

# SAD GIRL REVIEW



Amber ♥ / Oh Kitty, Oh Darling (2018)

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contemporary art & text to bring you down

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issue 09

# CAT LADY



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Amber ♥

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Photograph by Zoe.

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## **LANDBACK & TREATY RESPECT**

This issue was produced on traditional Snuneymuxw territory. Hay ce:p 'qa' (thank you all), Snuneymuxw.



BIPOC, LGBTQA2S+,  
& disabled lives matter.

## **CONTENT WARNING**

Blood, death/loss.

## **GET IN TOUCH**

Got questions? Comments? Ideas?  
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issue 09

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to the latest issue of Sad Girl Review wherein we've decided to fully embrace the "cat person" lifestyle. In this issue, we've got plenty of art, poetry, and creative writing that dotes on our perfect fuzzy darlings. As cat lovers, we understand the unique bond that exists between felines and their humans. As artists and creatives, we're particularly well suited to articulating our devotion. And don't worry, if you're on the fence about becoming a full-time cat person - we'll show you the way, one paw at a time.

So, whether you're a seasoned cat person or just thinking of getting to know a cat or two, we hope you'll find something to meow about in this issue. Because at the end of the day, there's nothing quite like the joy, camaraderie, and servitude that comes from being a cat person.

As a wise woman on the internet once said, "I'm just gonna start talking about what I like: I love cats, I love every kind of cat, I just wanna hug all of them, but I can't."

Amber ♥

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How to  
Become a  
**Small  
Town  
Crazy  
Cat Person**



Photographs by Kaci Skiles Laws.





## **How to Become a Small-Town Crazy Cat Person** **by Sara Roncero-Menendez**

Are you still single? What with a pandemic, the fall of civilization, and the current state of online dating, it feels like many of us are very likely to, as the saying goes, die alone. But we need not go gentle into that good night, forgotten by the cruel passage of time and its fickle arbiters. Instead, here's a simple, but highly entertaining plan B. An emergency back-up plan you would be too ashamed to ask for out loud, but one I am happy to provide free of charge. And there's no panicked crying in a bathroom required!

# **1**

## **Move to a small town.**

When I say small, I mean a population of 5,000 or less. Five thousand sounds like a lot, but really, you'd be surprised at how few people that actually is. Five thousand people is about the size of one large high school, and we all remember how fast word spreads in those dens of hormones and hysterics. If you already live in a town of this size or smaller, you will need to move somewhere else, ideally a few states away. Sorry, I know, moving is a pain, but you're shedding all that sorrow and hardship that follows you around like a cloud in your little one bedroom apartment you can barely afford anyways.

**Pro-tip:** Get a creepy house for maximum cat-person vibes. Nothing says societal outcast like living in a house that a Stephen King character would unironically call home.

## 2

### *Devise a new identity.*

This is going to be a little bit tricky, but if you play this right, you will cement your crazy cat person legacy in no time. First, you'll need a new name. Pick something that sounds relatively fake and overly dramatic. Some examples: Wilma van der Hoogan, Penelope Wingateington, Evangeline LeFrance, Alex O'Coormahan'O'Riley, Cheereh. Don't worry about remembering which one you've picked, because the more names you tell people you have, the crazier you will sound. And no, you don't need a fake ID. The fact that your names don't match will only add to the mystery. Just be anyone but yourself.

## 3

### *Go out in public.*

In order to achieve your verified Crazy Cat Person status, you will need to go out in public. Ugh, I know, the worst.

The best part of this plan is you can dress however you want. Sweatpants and a top bun to get dinner? Hit it! Ballgown to go grocery shopping? Love it. Swimsuit to do your laundry? Rock that bikini or speedo in 30-degree weather!

The worst part of this plan is that you will have to talk to strangers. Go to the various local bars and tell the bartenders your tale of woe. The trick is to tell people wildly different backstories. You're running away from your ex-fiancé who was a serial mail-fraudster. You were the heir to a vast mustard empire when a rival mustard company (who cannot be named for legal reasons) killed your second cousin. You are an orphan who discovered they are eighth in line to the throne of Moldova and are now hiding from your murderous uncles. No one will know which is true, but the best story will come out on top and you will be a town talking-point.

The way you know it has worked is if conversations die the moment you approach people. That silence is the sweet, sweet sound of success.

# 4

## *Foster some cats.*

Hoarding cats is animal abuse, so we will not be doing that. Our feline friends need not suffer for our plan to work. The trick is to foster cats and rotate them frequently and very publicly. Take the two or so you have out on the porch with you (supervised, of course, don't let them kill the local bird population). Pet them as you glare at strangers passing by. This is a win-win, because it gives you the appearance of having many cats and you are helping local shelters.

You can, technically, do this with other animals, but not dogs. Dogs are too friendly and will make you approachable. Also, cats are just delightful, why would you need a substitute?

# 5

## *Reflect on your progress.*

Amidst all the chaos and confusion you've created, you will one day wake up in the middle of the night. The cats will meow. They've been awake for hours watching you. They've been watching you ruin your life for months now. You will go to the bathroom and give your puffy, blotchy face a good look for the first time in a long time.

God, what are you doing? Have you seriously uprooted your entire life to play out some charade in front of these random people? And for what? The sick thrill of knowing that even though they see you, they will never know in the deepest pit of your heart you are the kind of awful person who would move to a town and pretend to be insane.

And what a gross masquerade of madness you've been putting on. This quirky affect, this thoughtful pantomime of struggle and loneliness, is closer to reality than you would ever let anyone know. Rather than genuinely taking a chance on human connection, you've chosen to deceive people, because you know you are honestly not worth knowing. You are now more story than self, more performance than person. What is wrong with you?

What isn't wrong with you?

**Pro-tip:** Everyone has all-consuming guilt. You know what helps drown out the voices? Cats. And vodka.

# 6

## **Exist.**

Just do as you do. You've laid the groundwork, now just keep that momentum going and enjoy being the weirdest person for miles around. Bask in the freedom of it, learn to love owing no one anything. You are the master of your domain. And several cats.

This freedom can be unexpectedly terrifying. We are so used to being who people want us to be, who we want people to want us to be, that it's hard to remember who we are. You might find you are the kind of person who never finishes crosswords. You might be the person who actually really hates war movies, no matter how many Oscars it has or Tom Hanks' there are in it. You might find you're strangely into boats, or mugs, or decorative waffle irons. Sometimes you will have the urge to randomly scream like a wild beast in the night. Do it. You get up when you want, eat when you feel like it, watch whatever you find worthy of your attention. And even when you are lonely, it doesn't hurt in the same way it used to. The sting of it, the gnawing, gnashing teeth are gone.

You are learning to be someone. Maybe not exactly you, but someone. And that's better than nothing.

# 7

## **Know when to go.**

After months (or years) of pure, unadulterated oddity, it's time to make your French exit. After all, if you want to cement your legend, you either have to disappear under mysterious circumstances or go out in a blaze of glory. Blazes of glory always sound fun, but they are more often than not both illegal and deadly. We don't need that kind of energy in our lives, or potentially our afterlives. Instead, one day, just slip away into the night. Pack up everything you can't bear to leave behind, drop off the keys, get the kitties you have in the crates, and do a full peace-out-girl-scout.

