

Minisode: Cat

[Spoke audio logo]

CARSON: Hey Janielle.

JAN: Hey Kitty-Cat.

CARSON: And hello everyone listening. Today, I am taking over this minisode. I am commandeering it, it is mine and mine alone.

JAN: Usually when you have a big surprise for me you'll say like, puddin, I have a big surprise. And we'll put like, Cat's big surprise.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: And this time, it's all a big Cat surprise.

CARSON: It's all a surprise.

JAN: You sent me a script.

CARSON: Welcome. Minisodes, as a reminder, this is where we have some piece of audio, some interview that we loved a lot, and that really informed something for me and Janielle, but didn't really fit into any of our chapter sort of narrative theme.

JAN: Yeah, it was useful in a stand-alone capacity to the story.

CARSON: But today, instead of an interview, or just one interview, I have a metaphor to share with you guys. This is a metaphor that Janielle and I have seen emerge in a bunch of different interviews, a bunch of different conversations, it's something that's come up quite a bit.

JAN: And we cut it pretty early on because we just didn't think we had room for it. There are only so many like metaphors or themes you can track in one story, so we picked our top three.

CARSON: Yeah, it sort of fell by the wayside for a long time until recently, where we got some more compelling audio that made this metaphor I think stand out in a way that it hadn't before.

JAN: Tell the people what the metaphor is.

CARSON: The metaphor is: Janielle's dad's cat.

JAN: God bless.

CARSON: God bless this cat. So today I am going to be playing for you some audio that I curated. Some of my favorite parts of conversations about this cat and how it played out in a metaphor in Janielle's story.

JAN: The metaphor that got away from us.

CARSON: Yes. Welcome to Untitled Dad Project. Minisode: Cat.

[Theme song. Carson and Jan meow the theme song]

[AD BREAK 1]

CARSON: We're going to start with a conversation you had with Charley about it, one of your dad's sailing buddies. We just heard from Charley in Chapter Six, more in-depth about your dad. And Charley is actually the one who took it upon himself to clean out your dad's apartment. So he is the one that discovered your dad's cat.

CHARLEY: Well, let's see. I'm trying to remember what her name is. See, her parents live in the same building. And she said, well there's two cats. And I've been in, in the apartment. And I said, how are there two cats in there? Um, I think Michelle told me about this lady that was a cat rescue person. And she had all these nice ladies who would do this cat rescue stuff. And there--one of the cats was dead. The older one. Just had died. But there was another one that they, and we had to go through. I mean it took over a week.

JAN: So you just couldn't find the cat?

CHARELY: Never saw the cat. We knew that there were two cats, and that one of them was dead and the other one had to be in there. And I thought, we better get this cat soon before--

JAN: How did you know one was dead? You found the dead one?

CHARLEY: Mmhmm.

[inaudible]

JAN: Oh. So do you think it had died--

WOMAN: Natural causes. She was on medications that stopped. So he passed away and then the cat passed away.

JAN: Oh I see.

CHARLEY: But that cat, eventually we got her a leads. Eventually I got to know these ladies.

JAN: How did they get the cat?

CHARLEY: Just eventually found her. And that cat is leads a life of luxury.

JAN: Where does she live now?

CHARLEY: Um, they got her some--

JAN: Or he?

CHARLEY: She was adopted out. I have a picture some place on my, uh that they sent me. And this this cat is totally groomed and sitting on this almost Victorian looking cat bed. So this cat has gone from this hell hole hoarder's place to the lap of luxury.

JAN: Hmm.

CARSON: So immediately after this, you and I sat down and sort of strategized how we were going to find this cat. Do you remember why you wanted to find this cat so badly? Why it was so important?

