had the carpets cleaned. And no grousing about the wet bar. I'm the CEO and I'm the host for this retreat so I need a fancy tent.

JULIE

Never mind. I don't want to unwrap my ankles. Tick tape to keep the bugs out. I'll hold it. Twenty minutes up the hill to my tent? Does it have my name on it?

ALISTER

Probably on the box.

JULIE

The box?

ALISTER

If you haven't been there yet, your tent's in the box. You put it together yourself.

JULIE

What?

ALISTER

Part of the team building experience. You assemble your own tent.

JULIE

Doesn't seem much like team building if I have to do it myself.

ALISTER

Julie, don't do anything you don't want to. It's only the middle of the bush. Sleep outside tonight under the stars if you like. Assuming you don't mind the poisonous spiders.

JULIE

(Looks around at the forest.)

Did *you* assemble your own tent? How did you connect the plumbing for the bidet?

ALISTER

Actually Jasper did most of it.

JULIE

(Alarmed.)

Jasper? She can't be here.

ALISTER

This is a corporate retreat. It's about *team* building. With the senior *team*.

JULIE

Keeping her *off* the team is why we agreed to this bushland bacchanal in the first place!

(A rustling in the bush. JASPER enters right.)

ALISTER

Jasper's on the team now. So she's here.

(JULIE searches her bag, finds a small telescope.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

So are we good here Julie? You're my HR VP. I need you to second the appointment of Jasper to Cat Operating Officer. Just tell the partners you're cool with this.

(JULIE walks downstage away from JASPER. She points the wrong end of the telescope at the sky.)

JULIE

Alister, I'm not great with these things. Can you show me how to work it?

(ALISTER goes, turns the telescope around.)

ALISTER

It's a telescope, Julie! You look through *this* end and see what's at *that* end.

JULIE

(Feigning interest in the telescope, talks quietly to ALISTER.)

I don't want her to hear us talking about her.

ALISTER

Good luck with that. She has incredible hearing.

(JASPER cocks her head, smiles at JULIE, waves.)

JULIE

Let's pretend we're discussing the third quarter results.

ALISTER

She'd hear a tarantula scratching its ear in your sleeping bag from a hundred yards away.

JULIE

The partners respect that it's your decision with Jasper. But they aren't happy with you hiring her. For an obviously made-up position.

ALISTER

COO? Not made up. Lots of firms our size have COOs.

JULIE

A Cat Operating Officer?

ALISTER

For which she's uniquely qualified.

JULIE

Sir, she's a cat.

ALISTER

She's better than most of the dogs I've hired over my career.

JULIE

You shouldn't do this. Even if it isn't a made-up job. You can't give a job to your cat.

ALISTER

I gave a job to *you*. Vice-president of human resources. Your job is totally made up.

JULIE

It most certainly is not!

ALISTER

It is! When I started this firm fifteen years ago, it was just me and Jasper working in our basement with a couple of phones and a single computer. There was no VP of HR.

JULIE

I think that's different. It was only you then.

ALISTER

*And Jasper*. Then she said, "We should hire a vice-president of human resources."

JULIE

She didn't!

ALISTER

She wanted to be less involved in the business. Focus more on raising a family.

JULIE

I never knew that.

ALISTER

She organized the search when we recruited you.

JULIE

When I interviewed, it was a group of partners. I wondered about the cat being there.

ALISTER

Blinded by your own privilege as a human. Who do you think was in charge?

(JULIE looks over at JASPER grooming herself.)

JULIE

Her?

ALISTER

Who made the recommendation to hire you? Who gave the approval to bring you on?

JULIE

You?

(ALISTER shakes his head no, nods at JASPER.)

JULIE (CONT'D)

Jasper?

(JASPER does a grand bow.)

ALISTER

Got it now Julie? You tell the partners we're appointing Jasper as Cat Operating Officer.

JULIE

Even if I wanted to . . . there's the elephant in the room.

ALISTER

The elephant?

JULIE

The cat. Sir.

ALISTER

I see. You can't get past that Jasper might present as a cat?

JULIE

She *is* a cat.

ALISTER

And that's why you're opposed to hiring her as COO of our firm?

JULIE

As your second in command? The face of our organization to our clients?

ALISTER

(Turns to look at JASPER. In baby talk.)

But just look at that face. Such a cutie. And those ears.

JULIE

Sir, even with all she's done for me, I have concerns about her being . . . a cat.

(JASPER grabs the telescope, searches the ground.)

JULIE (CONT'D)

She's also *your* pet. She'd be reporting to you. Not good to have a pet relationship with a direct report that might involve . . . you know, actual petting.

(JASPER rushes to ALISTER, rubs up against him.)

JULIE (CONT'D)

Are you okay with stigmatizing her as a NEPO KITTY? Even if we were going to hire a cat, Jasper lives with you. She's part of your family!