Now, you might think, "Should I leave a puddle of blood or a mysterious note?" which, granted, is tempting. Everyone wants to be the subject of a true crime podcast. But do you really want people snooping around your past, shoving microphones in your face with demands to explain why you randomly appeared and then disappeared? Do you want the unflattering candid photos that come with it? Exactly. Do not pull a *Gone Girl*.

# 8

## Moving on.

So what's next? You've successfully moved your entire life for a combo of performance art and mental health retreat and now you are back to square one.

You can go to another small town and be their cat person for a while. It's never as fun the second time around, but if you're particularly good at it, it might be worth a try. You can go back to the life you had before, treat this as just a random experience, a fun anecdote for parties or your dating profile, that weird chapter in your memoir no one will believe is real.

I don't recommend either option.

Here's what you do: drive. Pick a direction and go. Stop in towns to feed your cats, let them out as needed, grab yourself whatever meal calls to you. Drive until you've seen things that surprise you, delight you, make you squeal with joy. Drive until you feel like the stretches of barren landscape are truly endless and that the ocean was always just some kind of fever dream. Drive until you arrive at a town that feels right. Don't worry if it turns out it isn't. If it turns out to be just another hollow embrace. You have already done this twice before, leaving it all behind, shedding yourself of skin that is too tight. You are home. Wherever you choose to be is just the window dressing.

Once you're there, settle in. Take a breath. Put on a muumuu and those leopard-print knee highs, and go wash your whites at the laundromat. You got this.





Selena Cotte

## ***Wishes (for fishes)***

witchy little girl casting spells with stolen rocks  
they come to fruition a decade so plus

but who can afford an image  
so trite:

a grown up brunette licks her own hair  
lines her eyes like a cat

and meowls

Olive Scott

## ***Stray Spirit***

*the storms will only get worse, they say*  
our cell towers are down  
ancient oaks uprooted after 200 years  
and without anything better to do  
I walk to the river

the stray by the reedbed, born out here  
in the wild; is wild; has delightfully muddied paws  
meows in welcome, *what a storm*, he says to me  
*see how the river swirls with fallen twigs?*

*I see it all*, I say to him; the water's burst banks  
gray goslings waddling after their mother  
a young heron, moonrise, this aliveness

*the river is carrying our precious world*  
*somewhere safe, far away from here*

he, who spends his hours among the reeds  
knowing nothing of natural gas  
or the flicker of television, water from the tap  
simply stretches his tail skyward; carefree

but if this disappeared, and all that was left  
were the lakes and trees, wouldn't I pad along  
through the cattails and bulrushes as lighthearted as he?

Valerie Loveland

## ***My Cat is an Actor in the Skeletorian Method***

Actors convey feelings via their craft of gaining or losing weight. Adipose can express up to 90% of emotion. Bodily drama is a fastest growing movie genre.

Ask Christian Bale. Ask Matthew McConaughey. Ask Renee Zellweger. Ask Robert Dinero. Ask Christian Bale again.

Christian Bale said he lost weight using the same method as my cat: he ate and ate and ate and ate and his weight dropped lower and lower and his skeleton grew more angular and large. He called it "feeding the skeleton." I asked him how he knew he was finished losing weight, and he said once you hit zero, your weight swings negative. I asked what that means, and he said he continued losing until shooting was over for the Machinist and then he had to bulk up to become Batman.

I am waiting for my cat to get a "meatier" part, but he is typecast, so he continues getting smaller and smaller. He eats and eats until he is a skelecat who wears a custom tailor-made fur. He keeps needing to have his own fur taken in. He plays a cat with a terminal illness. Then a cat with a tapeworm. After that: a cat that lives inside a tapeworm for revenge from the movie when a tapeworm lived inside him. They film that movie with microscope camera tricks and excellent set design. The director calls it tapework and everyone has to laugh. The tapeworm actors are so insecure they throw fits and quit. Luckily they all look similar and are easily replaced.

My cat is negotiating a contract to play Skeletor in the next He-man movie and because they liked his weight so much, they are considering shifting the script so the movie includes Skeletor's backstory. My cat thinks they may even rewrite the whole movie so Skeletor is the star, if he can lose more weight.

Courtney Felle

## ***at the state carnival i contemplate how to find something that can love me back as well as my friend's cat tamagotchi loves her***

in my best moments i am  
a weighted blanket, an  
oversized cargo jacket  
smothered in enamel pins,  
fun-size candy stored  
in the freezer, someone  
you call to say how glad  
you are the party is over.  
when i cry i become  
a misshapen crochet  
scarf, a reminder list  
left at home, a school  
with all the lights turned  
off, someone who keeps  
calling you even after  
you can't answer.



Nina Carroll

## *I whisper to her*

I whisper to her

on cloudless days  
when her velvet  
blends with shadows

she blinks  
enjoys the cock chorus  
nestled in coconut palms

there is no ceiling  
just glassy sky  
above her ebony ears

her nonchalance  
belies her beguilement  
she escapes

in the cloak of night  
not running far hides  
ready to pounce back

mornings I walk  
she listens for my voice  
ready for hand-fed food

dump cats  
most unspayed  
feed on garbage and rats

bib cat wears white  
peers through weeds  
between road rocks

a trilogy of cats  
plays chicken  
with screeching cars

no cats see  
pink clouds  
white cirrus  
or tangerine cumulus

colorblind  
except to blue and gray  
some say maybe yellow

but hearing acute  
they melt seduced  
by cat whisperers

hurricane Dorian  
killed rats roosters insects  
dogs cats in the surges

stalled over the Abacos  
for days and days  
swimming pigs lived

my midnight cat  
cannot be found  
whispering purrs  
drowned—silent

Joan Mazza

## *Haiku's Mind*

Meows at my ear wake me. I rise  
obedient to this god of purring fur  
and razor claws, fill the second half

of his food dish, change his water,  
clean the litter box. On the porch,  
the water bowl is frozen.

*Come back to bed. It's 3 AM.*  
*Me-now!* Another roommate  
who disagrees with facts.

D Larissa Peters

## ***Orson on the Front Porch***

On a Friday evening, Orson sits  
calmly accompanying my quarantine. Casually  
carefully eyes each flutter, click,  
flickering move around him. His wide yawn  
conscious, lazy. His ears—twitch a touch,  
narrows his eyes. Two green slits  
looking at me,  
looking at him.



Photograph by D Larissa Peters.



## Katelyn Brings Me a Pregnant Cat a Few Days after My Cat Dies

by Rachel Atchley

Did you know - the words *stray* and *feral* aren't interchangeable. Which word describes you, little one before me, skittering on the linoleum after two hours in the car?

Have you ever  
known  
home?

Our Cady died just now. Well, last week, if we're being exact. Sorry if I start crying out of the blue. It's never out of the blue, though; she is always here with me, since she left. Her body went limp on the veterinarian's table Wednesday but she has always been right here. She's still my baby, even now. But right this very moment, I can feel her nudging me towards love.

