



*Down in the Dirt*

**CAT PEOPLE**  
**Cat People**  
**Kyle Hemmings**

**SCARS HOME ENTERTAINMENT**

  
**Acknowledgements**

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**I'm a Catster**

Just before sunrise  
I crawl into my mother's room,  
and wait, spring-loaded haunch,  
the tension of ten thousand whiny years,  
witness the sweep of the top sheet  
13 kittens nestled between her legs  
or tottering at the edge of the duvet.  
She said she had this dream of cats  
jumping through hoops, crossing a certain  
border, pissing in the footsteps  
of dog catchers and rat bounty hunters.  
Havana Brown, Japanese Bobtail,  
La Perm or Karat, I could never be,  
she says, your father's best kept  
Oriental Shorthair. One by one,  
the kittens jump from the bed  
and disappear in the orange-golden arm  
of sunlight. My mother goes back to sleep.  
I smile and look down.  
The real me is what's under my pajamas:  
torso made of tinder-dream,  
loins of cat-scratch Pixie-Bob.  
It's getting harder at school  
to not shed my true fur.

# Star Mother

As a child you clung to walls, stumpy fingers turning to claw-and-ball or cautious paw. Running your hands over walnut wood, its veneer and lacquer, you traced the curves of scallop shells, scrolls in Braille, Ping dynasty servant girls serving tea. What you didn't know, your father, master and commander of sash windows and gingerbread calamities, filled in the blanks. Then, one day, you couldn't hear your mother scream from her version of darkness. But you had a cat's sixth sense of events on the horizon. Your father placed your fingertips over his cracked lips, explained it like this: *Your mother was a faraway star, perhaps, the sun. The sun fell into the sea.* All the things you said to him in the dark turned into a tall stranger who had no concept of light. When you turned beautiful, your sight partially restored, he followed you everywhere, groping like a fugitive. You turned and asked him *Are you my father, the one I had before the house burned down, the one I cried over for years?* He turned and stumbled. You helped him up, noting the terribly scarred one eye, the splat black. From that point on, you became his walking cane, as he walked in reverse. Until you became his last words.



## Magicians

As a magician she was never lovelier then when she sawed you in half and never returned your parts. One part always longed for the clarity of winter. The other grew nostalgic for hissing summers, children selling lemonade on manicured lawns. Or the time she changed your blind turtles into laughing rain. Then you read in the news that a man cut his wife down to size, divided her. The right hemisphere kept in 2/3rds vinegar solution, the left in formaldehyde. When questioned by the police, he said It was the first idea he ever had of something being “clear and distinct.” For years, you imagine someone outside your house throwing stones at your window. She demands you put her back together or at least give her what she once had. But children never really grow all the way up. And magicians never reveal all their secrets. You think about your wife in the basement, shining a flashlight on the cement cracks, the black water rising, caused by the neighbor’s tree roots spreading under the foundation. After you open the window and yell out that you’re married to someone else, to please not come back, you realize there is no one there. Just a black rain and this hard shell of a house where everything slowly disappears.



**Noir**

I wake up screaming. I can't remember the exact content, only the gross shadows and the girl falling from the wharf. She was young with a voice that could charm dolphins, kingpins. Was that girl—me? I'm bleeding. I always cut myself when I dream. It's my way of telling myself: Hey, wake up! You're nowhere in sight. My white Persian with the blue eyes no longer answers to her French name: *Jolie fille*. The psychiatrist who speaks in shades of monotone, whose eyes scare me like ravens, says It's all the result of stress. Stop working so many hours he says. But I tell him: There's a war. There's a war going on. I suspect that in secret rooms with fly-a-way women, he's a fascist with dead-end eyes. The phone rings. It's the same man I met yesterday at Frankie's diner. He said his name was Dana Andrews. He handed me his card. He said tailing people was his specialty and asked whether anyone was giving me a hard time. I watched Frankie sling some hash, yell out to 86 the ham steaks. Now I remember. Dana Andrews was the man in my dream. He pushed me in. I believe he did. Then he swam after me. On the moonlit dock, I was shivering. He held me, kept calling me by my childhood nickname: Bleu. His eyes looked through me. Hooked through me. He had the eyes of my cat.

A decorative border of grey paw prints surrounds the title text. The paw prints are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape, with some overlapping the text.

