

WANNA KITTEN?

by Poppy Z. Brite

This story has never been published and never will be, except on www.poppyzbrite.com. I'm making it available not because I think it is some sort of lost masterpiece (far from it), but because it may give readers a look at how my fictional voice developed. In other words, it is just for fun.

Please read it in that spirit.

The literary equivalent of a doodle from the Big Red Notebook of 1985, this is the first-ever appearance of Steve and Ghost. A tiny fragment that led to a long and happy partnership, it is presented here for hardcore fans only. For some reason, the line "Wanna kitten?" used to absolutely crack up me and my friend Monica Kendrick.

Wild Bill's Pizza was a mother to desire; the bulletin board there was full of ads for used guitars, halves of apartments —

"Wanna kitten?" Steve held up a notecard with a drawing of a cat, child-scribbled round head and six straight whiskers. KITTENS — FREE. The value they place on tiny soft lives. Ghost turned away, his hair falling translucent over his eyes. His hands clutched the back of a chair he hadn't known was there and he edged into the booth, reaching for the shakers of Parmesan cheese, dried pepper flakes (hot and bitter), salt. The glass globes were cool between Ghost's hands. He shook out a pinch of each and began to trace patterns of spices on the checkered oilcloth. Nutmeg, myrrh ... Another shaker? ... ohhhhh, God, powdered garlic — a gift from the saints, a sign, a grace. He began to eat it by pinches, his eyes watering as they wandered. Steve was a thin blur in a black sweatshirt from a college he'd dropped out of, torn bluejeans, horrible green shoes. They were alone now, the two of them; the car once crammed with instrument cases and jabbing elbows seemed empty as a cathedral. Ghost slept in the back, wrapped in Steve's excellent warm blanket from some Holiday Inn; Steve drove and sang raucously, loudly, along with his cassette tapes to fill the space between the windshield and the highway and the fields.

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