I hope you're ready for that. And if you're not, I hope you're ready for me to wait for you. Give you time and space until you need or want me. I feel like that's what my dead cat is telling me to do.

Isn't that strange? Maybe ghosts aren't scary, if you love them. Maybe

Cady stuck around for *this moment right now* – me holding out all parts of me, fully and whole-heartedly, not a drop of timidity anywhere within or around me – offering what Cady left behind. I like to think she knows me well enough by now, so soon?

I discussed this with her, as her health faltered, you see. I don't know what she'd want of me in terms of moving on, but I know she hates to see me unhappy. One thing that would make me very happy right now is

teaching you the word *safe*. The fur on the back of your leg – how did you lose it? Or, rather, who took it from you? Chunk of hair cut clean off your face, throat scabbed up. I need you to know that you are not my dead cat. You are not

a placeholder  
or replacement.

You are not alone, now. I will learn you and you will find your happy. Your comfort.

I may never know where you've been,  
but I know where you'll

sleep, for as long  
as life will  
let  
you.

Welcome home. I'm glad you're here.

Ivanka Fear

## ***Crazy Old Lady Cat***

Crazy old cat lady, they call me.

I don't get it.

I'm not so old, not that crazy, not such a lady.

And I don't think I look anything like a cat at all!

But the cats do seem to recognize me, as do the dogs.

Stray cats following me home, seeking me out, finding me  
on my deck, on my porch, at my window, at my door.

Falling out of the sky, landing on my lap,

in my front yard, in the back,

meowing for my attention,

climbing up my legs,

ripping holes in my screen door,

tripping me as I climb the steps to my entrance.

Who do they think I am? The Mama cat?

Dogs barking each time I pass, yanking their chains, breaking their leashes  
in front of their houses, at their laneways, out their front door.

Chasing me down the street, as I hightail it back to my den,

where there's safety in numbers, a coven of kitties,

raising my fur on its end,

baring my fangs in protest,

hissing as I arch my back,

tail tucked between my legs.

Who do they think I am? A scaredy cat?

Crazy old cat lady,

I'm sure I've heard the neighbours say.

Don't understand what they mean.

I'm a collector of felines, that's all.

I'm pursuing my hobby, that's all there is to it.

Feeding cats, petting cats, playing with cats,

talking to cats, curling up with cats,

walking through the neighborhood at night,

eyes glowing in the dark,

accidentally shaking my bag of cat treats,

inadvertently stealing the neighbours' cats.

Crazy. Old Lady.

***Cat.***

Amanda Hawk

## ***I want a cat***

I want a cat.

A black cat or maybe two,

so I can spend the evenings

running my fingers through their fur

and enjoy the soft rumbling of their purr.

Have it remind me of home. I want a house.

A cottage with several rooms to collect all up my dreams

with my own bedroom, my own door, my own space, so my bed

can stop being multipurpose and not collect small pieces of envelopes, construction paper, and  
my identity in my hair in the morning. I guess I want a dining room table; long enough to fit all my

friends, projects and imagination. I want to invite my friends over and not feel ashamed about all  
my messy and cluttered thoughts. I want to have the space to process the day, and have the room

to pour out all the ache without my son's gaze, stacked emotions and the nosy neighbor listening  
against the paper thin walls. I want to not feel invaded by handymen, apartment complex notices,

and strange men sleeping outside my door. I want to forget the moment I came home to movie cases  
in shelves instead of games, crumpled candy wrappers, and stranger's

shadows resting nicely in my monthly nightmares. I want

to stop having sleepless nights guessing

what their names are and if they enjoy

playing Yoshi's Island as much as I

did. I guess I just want

to feel safe

again.

Carla Rachel Sameth

## ***Now we are house cats,***

confined to our corners, dependent  
upon whatever being is around to feed us, clean our shit  
and cuddle up with us. But only when we feel like it.

They say that it is for our own good, which  
is what we told our cat, Princesa, when we wouldn't  
let her out to frolic with the neighborhood

feral cats who came knocking about. That coyotes, cars  
and fleas, an untimely end await her if she ventures  
out. But she does escape now and then,

returns to throw up the gobbled grass. We stand at the door  
and scratch at the windows, yowl for release. Escape  
for short walks, now swathed with uncrafty cloth that shows

only our eyes. We blink and smile unseen, waving  
to the other outdoor creatures. Today it is pissing  
down torrents of rain so we remain inside,

seen only by screens that tell us to stretch, breathe  
and if we watch the news, to be very afraid.

Michele Mekel

## ***Unfathomable***

Naked in their amber eyes,  
we have such stunted senses  
and anemic claws.

*How*, they wonder,  
can we humans possess  
such awesome power:

*can-opening magic.*

Shelley Stein-Wotten & Carla Stein

## ***St. Lawrence the Apple's Conception***

Less popular now than in its 19th-century heyday, the mild-flavoured **St. Lawrence** stands out for its prominent red striations, the result of an unusual parentage: One day, a tabby cat named Philippe de Fluffybutt took a whiz on a fallen Fameuse apple. The next spring, the St. Lawrence was born.



Shutta Crum

## ***The Cat and I Look For Poems***

In the fieldstone cellar  
I run my fingers over hand-hewn beams  
to find the cord secured—double-hitched.  
Still pliable, this line I've lashed to the house  
leads us back through the labyrinth.

We move through rubble—  
your body easing around cardboard boxes  
patched with tape turning to dust.  
Opening one, we rock back on our haunches,  
brush the long years from yellowed pages,  
admire tracteries. Ghostly, but still readable,  
poems.

Unboxed, some threaten to lift like webs and waft away.  
You curl back, ready to pounce and pin them down.  
I read them with respect, remembering  
each poem has fought and earned a rightful place here  
among summers spent by unnamed lakes,  
and autumn days when you rolled in leaves the color of your fur.  
There are winters here, too, before you and after your coming.

In the rock-bound hush of the cellar's labyrinth,  
I trace my fingertips over the poems—  
tenacious embroideries from a life.  
You stand sentry, ears alert—a small but vigilant hero—  
should some merciless terror come bullying up from the depths  
to unloose these threads.



**A Portrait Of Every Cat  
I've Ever Loved**  
by Jade Bartlett

~

Dedicated to Jules, whose poem I am still working on.  
Right now, my words do not do you justice.

**I. Teddy**

It was *your* home first—  
before daddy bought the  
airedale  
who would gnaw on whatever  
he could find:

crayons  
& red doll hair  
& Polly Pocket limbs  
&

the cat.

You spent most days cowering  
under the bed.

And daddy said that was  
no way for a cat to live her life,  
so he gave you away to the neighbour  
across the street.

You were evicted from a home that belonged  
to you before it belonged to any other  
beast.

*(it was your home first.  
it was your home first.  
it was your home*

*first.)*

Eventually,  
daddy evicted the airedale too,  
took him back to the breeder  
after he broke through the skin  
on the baby's head.

But by then, it was too late—  
you had your new family, now.

~

I still blame them  
for squandering your nine lives  
on a perpetuum of canned salmon.

--

## II. Rooney

Named after the soccer player,  
in honour of your orange fur.