# **She Sounds Like Joni Mitchell Singing in a Taxi Whenever it Rains**

I love the way she plays guitar. Behind alabaster walls, I'm almost blind but I won't fall down. An ear to the crack. Finger to fret, 3 octave range, the song about a woman who loved too hard and in the end could only see herself. Someday I'll work up the nerve to knock on her door and invite her in for Sweet Southern Tea. Set those chords free. I'm so rusty at conversation. How's this: Someday I'm going to run to Canada. Way up North. Do they have cats on those arctic islands? I'll study their mating habits. I wonder if they can sing each other's voice. Or— Did you ever streak when you were young? I did. It's how I lost a good portion of my sight. I was chased into a brick wall by a jealous king of penguins. From then on, I could only see sideways. But I won't ask her in today. Today, like most days, I'll remain the nameless listener. She'll sing about her ex-lovers, cold islands, whistles in the night. I wish I could play guitar like her. Truth is I don't play guitar at all. Truth is there are probably no cats or penguins in the Arctic. But at night, after the penguins have gone to sleep and Arctic Canada is one big hushed mother with arms outstretched, I fantasize. I'm a musician. I love to improvise. Early morning fog, she drops a coin in my hat. She says she has a day job. Off to Nova Scotia. Lots of men watching Impressionistic sunsets, islands within islands. She can't spend the day listening to sad songs. We might sing each other: her contralto is my baritone. I would love to play her piccolo.



# **Kitty Galore**

We met on the Oriental Express streaming under white pockmarked night, congenitally deaf sky. I sensed Silver Vine on her white flesh, and her blue eyes reminded me of one too many fires I had set as a child. When the train stopped in Bulgaria, we let our guard down. “Catch any Tartars lately?” I asked with the coyness used to charm snake-women, illegal immigrants in Amsterdam. She leaned forward in her seat opposite to me. Her voice was a tortoiseshell pattern of tones and kitten-whispers. “I have orders to kill you. If I close my eyes, will you promise to escape? You have such a nice face. In my sleep, I could lick your face, savoring the trace of salt.” But I was tired of running. I spent much of my expat life under the beds of married women who eventually ratted me out to Gestapo agents. “Listen,” I said, “if you’re going to kill me, and pussycats are never worth killing, let’s make this worthwhile. I’ll please you out of your skull, kill you with pleasure.” I invited her back to my luxury car. In the bunk, I offered her my tabby scars and paltry alley flesh. But staring through me with her smoke-eyes, she said it was a trait passed down in her family of hemophiliacs and amnesiacs wondering along Europe’s lonely rails—she couldn’t taste sweetness—not in any form, not for the life of her. And with her long aristocratic fingers squeezing my throat, she smiled both vermin and luck of the chase. There was a subtle tilt of her face looming over mine. “Catch any Tartars lately?” she asked so sweetly, so endearingly.



# Solitary Dancers

Kat's childhood was a lost weekend inside a room of Teddy Bear eyes. Objects floated; shadows fell face first. Still there is today and a forbidden love for acting out. No barre, center of floor, teacher's voice, a constant ringing in the ears, Sad Tuesday's leftover. The ankle is aligned with one's favorite dark cloud. Not a waltz, he'd say. His hands are yellow-stained, bulging with knots and veins, his voice, a low-flying crane over White Russia, the impossibility of the glide. Years later, she imagines his sister, once light on her feet, practicing her Cabrioles in a Siberian prison, footfalls on the wind, a slap against brick. If only one could perform a jump, a *Brisé* from fifth position to endless swirling void. At least, there'd be no more complaints of fallen arches.

What Kat learns: no matter the composer or choreographer, life is about balance on one foot. Her father is always somewhere else, marking time with strippers. His balance, she pronounces as deviant. She learns to fly through the air, the weight of a swan's reflection. Jumping room to room, she becomes a window for others, their flighty attention span, their self-denials before mirrors. They conceal a fear of heights. She auditions for fat-lipped men in cheap suits and makes them pay for her sprains, her bruises. Leaping through time, growing older yet lighter, she lands on the same foot she starts with. With strangers wearing masks, she speaks of a paper Mache firebird still sitting in her room. Can you hear her, she asks each one. The teacher's voice returns, hovers over her nude body, foot wrapped around a lover's ankle, his breaths on the wind. *Fondu, relevé, fondu*. Down, up, down. Not a waltz step. Not a *pas de valse*. Not in this life. The dancer in a *degagé*. Her lovers die a white death, dreaming of air.