JAN: My dad's cat felt to me like his actual next of kin. Like I am his theoretical next of kin, I suppose, but I was feeling so like fraught about that, like am I really? But dad's cat was like there, was like his chosen family, he took care of that cat. So, like in that way it was his actual kind of child. And I was feeling really, um, like I wanted responsibility after my dad's death. I felt this like wave of nobility and I am. I'm gonna right the wrong of never having reached out to him. And so I at some point volunteered to adopt the cat when Charley called me in and told me about the cat. Um, lo and behold it had already been adopted. My roommate is, was at the time, was really allergic to cats, but she just didn't know how to love me through my grief, so she was like we'll find a way. And I thought, I'll just name

the cat Dad and it will just be this great little morbid whatever. I I kind of had all these fantasies I was playing out, and um, and even though I didn't adopt him, it felt important for some reason to find this cat. But just as important as it did to like find the reverend who officiated my dad's funeral. Like each of these things could have been where the breakthrough was going to be.

CARSON: So the next thing I'm going to play for you is a conversation that you had with a woman named Jean about this very subject. Why you thought it was so important to find this cat. This is the first time I had heard you put words to why you wanted to find this cat, why it might be important to you. And she makes you answer some really tough questions about what you would want from this cat.

JEAN: Do you want the cat?

JAN: I don't know that I want the cat, I really want to meet the cat. I don't know what happens to our energies, or what happens to us when we die, but this cat was the only thing in the room when my dad died. So he wasn't alone, and I don't know what of my dad--like do, whatever we are when we die, does that get lodged in the other living things around us, or? I don't know I'm just really interested in this cat.

JEAN: What I think is that your interest in that cat, your attraction to the cat, your feeling is an important thing to honor. That's what I know.

JAN: Ok.

JEAN: I have no answers other than that. The, cats have an intimate way with our psyches.

JAN: Yeah.

JEAN: So, there's why not? Why not?

JAN: Sure.

JEAN: Have an interview with a cat.

JAN: Yeah, I really want to meet it.

JAN: Are you going to tell people we didn't do it?

CARSON: Yeah, spoiler alert. We did not find this cat.

JAN: We can't find it.

CARSON: I looked so hard, I emailed Charley. He didn't know. He pointed us to the rescue. I went through that rescue, I emailed the rescue, they didn't know or they didn't get back to me, I can't remember. But, then I, my big deep dive was I went through their Facebook page and looked for any mane coon that I find on their Facebook page up for adoption and could not find a single one around the time of your dad's death. So.

JAN: We never met the cat.

CARSON: We never met the cat.

JAN: And this was about the time that we kind of abandoned the whole cat thing right?

CARSON: Uh, I would say like a couple months later, we had tried everything and exhausted all of our options and just was sort of like, this is not going to work.

JAN: Yeah. It's not going to be the thing that we thought.

CARSON: So, we never found your dad's cat. Would you like to reveal to our audience what we found instead?

JAN: Um, so I was walking up to your door one day to record Robert episode?

CARSON: It was our very first recording of the script for Chapter 1A.

JAN: For Chapter 1A.

CARSON: The very first iteration.

JAN: So I came in, like ready with my script, and feeling really nervous because I was very embarrassed about the interview and how it had gone. And I saw like a weird orange blur in your bushes. And so I was like, that must--that's like a weird squirrel. And then when I got to your front door, I looked in the bushes. And I, looking back at me were these giant eyes staring at me. And it's this little orange and white kitten. And I was like, oh my God, like this cat just was. It was waiting at your front door, and as I walked up it darted into the bushes. And then, as I started trying like very slowly to approach it, he darted away. And then I came inside and I was like, we're going to record. And we started recording, but you're obsessed with cats.

CARSON: Yeah, so you came inside and you were like, there's a kitten. And I was like, we are going to find this kitten. So we first tried to corner it, I think. We thought it was in the bushes and we tried to corner it.

JAN: And it wasn't in the bushes anymore.

CARSON: And it wasn't in the bushes anymore.

JAN: No.

CARSON: We couldn't find him. Second thing we tried was I took out every good smelling thing in my fridge. So there was like greek yogurt and cat treats.

JAN: We lured the kitten with treats. There he is. Carson's gonna get you little one. We're gonna get you.

CARSON: He came back, and we were watching the window, and we ran outside, and we lost him again. And then we were like, oh no we need to record.

JAN: Oh that's right so then I I I, we came up with the idea that we would just Facetime our kitty trap.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And so we Facetimed. I set my phone up downstairs facing out your front window and so we could record the Robert script.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: And at some point you stopped me.