You were the only cat I've ever owned  
who did not just enjoy belly rubs  
but demanded them.

A Garfield Incarnate  
who drooled whenever he purred.

I never got to tell you goodbye,  
had to hear it second-hand from the neighbour,  
who found you dead in the back alley.

After you'd been missing for three days,  
I asked him if he'd seen you around.

He replied,  
"I almost don't want to tell you."

And I almost didn't want to know.

--

## III. Tigger

When you were young and thin[ner],  
your favourite pastimes included  
attacking our piano instructor's feet  
during lessons on the treble clef;  
knocking over glasses of soda  
just so you could watch the bubbles  
effervesce across the dining room table;  
and, my personal favourite:  
teaching yourself how  
to open my bedroom door  
by jumping up and slamming  
down on the handle with your paws.

I remember the first time  
you showed off your new trick.  
I was eleven years old,  
and it was well after midnight  
when I heard the maniacal groan  
of the door's hinges.

I was, at best, expecting to find  
my sister playing a prank on me,  
and, at worst, an intruder lurking in the doorway.

Well,  
I just about shit my pants  
at the sight of the door  
shuddering open by itself.

Panic curdled in my stomach, then—  
a soft meow.

While you may be too  
old and fat for such antics now,  
you still sleep with me every night  
like you have for the past ten years.

--



#### IV. Ginger

We brought you and Tigger home  
as a sort of package deal.

From the same litter,  
you've known each other  
your entire lives:

Tigger: my gentle tabby  
and  
Ginger: my fiery tortoise shell.

What you lack in size,  
you make up for in meows:

guttural and demanding;

all tongue and fang.

They call it "Tortitude."

Yes,  
you may be stubborn.

You may be loud.

But you are just as  
nurturing.

Just as  
maternal.

Your nettled tongue  
grooms at my bruised calf;  
the alcove between my arm and elbow;  
the brine off my cheek.

It is almost as if  
I am Feline,  
too.

—

#### V. Ollie

You hated me  
and humans in general,  
I think—  
whacked and scratched at  
anyone who tried to pet you.

But I can't blame you,  
really.

The abuse of mankind  
was all you'd ever known.

That's not to say  
you were entirely incapable of  
love:

You loved Tigger.

He fathered you,  
as if you were one of his own.

Baptized the tabbied "m"  
on your forehead  
with eternal affection.

Your bodies burrowed against  
each other,  
always.

But then you got sick,  
your diseased organs  
short-changing you  
the nine lives you deserved.

Tigger started to distance himself,  
almost as if he was afraid  
to be around you.

And you no longer  
whacked or scratched.

No longer flinched at my touch.

That's how I knew it was the end.

—

## VI. Epilogue

To all of my dearly departed felines:

I will never stop missing you.

I will never stop loving you:

~

To Ginger & Tigger:

Please.

Don't leave me too soon.



# Amy MacAvery

## Refund

Everyone is gone

unopened cards overflow from a basket, withered plants  
slump, dry and sad.

A neighbor's son mows the lawn.

Weeds interrupt the sunset and a whole past  
stretches before me.

An unlucky stray with a bloodied leg  
huddles, jittery on our picnic table  
and both look hungry for a carefree meal.

I am moved to put water in a basin  
and pour something for me too,  
for our misfortune.

He drinks through days, hours and minutes while  
I am unaware of time passing.

With misgivings and an appetite to heal  
I place food beside the water to  
lure this hurt, feral feline  
inside before yet another storm.

Near a crevice known only to myself and the man I have lost  
frightened eyes watch as minutes race by slowly.  
I move sustenance closer to a cat carrier  
dropping an old blanket in for comfort.  
Those eyes withdraw, like me to the way back.  
The storm has raged with no rainbow to show for it

Days pass some blank, some shadowed, some blighted  
before I manage to get ourselves to the vet where  
we confer about foul odors.

"Bad teeth, bad blood,  
"50/50 chance".

Familiar with these odds, my credit card absorbs the hit.

Dawns follow dusks and his fur shines black and white  
his limp lessens, eyes brighten.

While I practice living through nights, he prowls,  
sniffs, assesses scents, senses absence.

Who lives, who has passed?

How did I get to this time, this place?

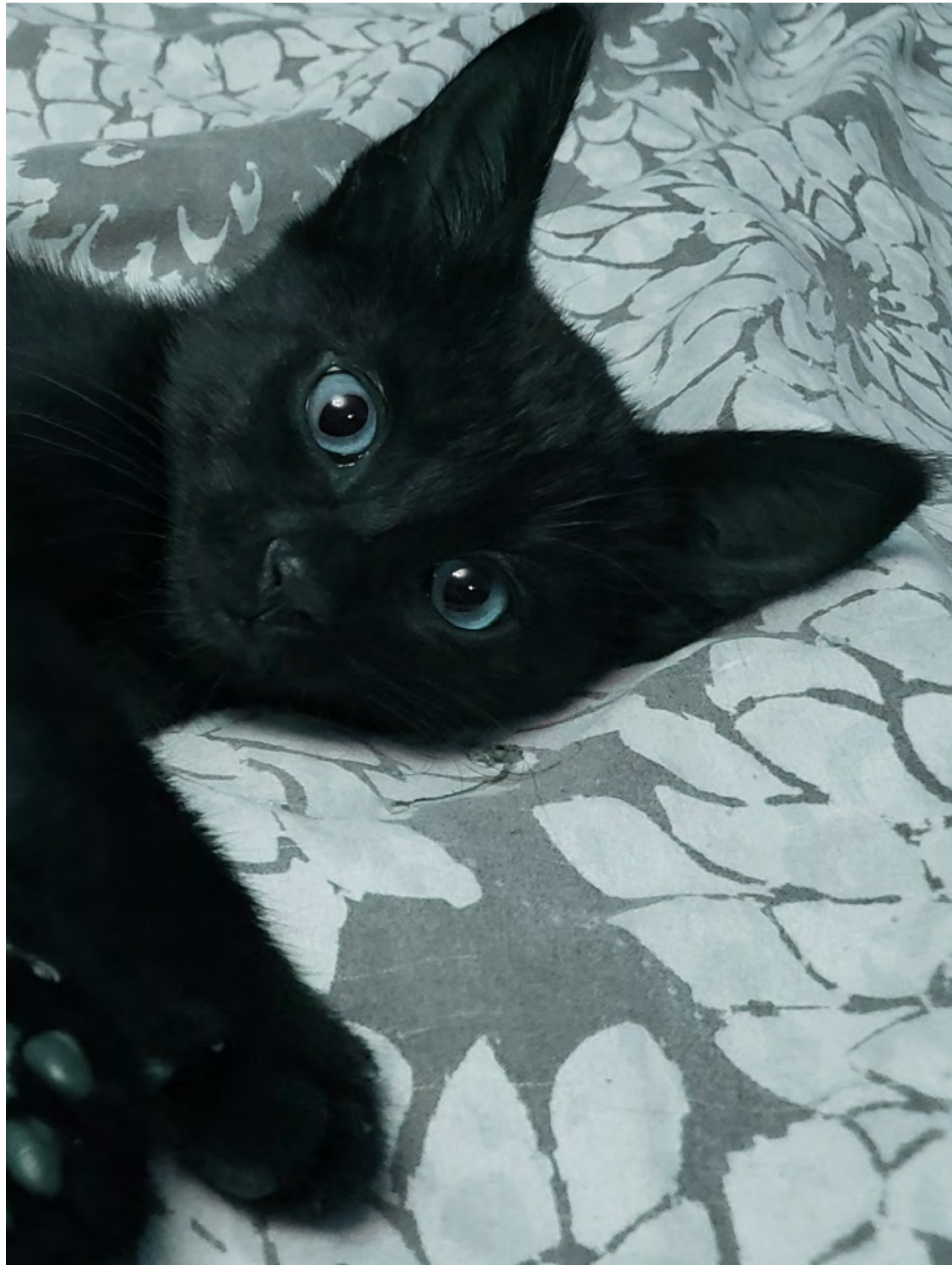
One day among unfamiliar days a check arrives,  
life insurance windfall, from my husband's death,  
enough to pay the vet bill.

