

CAT & SNAKE

I swore I'd stop writing
about cats. But here she comes
down the hall, our little black cat,
retrieving the catnip caterpillar for me
to throw again. Even a silly movie
like "Escape from L.A." addresses
more consequential subjects. When
Snake pushes the button that destroys
the global power grid forever, when he
lights that forbidden American Spirit cigarette
& blows out the match, we're inflamed:
"Fuck it! Let's just start all over again!"
Until then, I'm sitting here cross-legged
on the floor, a cat squirming in my lap,
staring up at me like a startled owl,
her body dense as a bean bag. Ok.
The only subjects worth writing about
are love & death but consider this:
if I died in the house, you know what the cat
would do after three days without food.

CAT & TRANSIENT

Boilerplate for beginners: show,
don't tell. But must I describe
the homeless guy who lowers himself
down beside me on the bench
outside the Co-op? He's generic,
more dirt than human. As if
my father's ill spirit possesses me,
I almost snarl "Hey! I'm eating here,"
his stink killing my appetite for the bowl
of organic jackfruit on my lap. I stand,
ashamed, give him a dollar & walk away
after dumping the paper bowl
into a trashcan advertising the pleasures
of our historic shopping district.
I swore I'd stop writing about liberal guilt
& about cats too, but I must confess
last night, I groomed our little black cat
with my tongue & watched her perpetually
startled gold eyes widen as I licked her neck
& then her belly, inhaling her scent.
In Japan, childless couples can rent
a cat by the hour to sniff its belly, which
smells like the crown of a baby's head.

DINNER TALE

Two couples at a table,
the women & one man
eating & talking,

the other man watching
them chew, their Adam's apples
bobbing when they swallow,
their tongues red with wine
when they laugh. "Alimentary,

my dear Watson," his shrink
had joked, upping his meds.
If you are what you eat, tonight

he renews his vow he'll become
an epiphyte, something
quiet that lives on air.

SEGUE

When the band segues from "Cupid"
to "Chain Gang," I stop dancing.
My hip hurts & I feel foolish, doing
the two-step to "Hoh! Ah! Hoh! Ah,"
the sound of the men working
on the chain gang. You keep dancing,
raising an imaginary pick ax over your head
on each "Hoh!" & striking on each "Ah!"
Love, for a shy girl, you don't sweat
much, meaning I love how you don't sweat
being judged. I sit down to my bottle
of flat beer, dreading tonight, knowing
I'll get up between nightmares six
or seven times to pee. Here comes
"Mustang Sally" & I slice a forefinger
across my throat, which means
"I'm dead, love. Let's go home."

CREPE

I shouldn't walk naked from the shower
in our garage back into the house. I glance
over the fence to make sure our young neighbor,
our gay firefighter, isn't in his yard. I don't want
to disgust him or make him worry about how
he'll look someday. A little pot belly, crepey skin
thin as the skin of the houris the Prophet
described as "transparent, the marrow
of their shanks visible through the flesh."
I imagine his English boyfriend nicknaming me
after the British pudding, "Spotted Dick."
Dressing , undressing, I'm so tired of this body,
washing & drying it, wrapping a towel around it
& I'm tired of hiding it from the neighbors. "Too
long," my answer to the question that old song
asks, "How Long Has This Been Going On?"