CARSON: At some point, I don't know that we even recorded it because I can't find that audio, but whatever happened we stopped because we were like, the kitten is back.

JAN: And we spent the better part of two hours running around your entire neighborhood. We would spot him and then try to corner him and he would dart and he was so small and so fast. We eventually caught him.

JAN: Carson you caught him!

CARSON: We caught him. Hey. Look at this little thing, it's soft. Your world will be soft now. Yeah.

CARSON: We caught him. We cornered him at a neighbor's garage.

JAN: And he was so scared looking.

CARSON: Oh, so skinny. And he's got his little red eyes. You're a little wild cat.

CARSON: So yeah, we put him in a box and we brought him into the house and we gave him a little bit of food.

JAN: Like me in college, so hungry.

CARSON: And he was covered in fleas.

JAN: And his little leg was bent.

CARSON: His leg was bent. It had this big uh,

JAN: Gash like a, like a,

CARSON: Mmhmm.

JAN: ..welt on it. And his little ribs you could see like

CARSON: He was so tiny. I took him to the vet and he was one pound.

JAN: Oh.

CARSON: Oh. He was so cute. So we decided to integrate him into our recording setup.

JAN: Ok, Carson I'm ready to record. And I've even got my kitten in here for emotional support. Oh the coffin isn't so sad and lonely with you in here. Oh hear that purr. Can you hear that purr on mic?

CARSON: I'm glad you had a support kitten today.

JAN: It was really helpful, I'm not going to lie.

CARSON: Good.

JAN: I think he likes the podcast.

CARSON: We can name him Rick Tears. Is that too much?

JAN: What did you say?

CARSON: I said that we can name him Rick Tears is that too much?

JAN: I want to name him dad.

CARSON: Dad.

JAN: Dad cat.

[music]

CARSON: So we thought a bunch of things about what this cat meant to us.

JAN: Yes like the metaphor picked back up. A cat reentered the story. Like maybe this is, like he represents my dad reincarnated?

CARSON: Yeah, and then there was a bunch of complications around like, but what does it mean that he would run!

JAN: Why was he running? He ran away and tried to hide. Like he made himself known to me at the front door, like he wanted in. But then he ran away for two hours.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: Like why, if my dad was coming to me, why did he not have like a knowing look in his eye and then come up to like he was running. Being scared as hell of me. So we thought, maybe it's the dad reincarnated, and then we thought maybe it's the dad's cat reincarnated. And then maybe he was just like a gift given to us by my dad.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: Whatever it is, the cat metaphor came back alive in like a really small, like innocent perfect way.

CARSON: And beyond that, the kitten metaphor actually came back in a way that wasn't with a tangible cat. It wasn't with a literal kitten coming back into your life.

JAN: It was just in my psyche.

CARSON: Yeah. And it came back like this.

JAN: When I was talking about what I had learned from our last chapter, foreshadowing and daddy issues, I was talking about it with one of my friends and I said, there's that. The feeling

had shown up for me finally which is, something about you is fundamentally abandonable and what a scary release it was to share that feeling. And then she said, well all of us are abandonable. And she brought up I think maybe the most brilliant point I've ever heard in my life which is, people abandon boxes of kittens. And none of us will ever be as adorable or as perfect or as innocent and yet, some people can place them on the side of the road. Also, there's almost no thing that is easier to not abandon. You can just walk in to a shelter and drop it off. You can lie and say they're not yours and drop it off. It's so easy to not leave a box of kittens by the side of the road where they could die. And yet some people still do.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And I think about what would make me abandon a box of kittens as opposed to doing the right thing and doing something responsible with them if I knew I couldn't actually take care of them the way I wanted to. And I think about how shameful it would be to say I'm the kind of person who abandons a box of kittens. And to walk into maybe a, I don't know a ASPCA shelter or whatever and have to actually show people that that's what you're doing. It would be so shameful and awful. It would be kind of admitting I'm the kind of person who can abandon kittens. So it might make you more likely to just leave them by the side of the road where they could die. Like how shameful a thought to think, I am a person who abandons their child. And if you had to actually reckon with me and look me in the eyes and say, hey, here's why I'm not in your life. Because I, I don't know I can't. I'm not good enough. You deserved a dad and I couldn't do it. To look me in the eyes would have to acknowledge to yourself that you're somebody who abandoned a child. So it would be a million times easier to just abandon the child. Like, do you see what I'm saying? The shame would make you more likely to do the thing that you're unwilling to acknowledge than to do it in a responsible way.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And this has nothing to do with my dad, no it does. It does. Abandoning a box of kittens by the side of the road says nothing about the quality of the kittens. It says everything about the quality of the person who cannot bring themselves to do something responsible with the kittens. Maybe I inherited this perfectionism, whatever it is. But the fact that he abandoned me says a lot more about his character than it does about mine.