I open my eyes, to friends sharing condolences,  
home grown vegetables, and wood for future warmth.  
Apparently, I've told of the vet bill, the insurance money.

"Refund?", my friend says softly.

There is a shift in the shadows  
as a renewed life steps out of a dusty corner.

Four years have passed but Refund remains  
as does loss and lost days and gains  
and rains that sometimes yield rainbows, sometimes do not.



# CREATIVE WRITING

Photograph by Amber.

## Five Days Until Trash Day

by Maura Ford

I watch the baby rat that Tony captured and half-killed sputter its last breaths on my living room floor. Reaching one leg long, then the other in a jerky dance, it coughs blood a centimeter from the white high-pile rug that I bought on overstock dot com for almost 300 dollars and I feel actually ashamed that I care more about the integrity of my rug's white high pile than I do this young dying thing.

This is a common occurrence. Both my neurosis about the white rug and Tony's murderous bent. The alley behind our apartment is home to a teeming rat population—an indoor/outdoor cat's nirvana. Tony drops dying rodents wherever he deems fit, trying to earn his keep. His instinct to hunt and kill hasn't been tempered out of him with treats and domestic love—if anything, it's been bolstered by his need to serve his two human masters, his desire to please so pure in intent and so wildly mismatched with what we want from a pet. It always feels almost funny.

I've been in figurative stalemates before, but the brushes with Tony's killer tendencies are more literal—he and I squared off, at odds over a suffering, still-dying creature. He mewls, meek and prostrated, like *I love you so much I'll kill for you*. And I shudder and wail at him like *Tony, god, no, fuck, why*. I scream these words at him like he can absorb my repulsion or rage and then act accordingly. We lock eyes over the kill and his instinct, a musky innate thing, will always inch him closer while mine trips me a few quick steps backward.

He smells the disgust ripening on me and swiftly, he ends the stalemate. For a moment, the kill becomes a toy and it all feels so irreverent the way he slaps the ratbody in quick succession with his paws like *bam bam bam*. Once he's warmed up, it turns ceremonious—with his mouth, he tosses the body in small, looping arcs and I watch liquids release from his jaws and from the rat's limpness and I think about how my rug bought on overstock dot com for almost 300 dollars has become a battlefield and how people write on dating apps that 'gift-giving' is their love language and how even when we try to please those we love the most we fail and how purity really must be a myth because things this clean are absolutely begging to be sullied.

The ritual ends with plastic. My human instinct is intervention, so I finally snatch Tony's hot, heaving form away from the mangled thing, stepping gingerly to avoid dead rat juice and toss him back outside to land that was, admittedly, his before it was mine. From here it's clinical. I use Glad Press'n Seal to wrap my favorite teal kitchen tongs down to the quick and grab a cylindrical Tupperware that has housed one of the countless miso soups I've ordered for delivery. Now I'm undertaker moving with practiced hands and now I'm priestess performing last rights, the body already anointed by Tony's sandpaper tongue. I encase this thing that I shudder at in both life and death in its new plastic exoskeleton, and tell it, not unkindly, that its fate is to wait five days until trash day.

# The Wish

## by Sarah Kilian

All I'd ever wanted was to be rid of my incessant seeking of approval, to be free of my need to please. So, on that clear August evening when that fateful star flung itself across my vision, I knew precisely what to wish for. I closed my eyes and concentrated. My head was nestled in the grass and the star's afterimage kept shooting over the back of my eyelids, growing fainter with each burst. "Please let me not care so much." I thought. "Please liberate me from the confines of excessive self-consciousness."

The final weeks of summer passed in a regular manner. I gardened. I swam in the sea. I hosted dinner parties. I kept waiting for something to happen, but it didn't. At least not how I was expecting. There was a time when I even thought the falling star had been a fraud and the wish wasted. I carried on as usual.

I was oblivious to the initial changes. My canines have always been slightly sharp, and thus, as they became more so, I didn't overthink it. When my fingernails grew into tiny curved blades I simply admired the satisfying clack they made against a smooth surface. When the tiny hairs at the corners of my mouth elongated dramatically, I only adored their elegance and relished their tingling. And, when my pupils compressed and extended into vertical slits I gazed at my own beauty in wonder, and thought nothing of their greater significance.

Slowly, as the downy hair on my body thickened into luxurious fur and my ears grew up into perfect points, everything became clear to me. By then some inner change had occurred as well, and the physical changes seemed somehow ideal, if not entirely natural. Like an indeterminate dream come true.

I cannot seem to recall why I had been so heavy with worry before the wish. Just like the star's afterimage, the difficulties of that time have faded from my mind's eye and into obscurity. I have forgotten how it feels to care what anyone thinks. Now, I am practically weightless.



Artwork by Sarah Kilian.

# Grandma Pinky

by Parvaneh Farhangpour Nikkhesal

It was love at first sight. She was thin, weak, and struggling for life when my mom found her, one cold, winter's evening when she was coming back from grocery shopping. She was in a cardboard box at the corner of the street. Many had passed by not noticing this precious little one. They didn't pay attention to her shivering on the cold, wet, snowy ground. Only God knows how long she had been there.

She was separated from her mother, hungry, exhausted with no strength to cry. Her eyes were wet, due to the cold and the tears she had shed calling for her mother. She was missing the warmth and security of her mother's breast. She was hungry and wanted some warm milk. When my mother lifted her tiny body from the ground and held her in her hands, it was a miraculous, new beginning for this poor creature.

We were a family of seven which included five children aged from 5 to 14 years. We struggled to survive, adding an extra mouth to feed, even a tiny mouth, was a decision my mother had to carefully consider. When my mom brought her into the house, she made sure no one made any noise so that my dad would not discover the new arrival. If he did find out, he would have most probably not allowed this new guest to stay; he would have needed a lot of convincing. The calm looks on my mother's face told us that she had plans and was confident she could convince my dad to keep this bundle of joy. As soon as we noticed what mom had in her hands, we quickly gathered around to get a closer look. We were so excited; it was really hard to contain ourselves and keep quiet. One said, "Oh, so cute!", the other said "So tiny!", and other exclaimed "I love her beautiful face!" We looked at the tiny life with her wide, desperate eyes, and immediately fell in love with her. It was as if those big eyes were crying out to us, "Please adopt me, I am just a baby. I need very little from you. Please keep me, you won't regret it."