# Sunset Boulevard Bow Tied Mo Fo Fat Cat

I am the decked out high-five cat with Gucci sunglasses. I ride in back of limousines, open top, diamonds glittering around my California Spangled neck. All the girls know me from Disney, my aunt was half-ocelot, an extra in Tarzan remakes and she was a friend of a friend of a friend of Thomasina, a cat who just wouldn't be put down. All the girls love me from Maine to Java, what they wouldn't do to give me a bowl of sardines, a throw rug stamped with my motto J.T. Cat Needs Some Love. And you're the big girl who never grew up, who never got over her first cat who grew too fast and too fat. I can tell by your green eyes, and fragile stance, always alone at night, that you're not a dog lover. Give me all your girly love. What you wouldn't do for a hair, a clip of my nail. We'll make pictures with happy endings, you and I. I'll direct and do the casting. 'Cuz life is too short and when you're a cat, it's even shorter. Imagine a three hour film, the story of our lives, how I saved you from small fires, how you'd never give me away, could it ever capture the love?



# **Tell-Tale Nights in the Heart of the City**

At the club, we're knee deep in dusk, pockets of post-despair. The D.J. is spinning a remix of Cash's Ring of Fire. But I and my cat brother, with his genius love of green, have already fallen in. We have codenames: He's Puma Boy; I'm Lucky Cat. Later, we'll rip off the straights, air brush tiger insignias on their leather jackets, now ours. Nothing is really ours unless it's under the skin, like connective tissue, like memories of disco strangers in my bed, my false confessions to them. Was it quick-spit love? All friendly fang and chipped tooth? I use to flatten their tires so they'd remember me. Later, Puma and I will have sex in Soho's back alleys. The pigeons will drop us condoms. We'll blush before strangers. The city is a tea cup that leaks us. I need some coffee. Deep, dark, Columbian. On the subway, girls without claws, ones with hollow eyes, stare out of windows. I study the curl and length of their fingernails. Not enough city love, too short, too pale. I need to paint them a green that glows in the dark. Long enough to scratch against the night.

# This Ain't No Cathouse, Sugah

She lives in a flapjack house over a fault line, not exactly her fault. Had no say in the construction of the walls. They're made of Monterey Jack and a childhood goo called Dream On which rhymes with Klingon. Even though her TV set is fuzzy, she loves star gazing at reruns of William Shatner giving lip and smooth face gloss to a princess of galaxy feminists, their captive hominoids high on brown sugar, comets careening through deep sleep. Her husband leads a double life, teaching Melville and pantheism but at home, practices a tight claw version of this-panther-wears-the-pants. She dreams of being Lady G or having the perfect S curl, but so far she's only succeeded in making a bald spot. Lately, she's been reminding him to fix the hole in the ceiling from which she sometimes ogles the blackness of night, stars as superscripts, the universe capable of many interpretations except that Matter matters. At times, after discovering a new scar in the mirror, one left by a dream of comets, she asks her bubble of a hubby if his mistresses wear panther pink or leopard spotted underwear. He retorts that at least he brings home the bacon and she's already lost three babies to various sucking wounds of depression. As a universal form of humiliation to jaded cats, he makes her iron his mistresses' cheap bras for a low plunge. Then one day, it happens. The ground shakes, reminds her of a fibrillating heart. Past her window, rumble all the amorous animals from the zoo. Run to the basement, cries her husband, who once promised her a Katmandu, but the mice chewed up the map. It's too late. The house collapses, over the edge, her husband swallowed feet first, she, belly side up, into a void darker than black, which goes to prove her previous theory that the world and what all the Deputy Dawgs and Sylvester Strung Out Cats made of it was really flat all along. *Do You Still Love Me, Daddycakes?* her words fly out like splashes of hot grease, hands sinking beneath soft dirt, a shade darker than maple syrup, while in some pit stops across the country, mind you, they serve pancakes until three.



