

Dumb Cat #3

I began living with a woman who loved cats. I hated cats and tried to kill them. She had 6 or 7 in the house and I couldn't, sleep, piss, write, or make love without some cat watching. I'd tell her, "JOYCE, EITHER THESE CATS GO OR I GO!"

She chose the cats, but I knew no other person that would have me so decided to stay. It was cheap, easy living. She kept me fat and happy and loved to pick the fleshy blemishes on my back and neck with a tweezer. Every morning when I woke there would be a goddamned cat curled up in a ball lying on my stomach. Sometimes I'd wake up with one on my face and I'd have a fit, chucking it against the wall, screaming and shouting, threatening to kill them all, making Joyce cry. I hit one of them with her car when I went out to buy cigarettes. Her old beater was well worn and hard to drive because the steering wheel was as big as a boat's and you had to stomp down with all your force to get the brakes to work. I was coming around the bend when I saw Cat #7, sitting on the sidewalk. There were too many cats to remember all their names so I gave them numbers. Cat #7 sat, licking its paw, confident. And as I got nearer to it I had a moment of guilt and tried to swerve out of the way, but it was already too late. I heard a "MEEEEEOOWWWW!" and then silence. Cat #7 was dead. 1 down 6 to go.

I was trying to be a writer. I wrote in the evenings while Joyce was out with her friends. Joyce had many friends, because she was a very warm and affable person. She loved to laugh. She'd tell me, "No one can make me laugh like you." and she'd invite me along to her little parties where men and

woman sat around and discussed books they never read and drank expensive wines with no appreciation and wrote poetry as a hobby. That's what the art community had

been reduced to in my opinion so I just stayed away completely. I couldn't digest that much bullshit in one sitting, but now the house was quiet and dark and the only noise that filled it was the clicks from the typewriter and every once in a while a soft purr from one of the remaining six cats. Cat #2 would strut around the typer with its ass up in the air. I reached over and tried to pet it, but when I did its left fang sank itself into my thumb. "MOTHER FUCKER!" I shouted at the cat. I grabbed it from underneath its belly and flung it out the window. The hole in my thumb was steadily leaking blood. The edges of the wound became maroon colored, hard, and sore. The bleeding stopped after I tongued and sucked at it. My one attempt to make friends had backfired.

Cat #2 had landed on its feet from my toss out of the window. He had also made his way back into the house and laid down in his favorite spot, which was my side of the bed. I had had enough of him. I grabbed him, making sure he couldn't bite me again, sat him in the passenger's seat of Joyce's car and drove all the way to the beach. 20-25 minutes away. I got out of the car with Cat #2 still under my arm. My eyes were closed when I felt the sand beneath my feet. I hated the feeling of the sand. I hated how it found its way into miserable little spots all over your body. I walked until I got where the tide broke and the water turned the sand brown. I let the water splash my toes. I looked out at the ocean and did not feel impressed. In fact I felt empty, like it

had taken something away from me. I tossed the cat out of my arms and it walked

off until it disappeared completely into the night. I kicked the water. It made a very pitiful splash and I got sand in my shoe. "GODDAMN IT!" I yelled. Looking around I realized that I was alone, secluded on a private part of the beach, and the sounds of solitude when you're alone on the beach can be deafening. It feels as though you have your hands cupped tightly around your ears and everything is blurred, even your own voice. Everything was dense. There was a nice wooden house painted white a few yards away. As the wind howled, and it howled, the house almost seemed to sway. Back and forth, back and forth, I watched it sway until a cloud completely swallowed the moon and it became very cold out. Sand crabs and turtles littered the beach. I watched a crab try to outrun the water and lose.

I knew that the cat would be O.K. Unlike dogs, they are able to survive on their own. That was the one thing I liked about them, they were survivors. All those children's books and movies about dogs walking across country to find their owners is horseshit. They wouldn't last an afternoon, but cats they would stroll leisurely about the town until finding new owners and forgetting about the old ones. When I got home Joyce was already there. "Where is Whiskers?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Whiskers, my cat." She said.

"I have no idea where your cat is."

"Yes you do! You did something with him, I know you did!"

"I don't know where your goddamned cat is!"

"Where were you?"

"The beach." I said.

"You hate the beach." She said.

"I needed to be inspired."

