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All the eating places were closed at that time of the night and it was a long ride into town. I couldn't take him back to my room, so I had to take a chance on Millie. She always had plenty of food. At any rate, she *always* had cheese.

I was right. She made us cheese sandwiches with coffee. The cat knew me and leaped into my lap.

I put the cat on the floor.

"Watch, Mr. Burnett," I said.

"Shake hands!" I said to the cat. "Shake hands!"

The cat just sat there.

"That's funny, it always used to do it," I said. "Shake hands!"

I remembered Shipkey had told Mr. Burnett that I talked to birds.

"Come on now! Shake hands!"

I began to feel foolish.

"Come on! Shake hands!"

I put my head right down by the cat's head and put everything I had into it.

"Shake hands!"

The cat just sat there.

I went back to my chair and picked up my cheese sandwich.

"Cats are funny animals, Mr. Burnett. You can never tell. Millie, put on Tchaikovsky's 6th for Mr. Burnett."

We listened to the music. Millie came over and sat in my lap. She just had on a negligee. She dropped down against me. I put my sandwich to one side.

"I want you to notice," I said to Mr. Burnett, "the section which brings forth the marching movement in this symphony. I think it's one of the most beautiful movements in all music. And besides its beauty and force, its structure is perfect. You can feel intelligence at work."

The cat jumped up into the lap of the man with the goatee. Millie laid her cheek against mine, put a hand on my chest. "Where ya been, baby boy? Millie's missed ya, ya know."

The record ended and the man with the goatee took the cat off his lap, got up and turned the record over. He should have found record #2 in the album. By turning it over we would get the climax rather early. I didn't say anything, though, and we listened to it end.

"How did you like it?" I asked.

"Fine! Just fine!"

He had the cat on the floor.

"Shake hands! Shake hands!" he said to the cat.

The cat shook hands.

"Look," he said, "I can make the cat shake hands."

"Shake hands!"

The cat rolled over.

"No, shake *hands*! Shake *hands*!"

The cat just sat there.

He put his head down by the cat's head and talked into its ear.

"Shake hands!"

The cat stuck its paw right into his goatee.

"Did you see? I made him shake hands!" Mr. Burnett seemed pleased.

Millie pressed tight against me. "Kiss me, baby boy," she said, "kiss me."

"No."

"Good Lord, ya gone off ya nut, baby boy? What's eatin' at ya? Sompin's botherin' ya tonight, I can tell! Tell Millie all about ut! Millie'd go ta hell for ya, baby boy, ya know that. Whats'a matter, huh? Ha?"

"Now I'll get the cat to roll over," said Mr. Burnett.

Millie wrapped her arms tight around me and peered down into my upward eye. She looked very sad and motherish and smelled like cheese. "Tell Millie what's eatin' ya up, baby boy."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat.

The cat just sat there.

"Listen," I said to Millie, "see that man over there?"

"Yeah, I see him."

"Well, that's Whit Burnett."

"Who's that?"

"The magazine editor. The one I send my stories to."

"Ya mean the one who sends you those little tiny notes?"

"Rejection slips, Millie."

"Well, he's mean. I don't like him."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat. The cat rolled over. "Look!" he yelled. "I made the cat roll over! I'd like to buy this cat! It's marvelous!"

Millie tightened her grip about me and peered down into my eye. I was quite helpless. I felt like a still live fish on ice in a butcher's counter on Friday morning.

"Listen," she said, "I can get him ta print one a ya stories. I can get him ta print *alla* them!"

"Watch me make the cat roll over!" said Mr. Burnett.

"No, no, Millie, you don't understand! Editors aren't like fixed businessmen. Editors have *scruples*!"

"Scruples?"

"Scruples."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett.

The cat just sat there.

"I know all about ya *scruples*! Don't ya worry about scruples! Baby boy, I'll get him ta print *alla* ya stories!"

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat. Nothing happened.

"No, Millie, I won't have it."

She was all wound around me. It was hard to breathe and she was rather heavy. I felt my feet going to sleep. Millie pressed her check against mine and rubbed a hand up and down my chest. "Baby boy, ya got nothin' to say!"

Mr. Burnett put his head down by the cat's head and talked into its ear. "Roll over!"

The cat stuck its paw right into his goatee.

"I think this cat wants something to eat," he said.

With that, he got back into his chair. Millie went over and sat on his knee.

"Where'd ya get tha cute little goaty?" she asked.

"Pardon me," I said, "I'm going to get a drink of water."