# Marry Me

My mother told me never to trust girls who speak from the side of their mouths. But Kat, with her rainbow bracelets and flat vans, can't speak any other way. A creature of A.D.D. and zip up leather, studded belt and the next No Wave, has mistaken me for the last fuzz boy guitarist who dumped her over a groupie into Goth and 50's horror films that are HYSTERICAL. So it's Saturday afternoon in a life of endless afternoons, waiting for balloons to fall, or poppies to emit milky juice through terminal pores. I mean I'm bored. So Kat calls and says what's up and yadda yadda yadda and I'm definitely leaving for school at the end of the summer and yadda yadda yadda and why is love such an ugly brute and yadda yadda yadda and I'm like Why not? So we're standing in the throng of a Central Park crowd, sweating in our skinny jeans. It's a free concert—Blackie Stark and the Undertones—who are from the Michigan area and formed as a high school band back in '64 and who have since recorded three singles but can't get picked up by a major label. And Kat is looking too cute with her chubby thighs and Ultra-glow pink lip gloss and I'm thinking of flowers falling but are they free? An announcer enters the stage and lists upcoming acts for the summer. Kat is whispering some crazy shit in my ear, like how she would marry a boy who was her best friend or some lines from her poetry like how the sky raped her but she lusted for the sun, or how the mushroom is not a symbol of the penis, it's just a vegetable that grows in her poems and I say, Kat, like you're tickling my ear. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Blackie comes on stage dressed as some glitter cowboy with shades. I'm starting to think what the Fall will be like with Kat gone. It was always a thing of Almost Love or there's somebody else just a notch above you. Kat is bobbing her head to Blackie's tune about devil women. Kat is holding my hand. Kat tongues my ear and smiles as if to say Fuck it, right? Blackie asks for a volunteer for his next song. But where is Kat? She's joining a commune. She becomes a shadow underneath your everything. I'm having flashbacks of Kat on a tricycle. We even shared raspberry popsicles at the age of eight. Was it so wrong? I'm raking through the crowd. I'm interrogating faces. Where did you hide Kat? My mother's voice answers: *She will not be the girl you will marry. Honey, She's Been Around.* No, mom, she's just a showy girl with too much black eyeliner. Inside she's crumpled petals. I was always unripe. I push my way to the stage. There is Kat belting out a Blackie tune. There is Kat on stage, outrageous and flirting with the crowd, making them beg for her smile. There is Kat looking down at me. I love you, Raspberry, she sings. Marry me, I shout back. She throws her brassiere into the crowd and I jump into space like the guitar solo I never could play.

The logo for 'City Cry' features the words 'City Cry' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Above the text, there are several grey paw prints arranged in a decorative arc.

We live for the night, Kat and I. Glitter queens, mothball girls with no back wings, neon cursed sex slaves, cherry boys with Ferris wheels in their eyes. The day will only break our backs. Kat, dressed in her black leather skirt, shin-snug boots, nylons with an incredible run, is rummaging through her latest collection of rare LPs from 60s Garage: The Blue Tangerine Scenario, Lovers Under House Arrest, Tulips for Wendy, and Oscillating Boy from Berlin. “When are the Eskimos coming?” I say. “We’re out of blue cubes and sugar substitutes.” “You know them,” she says without turning face. “They’re never good with directions and terminal bus stops.” Kat bops her head to a record, her body all sheer and leather snake. She turns, wiggles and does a faux Watusi before me without cracking. “The world is full of Eskimos late on arrival, or still under the ice. What makes the world turn, Kat? I mean, seriously.” She jerks her body towards a wall, imitates her shadow. “Money and sugar, honey. Money and sugar.” She skulks in front of me like a thief who lives to frustrate me. I reach up and pull down her panties. I rear end her. Inside, she feels like the empty spaces of 5.5 unlived lives and the cat who escaped from the suburbs. When I’m finished, she slaps me for not using lubricant. “Oh, did it hurt?” she says with a pout. “Nothing compared to last time,” I say. I saunter to the window. Two gays walking hand in hand. Obviously in love. Mr. Gypsy Moth with the aching eyes and Mr. Clingstone Peach who is always dropping from decision trees. Who will burn who first? Who has the thicker skin? Who can grow wings? “Why can’t we be like Jersey couples?” I call out to Kat. “Why can’t we refinance love, are we that broke?” “Because we live on Avenue C,” says Kat. “The rest of the world waits for us so they can turn.” “Love,” I say, biting my fingernails down to the skin. “Will it ever come this way again?” I turn. Kat is wiping an LP with a soft wet cloth. “When the sun goes down, baby. That’s when it’ll come again. When we become blind, when we’ve given up on touch and sound. Can anything live below the city? And we can only taste that part of the other that we once loved swallowing whole.”