As we were growing up, we didn't have much to entertain us, we didn't have many toys, visitors were few, and outings were rare. We had to find ways to entertain ourselves. So, seeing her and having her as a pet was very exciting for us. This small kitten could be the answer to our boredom at home, especially during the school holidays. We had previously asked for a pet, but our parents always had an excuse to reject the request. Now, eventually our wish seemed granted. We were so happy we took turns holding her. My brother ran into the kitchen, put some milk into a bottle and ran back to feed this ball of fur. We named her Pinky because she was only a little larger than my mom's pinky finger. From now on, she was our toy, our friend, our companion and of course our beloved kitten.

As she gained strength and began to grow bigger, she would do acrobatics and perform funny tricks as if she wanted to convince us that we made the right decision to keep her. In her own way, she was telling us, "See, I can be very entertaining and a source of joy for you all."

Fortunately, our dad didn't object to us keeping her. The reason was not that he had softened his position but because mice were a serious problem in our neighbourhood. The mice were attracted to the grain and flour stored in our basement. Many neighbours kept cats to keep the mice away. Those cats would usually catch the mice, play with them, then discard them half-dead. But that was not the case with our Pinky, she would eat them up.

Pinky became a member of our family and was present at all household events. At lunchtime she would patiently sit next to the table, without making any noise or jumping onto the table, she sat and watched us eat. This quality was unique to her as many neighbours complained that their cats sometimes stole meat from their kitchen tables.

Pinky's diet was a piece of bread, at best soaked in the leftover food or soup. Since bread was her main diet, she was very familiar with the sound of opening the metal bread bin. When opening the bin, the lid made a unique ringing sound. When Pinky heard this ringing sound, whether from far or near, she would run into the kitchen to wait for her share of bread. The smell of fresh bread mesmerized her. Every time my brother brought fresh bread home from the shops; Pinky would be waiting at the front door before it was opened. He would rub her soft body against his leg and turn around him a few times until my brother gave her a piece of bread.

She had a deep sense of loyalty, wherever she disappeared to during the day, at the end of the day she was back at home with us. Often, she would affectionately touch our feet or walked between our legs, purring loudly. She seemed to be saying, "I never forget what you have done for me. I enjoy being together with you in this house."

As years went by, she became much more than a pet to us. She was our friend, our confidant, and our personal psychologist. A psychologist because if any of the family members were sad, she was the first to notice it. She would come close, sit on your lap, or rub her tail against your hands or feet until you would hold her in your lap. Her soft fur, consoling purrs, and warmth of her body meant the world to us. She seemed to be saying, "Even though sometimes you bother me, I still love you and don't want to see you sad. You are my family."

In turn, we trusted her as a patient trusts her therapist. We would confide in her, complaining about daily chores, discuss school matters and anything else that bothered us. She was a wonderful counsellor as she never complained, never judged us, and kept our secrets. She was the most reliable free-of-charge psychologist, we knew!

Pinky was a black and white Persian cat. She was not particularly pretty, but she was definitely the most loyal cat we ever had. She became a mother more than seven times, every time giving birth to four to five kittens. It was interesting that every time she gave birth, it happened on a national religious holiday and this was considered a blessing. At that time, it wasn't customary to take pets to the vet for vaccination or sterilization.

Each time Pinky had a new litter we had to give away the kittens, something we really abhorred, especially when some of them were so beautifully coloured and very fluffy.

As time went by Pinky's kittens would have kittens of their own. We tried to keep track of Pinky's growing family but there were just too many cats to keep track of. My siblings and I would often talk about Pinky. We were amazed that the very tiny kitten had transformed into a grandmother and the wise cat of her clan. Consequently, we started to call her Grandma Pinky.

Several years passed. Pinky never failed to respond to the ring of the bread bin lid. She still ran to the front door to welcome us when we came from school. She played with a bouncing ball and jumped up and down to catch the moving light projected on the wall. She grew with us as we grew into teenagers.

Sometimes, we worried about her when we heard cats fighting at night and making weird sounds. We would be worried that we might not see her in the morning. But she always returned as soon as she heard us calling her or heard the ringing tone of the bread bin lid.

And then one ominous day that will always remain in our memories, Pinky did not respond to the ringing of the bread bin lid. We hit the lid against the metal bread bin several times, we went to the yard and called her name, we searched the roofs and walls of our neighbours' houses. We repeated this for days, but she never came running to the kitchen. Where had she disappeared to? What had happened to her?

For days we searched for her, hoping that if she was stuck, she could be freed, but there was no response to our calls of "Pinky! Pinky! Pinky!"

As each day passed our hopes of seeing her again became ever dimmer. As our hopes dimmed, our sense of loss and heartache deepened. We never saw her beauty again. Although Grandma Pinky was gone, her memory of love and loyalty was imprinted on our hearts forever.



# Calico Sentinel

## by Gillian Bowles

My introduction to being unable to discern real life from a horror movie unfolded on a summer night. I was eight years old, and dusk murmurs sifted through my bedroom window as I sprawled in bed beneath it, fussing from the heat.

It had been the Fall before that the cat came, arriving one day from over the fence without fanfare. She had chosen me and no one had ever done that before and no one will ever do that again. She still had the fresh-air of wildness clinging to her nearly one year later, and would eye the ceilings and walls in wary mistrust, a growl spinning in her chest and head low with unease.

My feet twisted the sheet that night as heavy air swirled in a vortex above me, stirred by a creaking fan. I heard a familiar bonk low on my bedroom door, and the latch that would forever fail my privacy popped open. It was the cat, coming to piously share my stillness after a day of marauding.

There was a sudden weight on the bed near my leg, and then it was gone. I heard the cat settle on the window ledge where she had bounced to from the bed, and was now busy arranging her feet fastidiously, face squashed against the screen. I glanced upwards as I heard a gentle smattering of rain begin.

The falling droplets sounded close, and I took in a deep belly breath, trying to find the storm smell. It didn't reach me. The cat's tail slapped the wall in agitation.

Splop. A bead of warmth landed on my forehead, then another hit my cheek. I had insisted that my bed be moved near the window for this very reason, to have close proximity to weather, so for a moment I felt a thrill of romance that the summer rain would kiss me goodnight.

Then with a spasm of alarm, the heat of the drop on my skin turned sinister. As if scalded I leapt out of bed. With a flick of the wall switch I squinted into the sudden bite of light, peering dumbly at the cat. Her luminous eyes met mine with calm, until I started to scream. She startled then, nearly leapt to the floor, but changed her mind and continued to flick her tail while surveying my frenzy coolly.

Blood speckled the wall on either side of the window, misting each edge of the base and fading to the mint paint beneath it. Directly under the window, gore streaked down in fat rivers, as if the ledge was a chopping block that delighted in violent ends.