CARSON: Yes. I love, I love that your friend said that, yeah.

JAN: I know that I've been. I've been in therapy for four years. I know that we've talked about this. But something about being like, but aren't you, you're worthy and like what your dad does doesn't mean anything about you. And what men do in your life when they stop talking to you

doesn't say anything about you. I understand, I know I've heard that before. But something about just picturing a box of kittens.

CARSON: Oh my gosh it's so good.

JAN: It's so much more clearly. There's nothing wrong with the kittens. And they might inherit stuff, because they were left by the side of the road like ticks and heartworms and all that stuff. But that has nothing to say about the quality of the kittens themselves.

CARSON: No.

JAN: It was just so much more clear. You know when you can't hear something until you can hear it?

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: I don't think I could have heard that all of last episode.

CARSON: No, of course not.

JAN: But something about facing that I was abandoned and I fear that makes me fundamentally abandonable. Something about facing that made me sit in the box with the kittens when she told me that metaphor and then I could really feel it. Oh there's nothing wrong with us. The person that can't look you in the eyes when they walk away or can't look you in the eyes as they continue to not be in your life but pop in with a birthday card. Can't look you, can't come to you correctly and acknowledge that they've abandoned you. It says something about them, not you.

CARSON: And this is where the metaphor comes full circle for me. Because we've just had this whole episode about what you inherited from your dad. What pieces of his character show up in your character, and we talked about how you might have had the same hubris, that same if I can't do something perfect, I won't do it at all. And this is like fundamental evidence to me that you have chosen a different path. Because when you were faced with a kitten. An inconvenient kitten. You didn't abandon it. And not only did you not abandon it, you chased it down the road for two hours. And so not only is this metaphor true in that you are worthy, but also it shows me like, you have refused to let this hubris play out in the way

that it played out for your dad. And that's why I think this metaphor is important to us.

JAN: Yeah it came back around there at the end, didn't it.

CARSON: Yeah, that's why I think it's worth it's own minisode.

JAN: Cause after, cause after, the cat's name is Taco-Cat.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: You named him Taco-Cat, it's a palindrome. After Taco came like into our lives, after we like saved him, I thought the metaphor had sort of dried up there too.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And that's really beautiful. But also, my dad took care of two cats.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: So in this new take on a metaphor, my dad did take care of two cats. He was able to do that. He was able to feed and take care of two creatures that were there for him at the end. I guess, here's how it plays into--the things that you do take care of when you don't have to, um can often come back and take care of you. So that's in there too. Somewhere. In the parts of the story that we've cut. There's more complication here. I mean you took the burden of financial responsibility, and the flea responsibility of sweet Taco-Cat.

CARSON: Well sure, but we--

JAN: And he's now your child. So I didn't take full responsibility for him, but I acknowledged him and didn't abandon him.

CARSON: But I feel like even full responsibility wouldn't exercise this metaphor in the way that I would hope. You know, there's some stuff around responsibility that I think has not been useful in your story. Like when you have felt responsible for reaching out to your dad, or when you have felt responsible for taking things on, that has not been. Like that's not the same thing as this metaphor, that's not the same thing.