I went in and sat in the breakfast nook and looked down at the flower designs on the table. I tried to scratch them off with a fingernail.

It was hard enough to share Millie's love with the cheese salesman and the welder. Millie with the figure right down to the hips. Damn, damn.

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A cat walks by and shakes Shakespeare
off his back.

I don't want to draw
like Mondrian,
I want to draw like a sparrow eaten by a cat.

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conversation on a telephone

I could tell by the crouch of the cat,
the way it was flattened,
that it was insane with prey;
and when my car came upon it,
it rose in the twilight
and made off
with bird in mouth,
a very large bird, gray,
the wings down like broken love,
the fangs in,
life still there
but not much,
not very much.

the broken love-bird
the cat walks in my mind
and I cannot make him out:
the phone rings,
I answer a voice,
but I see him again and again,
and the loose wings
the loose gray wings,
and this thing held
in a head that knows no mercy;
it is the world, it is ours;

I put the phone down
and the cat-sides of the room
come in upon me
and I would scream,
but they have places for people
who scream;
and the cat walks
the cat walks forever
in my brain.

I saw that bird and my hands were on the steering wheel and I saw
the wings and they were down like broken love, the wings said that,
and the cat moved away from the wheels of my car that way a cat
moves and I'm sick as I write this, and all the broken love of the
world and all the broken love birds, and the sky said this covered
with smog and cheap clouds and miscreant gods.

f

I saw a bird when I was driving home from the trace the other day.
It was in the mouth of a cat crouched down in the asphalt street,
the clouds overhead, the sunset, love and God overhead, and it saw
my car and rose, cat-rose insane, stiff back like mad love depravity,
and it walked toward the curbing, and I saw the bird, a large grey,
flop broken-winged, wings large and out, dipped, feathers spread,
still alive, cat-fanged; nobody saying anything, signals changing,
my motor running, and the wings the wings in my mind . . .

J

the cat

this cat hangs around the iron fire escape
and she's yellow like the sun
and she's never seen a dog in that part
of the city, and boy, she's fat,
full of rats and tidbits from HARVEY'S BAR
and I've been going up the fire escape
to see this lady in the hotel
and she shows me letters from her son
in France, and it is a very small room
full of wine bottles and sadness,
and sometimes I leave her a little money,
and when I go down the fire escape
there's the cat again and
she rubs against my legs and
as I go to the car
she follows, and I've got to be careful
when I start up, but not too much so:
she's pretty smart, she knows
the car is not her friend.
and one day I went to see the lady
and she was dead. I mean, she wasn't there,
her room was empty. it had been a hemorrhage
I was told. and the room was now for rent.
well, there's no use being sad. I went down
the iron steps and there was the cat. I

ON CATS

picked her up and rubbed her, but oddly,
it was not the same cat. her fur was rough
and the eyes were mean. I threw it to the ground
and watched it run off and glare at me.
then I got into the car
and drove away.



Feathers

§

The Arabians admire the cat, look down upon women and dogs because they show affection and affection is, some think, a sign of weakness. Well, perhaps it is. I do not show too much. My wives and girlfriends complain because I hold my soul separately—and give my body, perhaps, puritanically; but back to the g.d. cat. A cat is only ITSELF. That is why when it gets the poor bird it won't let go. This is a representative of the strong forces of LIFE that won't let go. The cat is the beautiful devil. And here we can use the word, even without the "a." You can get some dogs and some women to let go—and they'll let go. But a cat, hell, the lightning sides of houses will long be done over and he will still be purring in his milk. A cat will eat you when you die. No matter how long you've lived together. There was an old man once who died alone like Buk, and he didn't have a woman but he had a cat and he died alone and it was days days days poor old man began to stink, it not his fault, but the earth revolving and removing remains of what shoulda been buried by living earth spirits, and cat smelled good, to him, stink of dead meat, and when they found them the cat was clawing up from the floor, stuck to the bottom of the mattress like a rock, eating through the

mattress, hung like a clam on the rock, and they couldn't club him off or pry him off or burn him off, and they just hadda throw him off and away with the damned mattress. I suppose one moonlit nite through the dew of moon and leaves cooling the smell of death, he let go.

There are no spirits or gods in a cat, don't look for them, Shed. A cat is the picture of the eternal machinery, like the sea. You don't pet the sea because it's pretty but you pet a cat—why?—ONLY BECAUSE HE'LL LET YOU. And a cat never knows fear—finally—he only winds up into the spring of the sea and the rock, and even in a death-fight he does not think of anything except the majesty of darkness.