# Love Story for Cats Only

In city windows, our bodies look supersized, our faces, sad steroidal aliens. To whom does each one belong? It's 5:30 a.m. and wet. Sidewalks are wet. I want another cup of coffee, black, no sugar. On a dance floor of spilled liquor and sweat, Kat and I acted out our fantasies of no-wave love and white swan heart-break. But now the streets are empty. Echoes are not possible. It would take a person or an animal blinded by loss. Beyond the immediate boroughs, Kat declares that the rest of the world is melting, lovers are turning one-dimensional or flat. She's still working on that sci-fi story. We pass an oyster bar, then a small gallery featuring Cezanne and Man Ray photos in a magenta-hued light. I try catching the light rain on my tongue. You don't love me yet, says Kat, because I am too many people. I am every reflection I look at. I am every character I create. No, I say, I don't love you because you're a reflection I've already caught. You only love what you don't have. Like the rain. Try holding it and it becomes a thing of the past. Kat covers my ears and says Shhh. Do you hear them? She asks. Behind every door, you can hear the lovers, and in every lover—a secret. Every lover tries to destroy the other because it's a piece of themselves. Then they try to get it all back. A puzzle for two, all jagged spaces intact. Kat walks backwards shooting me a queer gaze that is forced, that tilt of the head that is uniquely Kat when she is philosophical. A car rushes by. She loses her balance, falls from the curb. I rush to grab her. We're both wet, I mean, wetter than what we were in a simple drizzle. With jutted jaw and wide dandelion smile, Kat looks back at me, into my eyes that she always describes as little Neanderthal men who can't make a fire. I smile back, then focus on my hand gripping her upper arm. It must be some kind of love. I can't let go. Not in this story.



# Kidnapped and Held Hostage in a Turkish Van

When our mama, who resembled Big Cass Eliot, died from food poisoning, my sis, a suspect in anything, took charge of me. Our father, who was in danger of being swallowed by Big Mama, was always somewhere other than here until he became nothing but a story. My sister's name was Katy as in Katy Did It and she resented taking care of me because now she was a bass player in some East Village Japanese band called Box Turtle Sex. She had this strange habit of taking me places and leaving me there: the art deco gallery on MacDougall, an S&M shop near Gansevoort, a bar named Sid Vicious on East 3rd and something, on the laps of strange women at a hair salon that also did hot wax, the Lowe's Movie Theater where we saw *The Postman Always Rings Twice* three times (I never noticed Katy was gone until the lights went on), and the dry cleaner's. It took me three years to escape from the last one. It turned out to be owned by a white slavery ring specializing in selling children who have this "lost" look about them, like they could be the next Justin Bieber or something. A couple of men whose faces I couldn't see took pictures of me for posters. In strange cities I saw posters of myself, kids trying to imitate me with that hung-loose lip and hungry eye look. Sometimes their older sisters would laugh, but I couldn't understand their language. Eventually, I found my way back to my sister who was now living with some Japanese dude in Chelsea. I had grown three inches taller and had the peach fuzz of a punkster on CD covers. After ringing the buzzard to her apartment building and being told several times that she doesn't know anyone named "Pixie-Bob," she finally let me up. The door unlocked but the chain remained. One eye inspected me up and down. My God, she said, how you've grown. You look so much like papa. Well, I said, where to next?



# Suicide Birds (sic)

Kat and I are standing in an alley behind a church converted to the nightclub-Happy Judas. Behind stained-glass windows, there's an occasional flickering of addiction. "I'm tired of holding the sun," says Kat with black eyeliner and bone earrings, in fishnets with tiny eyes.

I look for the boy we met inside the club, the one who claimed he loved playing with matches, setting fire to churches. I spot him smoking a cigarette, standing so cool against the side of the club, like he might be the nephew of some Viking guitarist hung up on perfect fifths and palm-muted riff. He's missing a pinky.

The matchstick boy gives us the devil horn with his free hand, and says, Oh yeah, the guy with the split lip and the ghost girl from Swedish summer nights. Excuse my Netflix eye, but your girl's got some mean curves. She reminds me of someone. I never get that lucky anymore."

"Look, I say, " we need a favor. Could you marry us? Then set us on fire. We'll pay you."

From across the river, I hear the sound, the grumble of the Insect People. They work the graveyard shift and beyond, pulling things to under, stuffing crumbs of lives into plastic bags for pocket-savvy consumers.

"It's like this," says Kat. "We're in love, Beatle-Boy and me. But marriage would only kill us. I mean, isn't it what real time does? Slows down your life and makes you miss pedal points and hooks. So marry us, man, and set us on fire."

I pay the matchstick boy and he marries us with several false starts, a sticky tongue, some striking spaces. His eyes are all about Kat and some old hurt, maybe never to be remembered as a lesson. Kat and I kiss, our bodies a cradle, a soft blanket. Matchstick boy looks away then sets himself on fire. Up in smoke. Kat cries in the high pitched wail of a Grade Z slasher flick.

We carry his ashes to the river.

“Maybe I should join the Insect People,” says Kat. “Live on the dark throne of his remains and drink 24-hour rat poison coffee. He reminded me of somebody who never left. Canned love? Voices in a jar? I can’t sleep on sharp stones. Tonight is another country.”

“Isn’t it true, “I say, “that every girl, from uptown to Panic Park, from Soho to Stockholm, has under their bed a tin can Harry, echoing in tritones, heart of springs?”