She knew something was up, but I wouldn't give her an inch. I knew that if I told her enough times that I had nothing to do with the mysterious disappearance of her cat that she would believe me.

"Where's your cat?" I asked.

"I don't know! I thought you took him!"

"Must have run away."

I took the milk carafe from the refrigerator, gulped some of it down and spit it into the sink, spoiled. 2 down 5 to go.

Living with a woman is much, much easier when you're a writer. When I first started writing I didn't have the discipline that it took. I'm not saying you must be a disciplined person, but you must be disciplined when writing. I'd sit down and in five minutes I'd have an erection and then I couldn't think straight. Hard ons are the enemy, and when living alone there is no outlet. Masturbation becomes routine, but when living with a woman you can make love to her, and in the briefest of moments when the horniness goes away, you can write something half decent, if you're lucky. When making love to Joyce I'd look over and see 5 sets of shimmering eyes in the darkness, watching me. I'd go limp. "You've got to do something about those cats."

"What's wrong with them watching mommy and daddy love each other?"

"I can't screw, that's what wrong."

I'd roll over to my side of the bed, against the wall and exhale

noisily. She'd roll over and face me, hardly being able to make out my shape in the lighting of the room.

"Do you love me?" she'd ask.

"I'm still here, aren't I?"

Two of the remaining 5 cats would walk along the top of our back wall. One would walk one direction while the other would walk the other direction. They looked like gargoyles. Both of them were fat and grey. The older one looked after the younger one who was stupid. He did not share the same pristine look in his eye as the others did. He did not walk with grace or class, he rather hung his head down low and his tongue would hang loosely out of his mouth. I called him Dumb #3. Dumb #3 loved his friend Cat #4. #4 would lick Dumb #3's paws clean and keep him out of fights with the other cats and made sure he shit in the litter box. It was a kind thing to watch them together. Joyce never noticed their relationship and I just kept it for myself...

When Joyce and I would fight the cats would fly to their hiding places, all except Dumb #3. He sat on his ass, both legs pointing outward, tail sticking up, watching us scream backwards and forwards. After fighting we'd make love and all the cats would line up again.

A few months passed and I was still jobless, living off Joyce, writing the occasional poem. Everything

seemed to be running like clockwork, but then #4 died of old age. We found him next to the bed lying still with Dumb #3 lying next to him. Dumb #3 knew his friend had died. We buried #4, whose name was Bruno, in a shoebox from Sears, Roebuck and Co. in a little hole I had dug for him. Every day after his funeral Dumb #3 went and laid on the patch of dirt

where he buried his friend. And as I watched that I couldn't help but think, 3 down 4 to go.

Cat #1 was a mean son of a bitch. He was strong, full of piss and vinegar, and now that old #4 was gone he tore the hell out of poor Dumb #3. I had to watch the brutality unfold. Darwin said it, survival of the fittest. #5 and #6 were asshole buddies. #1 was the maverick. And while 5 and 6 watched, #1 tore Dumb #3's throat out one summer's night. It was hot and vicious. There were bloody paw prints all over the concrete backyard, red steps made in circles from #1's victory dance. Dumb #3 lay shivering on the ground, bleeding profusely. I picked him up and held him. His tongue dry and bright pink, his eyes still had that glazed look to them. We buried him next to #4. I truly felt sadness for old Dumb #3. I felt filled with cinderblocks as I watched him being lowered into his tiny grave next to #4.

Some time after that Joyce kicked me out and I was to fend for myself again. I had mistakenly told her while I was drunk that I took Cat #2 to the beach and left him there. I also told her I had killed #7 with the car, which I had lied about previously. She was a very

sweet woman, but she had a way to cut to the core. She told me I was a bad fuck, a bad man, and most horribly, a bad poet. While out there on the road with nothing but a bag, holding clothes and a few choice books in one hand and the typewriter in the other, I felt mean...strong, full of piss and vinegar, like good old Cat #1. I hoped I could be like that, but write with the same simplicity of Dumb #3. I decided I would get out of town. I had worn out my welcome there. Before I left, I stopped off at a café and ordered coffee. It cost 99c. I

gave the waitress a dollar and she gave me the penny back. I rubbed the edges of the coin. Everything seemed very nice at that moment. I thought about the cats. Hemingway had six cats, but Hemingway was dead. I boarded the Los Angeles transit system and headed east.