The red of the blood made my eyes bulge, ingesting the information in gulps and pushing it out in a wail of terror to alert the house. Deep crimson, shellacked and glistening. The spray reached beyond the wall, and with paint-splatter skill it had spritzed the matted sheet, arching bright jets criss-crossing over where I had lain. I looked down at the former white of my nightshirt and kept on screaming. The cat's gaze was steady, bored and annoyed at the din I was causing.

I remember snippets of my Mom trying to calm me, holding my face as I gibbered. My sister's eyes wide as she grabbed the cat, seeking a source of the havok.

'She has a cut on the tip of her tail. It isn't very big.'

I don't remember who cleaned the wall, or if I got to see my own face full of red fear before it too was scoured and dried. I remember the surveying eyes of the cat though. Her disinterest at the chaos.

In that same way she would sedately watch me cry and cut and cum my way through adolescence, a sizzle reel of insidious maladies taking root. If she found some parts intriguing or disturbing, she rarely let on. Her nonchalance helped me talk myself down from the ledge of mundane small agonies so many times; If she can blink and bask, surely I can too.

There is privacy in cat company, and it can be for better or worse. No conferring notes in the off-leash park, no adoration from sopping jaws. They are lithe companions for grubby souls who are relieved that they will never be a God. Her serenity was always the answer to my anxious panic. Calm down kid, it's just another day.

When she got very old, no more meows came out; just like in nightmares where guppy mouths gape open but no sound escapes. It was her own horror movie now. She died wrapped in a towel and my arms, though I was a grown-up by then. I had hoped she would haunt me for a while, a little ghost cat shaking her head at all these spilled tears. I planned a paw-print tattoo and still have her name as a social-media pseudonym. I suppose I tried to force the haunting, which may be why it never happened. She hasn't visited me since she left, not once.

Instead I'm carried ever further away from the kid with the daydreams and the cat trailing behind, grandiose ideations sharpening into melancholic clarity. No serene gaze of flaring pupils to silently chide my clattering nerves. Without this conspirator I am all freeze and fawn, wringing hands off my wrists as I pace. Each bloodbath now is a spectacle of crisis that obscures thoughtful rumination, no solemn companion to instill calm. Life is ruddy tears in the mirror with only myself to mutter to.

But I am not certain I have suffered enough yet to warrant the betrayal of acquiring a new cat. It won't know me at all, and how I am now is most definitely not the truth. She was the only witness, the link to a childhood landscape I will never see again. For now, I keep my own feeble watch.



*How Beautiful it was When He Left* by Mayce Keeler (@supermundanebodies).



*Photograph by Erin Schmerr (@tatefineartphotography).*

## ***The Smartest Man*** **by Michelle McMillan-Holifield**

### ***The Smartest Man in the World***

I am five years old. You are the smartest man in the world. I turn six and I challenge you: *If you're so smart, what's a hundred times a thousand times a hundred times a thousand times a hundred and so on until I am out of breath.* You can't answer this and so we are at an impasse.

### ***The Smartest Man and Spam***

Mom is not home, so today, it's just you pondering what to make for my 16th birthday breakfast. In the end, you fry up two pieces of Spam. In the years following, you and I argue many times about love, careers, and money. I will claim you do not understand who I am, and I will believe I know everything there is to know about everything. Now at forty and seventy-two, we don't talk about those hard days. We talk about this one: this breakfast, this Spam. And we laugh. The laughter is enough.

### ***The Smartest Man and the Cats***

The neighborhood feral cats stay at your house because they get fed there. They get love, too, although the kittens are oblivious to love. They meow (*food, please*) and hiss (*scram while I eat*), and you talk to them like they are children. When I call, you tell me how much they've grown and how each one has a distinct personality—*Mama* never lets *Floyd* get within two feet of her, yet *Mama* had kittens in the garage. *Mama* begot *Baby Girl*. *Baby Girl* begot *Sugar* and *Sweet Pea* and *Buster* and *Peanut*. *Baby Girl* also begot *Stella* and *Rosie* and *Slick*. *Mama* and *Baby Girl* have ousted *Floyd*, who sired the lot. You put some food out in a tin pan away from the garage so *Floyd* can visit whenever he feels it's safe to venture up. When you describe the adventures of *Floyd* and *Mama* and *Baby Girl*, I imagine you think of them as real people. When your friends show off photos of their grandchildren, you, who are without, can only offer quips about the cats: *Baby Girl has built a nice little nest for her kittens—real proud of her. She's turned out to be a real good mama.*

### ***The Smartest Man and the Fall***

You fall in November; you are 78. You refuse to be carted to the hospital. Later your oxygen is so low you can't lift your head or help us get you into the car, so we call the ambulance for the second time. For a month, your body attempts to recover from pneumonia. While the pulmonary fibrosis continues to scar and inflame your lungs, while the constant low oxygen levels curl and club your fingernails, while your feet swell so large I am afraid they will burst, still there are small victories that make me think you're recovering. Like your standing up without help while the hospice nurse bathes you. Like the small jokes you and mom share as she moves you from the wheelchair to the bed. And yet, as your health becomes our daily focus, I don't realize that the nightly conversations we used to have on my way home are actively obscuring into memories, as stars extinguishing against the darkest canopy of sky.

### ***The Smartest Man and Death***

The cats are unable to adjust to this new you who is dying daily. You seem a stranger to them. You call their names, and they do not ignore you so much as stand in the background grieving. And I wonder, after that hard day when you struggle so hard to breathe and raise your voice at them, if they wish at that impasse they had done something other than wanting space and turning away from you. I wonder, too, if they will forgive themselves for not recognizing that day, that very hard day, as your last. Will they return the place you last looked them in the eye and be able to only remember the food you gave them, and the laughing.



*Photograph by Erin Schmerr (@tatefineartphotography).*



*Photograph by Erin Schmerr (@tatefineartphotography).*

## CONTRIBUTORS



Photograph by Erin Schmerr (@tatefineartphotography).

**AMANDA HAWK** lives in Seattle between the roaring planes and concrete jungle. She splits her time with her son and friends, and the city's neon lights. Recently, she has been published in Volney Road Review, Drunk Monkeys Literary Journal, Anti-Heroine Chic, and the winnow magazine.

**AMY MACAVERY** is a poet living in the small beach town of Brewster Massachusetts. A lifelong writer, Amy tries to express the imprints of her life experiences lyrically and emotionally. Her poem, *Refund*, was previously published in Off Topic Publishing. Amy has had other poems published in the Cape Cod Times and other local newspapers where she has lived.

**CARLA RACHEL SAMETH** is the Co-Poet Laureate for Altadena, CA 2022-2024. Her chapbook *What Is Left* was published December 2021 with dancing girl press. Carla's debut memoir, *One Day on the Gold Line*, originally published in 2019, was reissued by Golden Foothills Press in 2022. Her writing on blended/unblended, queer, multiracial and single parent families appears in a variety of publications. Carla's work has been selected three times as Notable Essays of the Year in Best American Essays. Her story "Graduation Day at Addiction High," which originally appeared in Narratively, was also selected for Longread's "Five Stories on Addiction." A Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. a Pasadena Rose Poet, a West Hollywood Pride Poet, and a former PEN Teaching Artist, Carla teaches creative writing to high school and university students and has taught incarcerated youth. Find Carla online: [carlasameth.com](http://carlasameth.com) and [@carlasameth](https://www.instagram.com/carlasameth) (IG, twitter and FB)

**CARLA STEIN** enjoys cooking up stuff like veggies, poems, paintings, and illustrations. Her work hangs out in pamphlets, poetry collections, on walls, and on-line. She often shares her poems and paintings in public, but the veggies are shy and prefer to stay at home. You can find examples of her visual musings at: [www.roaeriestudio.com](http://www.roaeriestudio.com).