She says nothing. Only looks into the water reflecting blank night, melting stars in the shape of radioactive bananas.

On the banks of the river, I am tense as a chord, in the heart of suspicion, 350 beats per minute, as I look sideways at my dying bride.

# **Dancin' Across the U.S.A.**

Kat and I are doing our version of *The Bubblegum Strain* before 17 million viewers around the world. It's the show *How Many Legs Have You Got?* Slinking and slow-burning, we combine old hip-hop routines with improvised House four-to-the-floor. We do half-time and dubstep. Kat is kick drum; I am snare. Kat is synth-stroked climax; I am deep in spacey futurism. Kat is dressed as an eighties Madonna, long skirt with tie-up boots. I am a slender Hercules on a diet of parallel worlds. The audience claps. The judges give irrelevant critiques and scores. Judge No.1 gives us a 7. He says I lack attitude. No. 2 gives us a 9. She admits it's hard to adapt to dubstep. It's like crashing gates. No. 3 gives us a 6, claiming that our grime was too complex and jerky. I can feel the sweat from Kat's palm traveling through my lifeline. "Wait," says Kat, "it's not over. The second dance is always better." She stares each judge in the face. I'm about to go Kode9. The cameramen are giving each other strange hand signals. Kat shuffles to the edge of the stage and flies. She floats over the audience, under hot colored lights. The people stand. Their heads roll. Their eyes trace crazy fish patterns across the ceiling. The judges rise and guffaw. No. 1 says Is she Mary Poppins? No. 2 says The craziest shit always happens when it's not in the script. No. 3 asks if there are strings attached to her. Kat returns to the stage, perched before the judges. She looks at me with her big Barbie-Girl aqua eyes, the only thing about her that is not breathless. I'm walking on a mist. The audience can't stop cheering. The judges stand and collectively fire themselves. In the backseat of a taxi, I hold Kat's hand and look into her eyes. There are bruises below each. Does she punch herself in her sleep? I think of what a friend once said about the mind being an invisible jukebox. Kat smiles like a ballerina returning to her average life hanging from strings. In her eyes are miniature porcelain swans forever stuck within their gelatinous spheres.



## Blue Hearts

Whenever Pixie-Bob and Kat get into an argument, he will tear his pillow with a Shonen knife. He will threaten to love girls who work in bomb factories. Or he will sleep under the house with the goat-boys, made homeless under the city's new urban renewal program. They are dreamless and have no sense of mute beat. If things get too heated, Pixie-Bob will get lost in L-shaped rooms under streets and gear-grind, doing the Trip Hop before hookers having ticks and herniated discs. When he returns home, he will be in a trance. For days, all doors will be closed. But Kat being a girl-rapper trained in classical, will stand in the rain. This is not to say that every time Kat and Pixie-Bob argue, there will be rain. The rain is not logical, and contrary to popular opinion, has no musical sense. The rain does not say Take off your hi-hat and dance with me. The rain may not be there at all. It's just that in the absence of the other, Kat loves to stand in the middle of a street, oblivious to sky peddlers and pimps on parole. She will throw her head back and open her mouth. She'll convince herself that it's pouring—it's there. She loves to taste the meltdown of reflexive clouds, their nuclear sadness.

The logo for 'Red Beryl' features the words 'Red Beryl' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Above the text is a decorative horizontal line composed of several grey paw prints of varying sizes, some overlapping the letters.

I'm standing before the smoking mirror watching Kat slap each side of her head. In her magical cat's eye thinking, she believes this is a crude way to dislodge the tumor discovered by the uptown doctors with stone eyes who tend towards BIG. The tumor was a red beryl lodged near the pineal gland. Kat was told she needed surgery and it probably wouldn't work. The little men with stone eyes should be here any minute to take her away.

“Doesn't love have anything to do with it?” says Kat, her words skipping over each other. “I mean, it's my body, my future. It's not a gift from some crystalloid god whose eyes always get dry at sacrifices.”

“It's by order of the King of East Village Flats and sub-lets. You know you're a danger to yourself and others. You keep seeing light where there isn't. You see light in the cracks. It's giving you convulsions and some grandiose delusion of stars that you talk about in your sleep. It's the gemstone in your brain and it's making you blind to what lies under or between things.”

“Darkness, darkness, that's all they know! I haven't killed anything. I don't destroy painted dogs, not even a swoosh over cockroaches. Those doctors will use me for research. They'll sell my tumor on E-bay. Oh, honey how long will you wait?”

“Until you come home, Kat. Until your eyes are a darker shade of hazel.”