JAN: Right, you don't have to be responsible for something to not abandon it.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: You can acknowledge this thing in an inconvenient moment when it'd be easier to ignore it, and you can responsibly say and I'm not going to be your

caretaker in a responsible way. And give it to someone who can. Or surrender it to someone who can.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: That's interested Kitty-Cat because it's my dad didn't have to adopt me and nurture me and care for me like he did for his cats which he chose. He chose however those cats came into his life he chose to keep them alive and take care of them. Um, but he abandoned me. He could have not abandoned me by sort of responsibly acknowledging me.

CARSON: Yeah, I mean.

JAN: And saying goodbye in some way.

CARSON: It's the, it's the, you can responsibly not abandon kittens. You can take them to the ASPCA.

JAN: Yeah yeah yeah. Wow ok. That's even more complicated because it's less tidy than you just adopt every cat you meet. It's not every cat you meet, not every inconvenient responsibility that comes your way is yours, but that doesn't mean you have to abandon those things. You can acknowledge them.

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: That's a much more complicated thing to reckon with in that way it feels much more apt and appropriate for this story, which is not netting out in like the coziest, tidiest of ways. It's netting out in a much more complicated way.

[music]

CARSON: I have a question.

JAN: Yeah.

CARSON: If you were to talk to your dad's cat now, what would you say?

JAN: Hm. Thank you for being with him at the end. He obviously loved you very much. Thank you for loving him too. Thank you for bearing witness to his story. I'm sorry that your, you don't have a dad anymore. I don't either. I never did. But that doesn't qualify your pain, cat. Kitty-Cat, not you. Cat, Dad's Cat. I'm sorry you don't have your person anymore. It must be very hard. I'm really glad you have a new home. I hope you love it. And I hope you never forget my dad. And you matter. And I would very importantly not make the cat feel like it had to take

care of my feelings. I would want it to be able to find me irrelevant like some cats do. I would just sort of what to have mutual respect as my dad's kind of two next of kins.

CARSON: Is there anything you'd like to say to like, Taco?

JAN: Oh Taco-Cat. Um, you're so lucky. So many other kitty cats never get found. Never get chosen, and never get to have a world that's so soft. And how fun that you get to be such an entitled asshole now. It's so fun to feel so legitimate and that you so belong in a house that you get to knock things off of shelves. That's how much you belong here. And I'd tell him I love him. And that he picked the right door to meow in front of and then run away from. I'd tell him he's lucky he didn't get what he wanted. The scarier thing, getting caught, was so much better for him. You know, I wouldn't tell him he's lucky to have a warm, soft home. I would tell him that's what he deserves. That's what he deserves. All the little kitties deserve that. He's not lucky for having had it. All of us deserve it. All of us deserve that too. We're lucky or blessed I guess if we have warm homes where we're loved. But we all deserve it, even if we're abandoned and didn't have that warm soft home. And I'd look at him really closely to see if he's my dad. He's not. He's not my dad. But he's a good boy.

CARSON: Good boy.

CARSON: So, a few things about Taco. Taco does not talk very much, it's very rare and only when he has something important to say. Taco, I have a very important question for you. Were you sent by Janielle's father?

[Taco purrs]

CARSON: Taco, do you think you're quiet because you are a podcast producer and not a podcast host?

[Taco purrs again]

CARSON: Hey, Taco? Are you glad we found you?

[Taco purrs]

CARSON: So to catch you up on Taco's life, since he was untitled pod-cat, I think he's pretty happy. Do you think you're happy Taco?

[Taco purrs and meows]

[music]

CARSON: Thank you all for listening to this week's minisode. Up next is Chapter Seven, where Janielle and I chase down her elusive Third Act Breakthrough.

UDP is created and hosted by Janielle Kastner. Our production team is me, Carson McCain, Kelly Kolff, Lauren Floyd, Jenna Hannum, Kendall Lake, Evan Arnett, and Will Short. Our Executive Producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds. Special thanks this week to Charley, for finding Rick's cat a fabulous new home. Thank you to Jean Denny. You can find more of her at jeandenny.com. And thank you, Taco, for showing up at my door, for all the emotional support, and for every lizard you've ever caught and brought to me. You're a good boy.