**COURTNEY FELLE** (they/them) is a multiply disabled writer with connections to Western NY, rural Ohio, and Washington, DC. Their previous writing can be found in SICK Magazine, Monsterring Magazine, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, and Half Mystic Press, among other publications. They are a big fan of long road trips, large mugs of tea, ultra-specific Spotify playlists, and access as love. You can find them on **Twitter** and **Instagram**.

**D LARISSA PETERS** grew up in Indonesia. Somewhat of a nomad, she meandered around the East Coast for more than 10 years before moving to California—in the middle of a pandemic. Her most recent published poems have appeared in Synkroniciti, Solstice Literary, Monterey Poetry Review and has a few forthcoming pieces elsewhere.

**ERIN SCHMERR** is a portrait photographer from Cincinnati, Ohio who specializes in dreamy and ethereal photography. Instagram: [@tatefineartphotography](#)

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**IVANKA FEAR** is a Canadian writer, born in Slovenia. Her poems and short stories have appeared in numerous publications in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. The first book in her Blue Water Mysteries series, *The Dead Lie* (Level Best Books), is available on Amazon. You can connect with Ivanka on Twitter [@FearIvanka](#) and Instagram [@ivankawrites](#). Follow her on Facebook [www.facebook.com/ivankafearauthor](http://www.facebook.com/ivankafearauthor) and visit Ivanka's website: [www.ivankafear.com](http://www.ivankafear.com)

**JADE BARTLETT** is a Calgarian poet and photographer who creates art with passion and ferocity. Her poetry has been published in several literary magazines and she is currently wrapping up the finishing touches on what has been a six-year-long project: a poetic memoir about trauma and growth. When Jade isn't writing, she can be found reading, taking photographs of the moon, and tending to her plants.

**JOAN MAZZA** has worked as a medical microbiologist, psychotherapist, and taught workshops on understanding dreams and nightmares. She is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self*, and her poetry has appeared in *Slant*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, *Slipstream*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia.

**MAURA FORD** is a writer, among other things, living in Chicago, IL. Born and raised in Chicago, she studied literature at Trinity College Dublin. Her poetry has appeared in *Spectra* and *Sour Cherry Mag*. Find her on the internet [@iwantsomeMaura](#).

**MAYCE KEELER** is a painter and printmaker currently working and living in San Diego. They graduated in 2018 with a BFA in visual arts from the University of San Diego, and was awarded a SURE grant in 2017. Keeler has had work shown in San Diego and Los Angeles, collaborated on murals in San Diego as well as Rhode Island, and has taught classes at the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Living in Happy Valley, **MICHELE MEKEL** wears many hats: educator, bioethicist, poetess, cat herder, witch, and woman. With more than 130 poems published, her work has appeared in various academic and creative publications, including being featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac* and nominated for Best of the Net. Her poetry has also been translated into Cherokee. She is co-principal investigator for the Viral Imaginations: COVID-19 project.

**MICHELLE MCMILLAN-HOLIFIELD** is a recent Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee. Her work has been included in or is forthcoming in *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Nelle*, *The Collagist*, *The Main Street Rag*, and *Whale Road Review*, among others. She hopes you one day find her poetry tacked to a tree somewhere in the Alaskan Wild.

**NINA CARROLL** secretly self-identified as a poet in her youth, now as a feminist, gynecologist, sailor, traveler, gardener, and poet again. Through decades she composed poetic fragments organized chronologically like journals. Some have become poems. She writes almost daily when a theme deserves capture. Then it simmers, gets lost, found again, then molded into a new offering.

**OLIVE SCOTT** (she/her) is a writer from Belleville, Ontario and is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Saskatchewan. She obtained her BA in Classical Civilizations from the University of Toronto. Her favourite pastime involves trying to pet every cat she comes across.

**PARVANEH FARHANGPOUR NIKKHESAL** is a researcher, a writer, and a poet. She holds a Ph.D. in education from the University of Pretoria. She has published articles in international scientific journals, co-authored several textbooks for high schools, and created the Youth Enrichment Life skills Program in South Africa. During the last three years, she has focused on her childhood passion for creative writing and poetry. Her poetry obtained second position (2021) and first position (2022) in Global Peace Alliance literary contest, Honorable Mention (2022), Christmas card contest by Arts Council of Surrey, and first position (2023) Ekphrastic contest #2. Online reading Surrey Muse (2022) and FBCW Spotlight (2023). She published poetry and short stories in *PULP* magazine (2021), *White Rock* and *Surrey writer's Anthology* (2022), and *Arts council of Ladysmith Arts Magazine* (2023).



**RACHEL TANNER ATCHLEY** is a poet from Alabama who lives with her new husband and two cats down the street from a place that serves the best wine slushies on Earth. Her previous work can be found in literary magazines such as Corporeal Lit, Gastropoda, Sledgehammer Lit, and elsewhere. You can usually find her on Twitter @rickit, doing god only knows what.

**SARA RONCERO-MENENDEZ** is a writer based in Queens, NY, and has published stories and essays in several outlets, including Points in Case and miniskirt magazine, as well as a poetry chapbook, Graveyard Heart. She is also a journalist and PR professional, writing about movies, television and books.

**SARAH KILIAN** is a visual artist, writer, bookseller, and educator from Vancouver Island, where she currently lives on the traditional territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking people. She lives with two cats.

**SELENA COTTE** is online now. Her poetry can be found in Hobart, Landfill, Autofocus, Juked Online, and other journals. Her corporeal form can usually be found in Chicago, but her recent dreams take place in Las Vegas.

**SHELLEY STEIN-WOTTEN**'s humour writings have appeared in The Temz Review, R U Joking?, JÓN Magazine, and The Belladonna and her sketches have been performed in Vancouver and Seattle. She writes and eats mostly vegetables from her home on Vancouver Island, Canada.

**SHUTTA CRUM**'s poems have appeared in Typehouse, West Trade, 3rd Wednesday, MER, Acumen, Calyx and Boulevard. She's been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her chapbook When You Get Here won a gold Royal Palm Literary Award. Her newest book is The Way to the River. Her books for young readers include 13 picture books (many of these in verse), 3 novels and 2 board books, all published traditionally. She also sends out a monthly newsletter called The Wordsmith's Playground. [www.shutta.com](http://www.shutta.com)

**VALERIE LOVELAND** enjoys audio poetry, silent movies, and celebrity cats. She works in Tech and lives in NJ. Her book, [unsolved mysteries theme song] was recently published by Crooked Treehouse Press.



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