

Waterways:

Poetry in the Mainstream

VOLUME

29



Waterways: Poetry in the Mainstream

Volume 29, #6

For I praise my cat Jasmine
For I praise her white fur and expressive tail
For I praise her lioness face -
half sphinx half my mother's;
her two different eyes,
pale gold paler blue,
useful for looking in different directions.

Enid Dame

excerpted from *Jasmine* (after Christopher Smart)

published in *Where is the Woman* (Shivastan)

WATERWAYS: Poetry in the Mainstream

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Number 6*

Designed, Edited and Published by Barbara Fisher & Richard Spiegel
Thomas Perry, Teaching Artist

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Patricia Kelly

the kitten paws at
the curve of the light bowl
no way in

Purrfect Priorities — Ellaraine Lockie

Midnight at the computer
An a.m. deadline
My cat keeps watch close-by
Muscles drawn taught, motionless
But for twitch of tail
and tremor in eye
matching my hand movement

I tell her no time no play
But a higher power speaks louder
An inherent habit of hunt
commands her to come in for the kill
continually

I'd blow my deadline
before offending the feline Deity
So I put on a shredded gardening glove
And continue to maneuver clumsily
the computer's right hand
Cursing the person
who told her it was a mouse

Lions 1, Christians 0 — Michael Hathaway

i glanced out my bedroom window in time to see Dancer, my 11-year-old, 14-pound yellow cat, hopping out of the preacher's brand new convertible mazda miata at the church across the street, i was horrified, knowing Dancer's territorial ideology, knowing from experience those unholy things he does to the insides of cars when the windows are left down. i ran frantically downstairs, flung open the door and called him. i wanted him home. before

he had to learn about the Christian obsession with retribution, what Christians do to those who do what comes natural. he pranced and danced home, pleased with himself. i smiled, "Ba-a-a-ad kitty!" and fed him a whole can of his favorite food.

The Orange Tree — Alicia Adams

More than ten we buried in the shade of the orange tree-
Ten cats in less than ten years, poisoned by the neighbors
Or crushed under cars. We wrapped them in towels
As we buried them. To keep them warm. To shield
Them from our eyes as the rusted shovel pierced
Through dirt and roots.

I think of them when I can't find a towel, when I stand
Over the bathroom tile and shiver as I dry, drop
By drop. I think of them at night when the tree taps
Against my window, and I imagine a strong wind ripping
Their bodies from the ground, and I wonder if it's their bones
I hear tapping against the glass.

If I meet them in heaven, I will lie down and let them
Crawl on top of me and around me, and stroke their chins
And bellies the way I used to individually, but now altogether,
A warm and purring blanket.

Some days I eat the oranges whole- peel, seeds, and fruit
And imagine kitten corpses decomposing in the soil,
Absorbing through roots and trunk and branches, into
The fruit I eat, into the juice that drips down my chin and sticks
Between my fingers. The fruit that slips down my throat
And stomach, that courses through my blood and fuels
My guilt.

The Window — Ida Fasel

Down by the river
where the rents are cheap,
in the flats where flood
is always a threat
and houses are
abandoned, fired, vandalized,
old tires, auto hulks collect.
Mother's Day roses just delivered
by Floral Air. Yellow this year.

In the window a cat sits reflecting
On fast years flown. Would she
recognize the child whose lap was
so often hers, whose hand
in her yellow fur was so well known?

Divertimento — Joan Payne Kincaid

Sushi lies under the reading lamp
to find a source of heat, a quest she's been on
most of her sixteen years since her birth on my desk;
lately at night the electric radiator is switched on

in case the thermostat doesn't bring enough heat
to the iron radiators...
the least we can do for her devotion
and entertainment all these years.

It's nearly time for her hydration routine
once a day insertion of liquids the vet prepares
inserted under her skin
something she has learned makes her feel good.

Today we hear she's lost a pound-
chopped chicken livers and steamed flounder
can't seem to fatten
and she's an artist at refusing any sort of pill!

So we will take it one step at a time
and be grateful for every moment of her proud sense of humor,
to hug the egg shell body, be charmed by the lilac masque
and eyes the color of sky.

Unfixed — Noel Sloboda

The family next door never
had its cat spayed and
when she bore

another litter
in late July
two were tuxedoes

one was pure white
another a grey tiger
the last a golden lab and

it was not entirely clear
if nature was selecting
or sending messages.

Peekie — Lorraine Jeffery

She wasn't much trouble,
 this outside non-pampered cat.
A hand-me-down from a
 college son.

She chased leaves and caught
 butterflies,
and ran from loud noises and
 small children.

I fed her, provided water,
 a litter box in winter,
and then —
 I ignored her.

Occasionally she would twine
around my legs.

I would give a quick pat, and
a brief word.

Swirls of white hair floated up when
the garage door opened,
And there were muddy paw prints on my
car in the spring. I complained.

In the winter, when her coat
was thick, soft and white,
she died — quickly and quietly.
There was no mess.

She wasn't much trouble,
this non-pampered cat.

Many Years from Today — Paul Kareem Tayyar

She fears she will become the
"Cat Lady," the aged, witch-like
Waif who lives in her house on
The hill and tends only to the
Kittens who crawl into her
Lap for comfort each morning.

She could not be more wrong.

I'll be there, too, sitting beside
Her on the sofa, watching reruns
Of old television shows that we
Liked, too deaf to listen to anything
The characters are saying, but
Certain the low whispering that
I hear is the beating of our hearts
In time together.