ALISTER

We're not related by blood you know. She's adopted.

(Beat.)

Julie, I'm disappointed you would endorse employment discrimination at our firm.

JULIE

Employment discrimination?

ALISTER

We're progressive. Yet now we're discriminating against an individual simply for not being a visible member of the dominant species.

JULIE

You're thinking unfair treatment based on how she identifies? As a *cat*?

ALISTER

You said it yourself. You're opposed to hiring her on the grounds that she's not human.

JULIE

Species status is not a protected personal characteristic in employment legislation.

ALISTER

Maybe it should be. We have an implied duty to accommodate Jasper's *catness*. We can't judge her unfairly because she identifies as *Felis Catus*.

JULIE

I have to think.

ALISTER

Look around. What do you see? Campsites. Lovely outhouses. But do you know what animals see in the modern forest? A repressive hegemony controlled by humans.

JULIE

Isn't that the natural order? Humans in charge of everything? Because we're the humans?

ALISTER

But is it right? Isn't it time to put animals at the top? We could start today. With Jasper.

JULIE

You're talking about feline empowerment? We appropriate cats' cultural tropes all the time. Yet we never see actual cats running the show in corporate boardrooms.

ALISTER

Julie, you could grab the leash on this and run with it.

JULIE

What gives us the right to discriminate against them, to deny them opportunities?

ALISTER

That's the spirit. Not every person in the world identifies as human. Certainly, cats don't.

JULIE

Our brand is about being progressive. Cats in the boardroom could be the next big thing in employment inclusivity and workplace activism.

ALISTER

It could be *your thing*.

JULIE

As liberals, we take our causes seriously. Whatever they are.

ALISTER

So are you open to this now? Advocating for Jasper with the partners?

JULIE

The fur ceiling keeping cats out of C-suite jobs? I could go to conferences, do talks on it.

ALISTER

For the firm and you professionally, it's a win-win. The corporate cat lady from HR!

JULIE

I like the sound of that. I'm getting tingles just thinking about it. The corporate cat lady!

ALISTER

Tingles? Could be a skin reaction to contact with the forest. Do you want bug spray?

JULIE

I'm getting a physical sensation. Are there hives on my neck?

(JULIE leans over so ALISTER can see her neck.)

ALISTER

A little red. Probably too much exposure to the natural world. So you're on board?

JULIE

The back of my neck is prickly. Do you feel like something is watching us?

(JASPER points, whispers to ALISTER.)

JULIE (CONT'D)

My skin is itchy. Is this what being a corporate cat lady feels like? I should go.

ALISTER

Maybe it's just spidey-sense. Happens in the forest. Did you know that for every single human alive, there are 2.8 million spiders.

JULIE

Terrific. I have to go now.

ALISTER

That's not including insects—which are not spiders and are counted separately. But there's like a zillion spiders and insects in this forest right now watching us.

JULIE

I have to find my campsite and pull my tent over my head.

(JASPER whispers to ALISTER.)

ALISTER

Julie, fun fact about spiders. They love to eat. Jasper's an expert on them. If all the humans in the world fell asleep at the same time and spiders started eating them, it would take a year to consume every single person alive. Alive but sleeping.

JULIE

Why would you let a spider eat you? I hate spiders. I'm feeling unwell.

(JASPER points, whispers to ALISTER.)

ALISTER

Julie, don't move.

JULIE

What? The rash!

ALISTER

I don't want to alarm you.

JULIE

You're freaking me out. What?

ALISTER

Are you wearing earrings shaped like tarantulas?

JULIE

No! Of course not—

ALISTER

Stop! You don't want to move and scare it—

JULIE

What about scaring *me*? Get it off me!

ALISTER

Jasper's a superhero when it comes to spiders. And very knowledgeable.

(JASPER looks at JULIE's face with the telescope, whispers to ALISTER who speaks softly to JULIE.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

Have you heard of the Sydney funnel web spider? Fun fact. Its venom is toxic to primates but harmless to cats. I know what you're thinking. The biological order *Primates* include the genus *Homo* which includes the species *Homo sapiens* which includes *us*.

(JULIE hyperventilates. ALISTER raises his hand.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

So while it's true that its bite kills people, this spider is no match for *Felis Catus*.

JULIE

What are you saying! Get if off me!

ALISTER

Julie, I'm saying that Jasper is *Felis Catus*, Superhero and she's about to save your life.

(JASPER walks calmly to JULIE, lifts her face covering, picks the bug off her face and eats it.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

All gone. You're alive Julie and free to go. And always remember who saved your life.

(JULIE rushes off.)

ALISTER (CONT'D)

I think we can count on her at the partners' meeting. By the way, what was it you ate?

JASPER

A shad fly.

(END OF PLAY)