“When they get done with me, Pixie-Bob, I'll be one of the insect people, building dirt pyramids from the inside for life.”

A knock at the door. I embrace Kat and stroke her hair. I whisper in her ear, they can't take away what is you. I won't let them."

She looks at me bleary-eyed and wilted lip.

"When I come back, I might not know you, baby."

The little uptown men with stones in their eyes, place a hand on Kat's shoulders. She fights, lurches forward, like some exotic bird too soft and outraged for its own good. I grab Kat, pull her head against my chest. She's making all kinds of strange animal sounds, coos and vow wows, drool from her lips, then starts to convulse. Her eyes in and out of reckoning. It's frightening me. One of the uptown men calls for a stretcher. "Kat," I whisper, "cough into my hand. " She obeys. For a moment, her eyes turn colorless, then, a darker shade of hazel. She has become conscious again. I kiss her on the cheek and tell her It's going to be alright. I wave as Kat watches me from the back of the ambulance. I look down at my fist and unfold it. There in the palm is Kat's gem. I'm beginning to see stars.

## **Calico Girl Cats Never Cry**

So putty cat, they flattened your tail and ran a big ass truck over your legs. In your bedridden existential state, you vow to become the terrorist of all pizza trucks, mousy men, all air gun and trap doors for brains. You'll find a way to sneak into their bedrooms, piss on their sheets, put crop circles in their rectangular dreams of false gods, valleys of nil rivers, dead dogs. You'll multiply like a songbird on pellet aphrodisiac. Someday a young girl with a strong streak of Mother Hubbard will take you in. You'll no longer wish to choke on fish bones, a starling's claw caught in the trachea, or die in a cat's noose, hanging in this blind alley called life. She'll rub your back and sing you nurseryrhymes. With ears perked, you'll follow her everyday to school, protecting her from the mice under her feet. Never once do you tell this hard-earned secret: In the end, we all fall down. No, this mama with hands sleek as fins will love you to death. It's the best metaphor you'll ever carry into endless sleep





I wake up to a feeling of floating bodies. Kat is not sleeping next to me, which means I might be stranded on Mars without a blanket. A note pinned to the pillow: *I'm tired of being your singing cockroach. Bow down before your Queen Bee Diva. I might be home before six, or I might swim to Bali. I'm just that kind of girl. Anyway, you still give me a reverse hard-on. Love, Kat.* I look out the window, as if I'm imprisoned inside a tower room. There's a smell of bubblegum, wafting through hot days and porch-less childhoods. Maybe the East Village is burning. I imagine in the building across the street, a girl is locked in a room and thinks it is her lighthouse. She loves the sun but can't stand to look down. She probably doesn't give a damn about pod slurping or car podding. She just wants to be saved from household cleaners and her brother's broken bass lines. He could go on for hours about the social stigma of having a hare lip. I download Kat and her band—Izzy and the Dogs of Dis-Solution—in MPEG-4 and watch them perform in H.264 video. Kat is dressed in a plastic mini-skirt with candy cane stockings that keep twirling, that never end. She's holding a fake water hydrant because behind her the city is burning. The rest of her band are dressed as ANGRY, SLEEK-DOG, AND LUDICROUS. At the computer, I type this message: We're out of leftovers. The cockroaches with no voices got to them. And I promise I won't put my shoes in the oven and set it on Broil. I'm going to lick my A.D.D. and talk to you in simple sentences. You're going to love my new haircut. And I won't hold grudges against girls singing under the radar, their songs without bridges. Remember that old cliché you once sang about? Love is like peanut butter, all gooey and sticks to your cheeks. Please come home before I burn the last two slices of bread. Love, Pixie-Bob. I will send this e-mail to myself.