Shaken, Not Stirred — Paul Kareem Tayyar

Your cat believes himself a spy to be,
See him hiding in the shower like
An illicit lover whose mistress'
Husband has just come home,
See him crouching underneath
The sink even when our ancient
Dishwasher begins its never-
Ending moan, see him slip
Between the covers in the
Night when he believes sleep
Has already stole upon our
Tired bones.

He would be
A 007 to your Madame M,
He would flirt with the Siamese
Moneypennys that come calling
For him every evening when you
Let him out to roam, he would
Use the license that his sharpened
Claws provide to kill any danger
To the throne that you have so assigned.

But, thank goodness this is not to
Be, that there is not much use for
Special agents in this town beside
The sea, because the word is that
The 00s don't live very long when
They are surrounded by a den of
Thieves, and you'd love this cat to
See another twenty years before
He takes his final leave.

The Stray — Fran Farrell Kraft

Trash was a stray

Like all good strays, he knew a good thing when he smelled one

He showed up in our yard when he sensed we were yearning for a cat

We had selected a white kitten with a grey spot on her belly

from Momma-cat next door's latest litter

After much discussion and consultation, we had arrived at

the right name for the kitten

I wanted to call her Spot (see above), my husband wanted to call her Honky

Our friend, the Southern civil rights lawyer, named her Po' White Trash

Unfortunately the kittens grew to giving-away size while we were on a short vacation

We arrived home eager to assume our new responsibilities only to find we no longer had a kitty-designate

Our dedicated neighbors had found her a good home

Trash, with his stray's nose, soon found us

He fulfilled all of our requirements

He was not female nor all white nor did he have a spot.

But he was a cat with an attitude.

He would answer, in his own fashion,

to Po' White Trash or Mr. Trash or PW or simply Trash

He knew who he was

Weekend — Fran Farrell Kraft

The week ends and somewhere in the house

A mommy mouse has babies.

Upstairs, on Saturday, Maria catches two.

My younger cat salutes the Sabbath by
presenting me with one. It's a tiny little mouse
but still unsettling.

Hezzie, the older cat, feigns indifference.

She eats both breakfasts
while Bastet prowls and romps,
searching for another prize.

I hope it was a very small litter
and Bastet scared them back into their holes.

The week begins and I am still two weeks behind

Now with a baby mouse on our collective mind.

Indoor Cat — Joanne Seltzer

The white of her face
threatens cancer,
warns not to sunbathe
on her wide windowsill
without sun block
(yeah, tell that to a cat).

When songbirds chirp
she chirps
and when they fly away
a white paw washes
what the tongue can't reach
and when orange fluff
scratches the deckside
of our patio door
lioness hisses at
her only feline friend.

Potted cutgrass
reaches for sunshine,
brings the outdoors in.

Geoff Stevens

meowing at me
to mow the lawn
to take the trash out
to repair the toaster
she stares at me
from her stony Sphinx face
will not take no for an answer
will not allow me to ignore her
she does not believe that I am
king of the jungle

O Honey Cat — Marguerite Maria Rivas

1986-2002

O honey cat, you can drip drop
that purr ooze onto my covers.
Sweet Stria, sleep, nap-cat
while I click clack poetry beside you

You've survived homelessness—
basement dweller smelling like heating oil.

O most forbearant cat!
You've hopped and scratched
the life out of the new couch.

O most beauteous feline, fierce
yet fearful, you burrow under
my armpit in a thunderstorm.

Sweet Stria, purring past the last
leg of her disease—my last link
to an old, old, life and spring's amnesia.

O most noble ears! Most velvet fur!
Behind your dull cataracts, I see
the lamping eyes of Isis.

Whim — Davide Trame

You keep the door ajar and see
your dog's eyes just outside, alert and pleading,
two beacons enquiring and waiting in the dark;
you open the door but instead of coming in
she leaves in a rush, back to her armchair in the other room.
The door ajar again you forget her
and see her later, suddenly, tail wagging towards your desk.

The cat jumps down from the roof
to the glass door and bangs it with her paw,
when you open she turns and leaves,
on a whim, out of spite maybe.

Gestures filling your day,
a constant pattern like the roar of the sea
that you hear and do not hear.

The sea that on this moonlight night
seems so far from its fury,
the white hem of the foam like the bed sheet
you shift before lying down.
And its stare, where all whims sail,
like the cat's eyes blinking
in truce-like reassurance.

First Day of Spring — Lyn Lifshin

the cat coils into my skin.
Red maple nipples
unfolding. All night, in
the cove of my hip she
nests, as if out of love,
deep into my body the
way I've heard some birds
fed sugar and water from
a dropper, held in the
warmth of a palm,
won't fly off as if
remembering the inside
of their mother's
body, the dark heat in

the egg, the roughness
of tongue or the
doctor slappingskin to
breathe. The heat, a
dream of food, a harbor
that even left, holds
the warmth of
what huddled there
like the field of
red tulips you planted
with someone gone,
exploding into
blood ruby

What Was It? — Donald Lev

What was it? A rose? A little fluffy white cat reflected in a pane of glass?
Where do storms begin? Show me some patch of ocean to sink my prayers in.
Reveal to me the graffiti scribbled on the void
The smudge of sunlight I am to understand.

I am to understand, am I? Every bulge and bend in the universe, each
Catastrophic event in the bleak and starry seas
Surrounding my pitiable privacy must become known to me
While my heart's whole and my walnut brain's uneaten,
And my dust's yet undistributed over the dance floor of the crowded discotheque of Time?
Here, Kitty, the sea's still calm. Ah, the fragrance
Of this cut rose with an aspirin to sustain it, and a
Very wee fragment of the once huge brain of Einstein!

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