# Kats and Birds

You really should know better than to ask the sun to turn you into a stone Buddha. Forget about Kat. It's 1967 and every girl is a bird with a distinct song. Some unlock you; others cut you at the core. After a thousand good-byes, after losing her in some hazy party where some doper kid screws up the words and sings *It never rains in Austin*, Kat, like a premature femme fatale sunsetting, goes away to college in an orange Beetle. It's the one with three identical dents along the door, driver's side. Her parents? Nothing but an empty nest made of nail clippings, shreds of yellowed newspaper, pieces of burnt toast. You imagine her mother wondering if Kat will use the pill. Will she date a meth freak and bring home a chatterbox? Will she burn all personal flags? Her father, you think, will laugh for no reason at tea parties, but will continue to dunk buttermilk cookies in milk. For you, it's a sign of hope. At the local college you attend, the soft-eyed freshman sneak hits of acid in the second floor bathroom. While your professors lecture you about the pros and cons of guerrilla warfare, or how Helen of Troy gave a whole city of men some serious blue balls, you stare out the window, wishing to send Kat telepathic flowers, rushed delivery. Without her, everything is turn-down and surface-glide. In the margin of your notebook, you write a poem in iambic silly-ameter how you once rode a horse to the edge of a cliff and you saw everything and it was love. You were that trippy, stains on your underwear, forever under the weather. You almost forget that a war is happening someplace else. Some babies will not survive the morning's first napalm. And Kat is gone. You really should know better than to love a girl who mistakes a man's shoe size for a code unlocking erogenous secrets. You hold on to ugly thunderclouds. In three to five months, in her letters to you, she'll misspell your name by one consonant. In six to eight months, she'll drop every vowel. You'll marry someone else, a girl with a look of runny hurt, a directory of missed appointments, an excuse for each unpaid bill. You'll continue to look out your back windows. Bury your father's knives under the river. You'll remember that as a child you won every spelling bee in school. They just didn't give away prizes. But you kept hoping.



# Broken Shell

In the rain. In the mix of rain and oil slick that coats our lives, the oil spill that spreads to everywhere. After green becomes merged with black menses flooding the tunnels under the streets. Sisters, there is no time to breathe. I and Molly Goo carry Kat in from the sea, another self-downed girl. Our makeshift family of burned girls lives under the amusement park, under the candy wrappers and paper cones, under the summer footfalls that still echo in our ginger hearts. Remember, Sisters, back in 72? We were the hot sonority girls of Greenpeace U. We infected our mothers with a new liberalism; gave our fathers a new skin. Our lover boys had seaweed in their eyes. We were their black tang. We watched their bones grow in their sleep. In F.B.I. photos we looked incredibly foxy, the smiling eyes of a minx. But now the sea is crashing against our little wooden house built on sand, shale, walls of moss. The sky is wearing dirty underwear and the sea cries *Kat! Give me your tired shell of a girl. For I have new owners, and they only get high on what sinks.* I and Molly Goo lay Kat on the table. Our heads are dense with fog. Soon dying fish will thrust themselves through our windows. The air will become thicker than love. We will suffocate while holding hands. Our eyes are turning a poisonous red seaweed. Our bodies hum and the hum is a koan that no one will ever hear. Kat is dead. Kat is dead.



# Unanswered E-Mail

*Hi Kat,*

I was passing by your hangout—*Miranda Sinned*—and I picked up a plastic girl with all your features. Only her eyes and lips could move. So I felt sorry for her, people passing her on the sidewalk like she was a manikin who needed a life but all she got was stillness, which is a form of nothing. So I tucked Plastic Girl under my arm and walked down East Houston. Plastic Girl said Where are you taking me? I said, I'm not sure, maybe we'll go shopping together, or maybe to Miranda's when it opens, but you can't dance, so nuke that idea. She asked me to put her down. I leaned her up against the wall of an old brick and mortar building that I knew housed a 24 hr. massage parlor and the office of a guy I worked for. He was a Chinese gangster kingpin, who on the side, collected exotic butterflies. He gave each one the name of a love child. With her blue hungry planet-boy eyes, Plastic Girl froze me. She said What are you looking for? Do you think you can find luv with a replica? Polyurethane silence and doll-drop eyes? I said I don't care. I said you remind me of someone who was once there as like inside but I don't know myself anymore. Plastic Girl's hand slowly raised. I stepped back, not sure how to process this. Then, she melted. What was left was a girly space alien with flashing eyes and antennae for ears. She placed me under her arm and we flew over the city. It gives you a different perspective being up here, doesn't it? she asked. Yes, I said, but I'm dizzy at heights. We landed at the same spot, in front of Miranda's, and after a long waxy kiss, she took off. She said she had to return to her planet and her parents were old fashion. I told her I'd keep in touch through virtual thought channeling while keeping Deep Space integrity.

Kat, if you believe this story, then give me a call.

If you don't, then give me a call anyway because I can't seem to reach you.

*Love, Pixie-Bob*



## **Kyle Hemmings Bio**

Kyle Hemmings lives and works in New Jersey. His work has been published in *Decomp*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Thunderclap Press*, and others. He is the author of three chapbooks of poems: **Avenue C** (*Scars Publications*), *Fuzzy Logic* (*Punkin Press*), and *Amsterdam & Other Broken Love Songs* (*Flutter Press*).

CAT PEOPLE  
KYLE HEMMINGS

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