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Visiting the Queen

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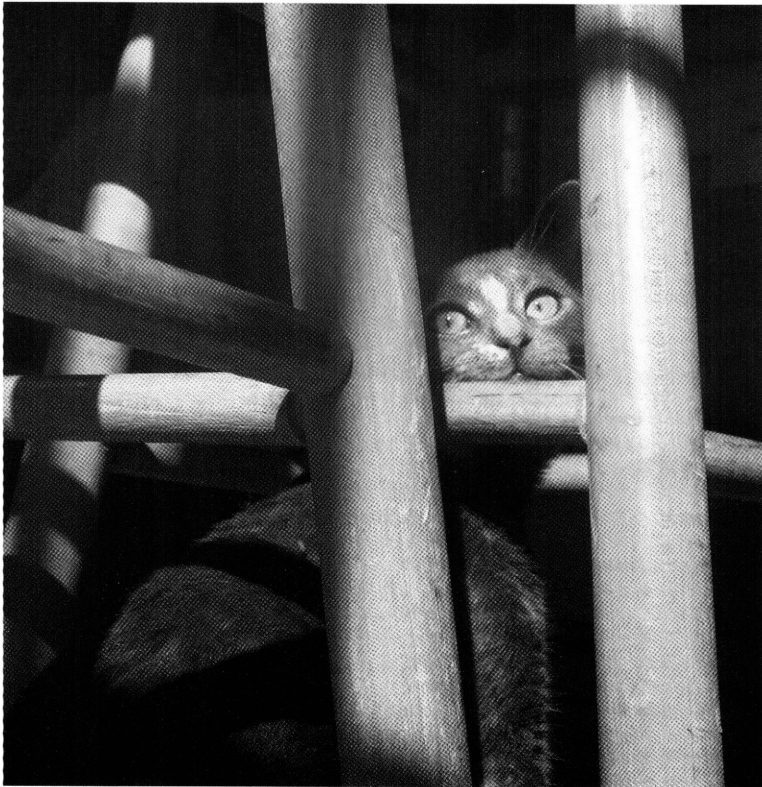
Visiting the Queen

Doris Yanger

Recently, a cat who has faithfully greeted me each morning no longer comes to my door. I am hoping it is only a temporary absence...She manages to make these mystery disappearances about once a year. I often wonder where she goes, however, she always returns in a few days. Nothing appeared any different that day in December as I watched "Calli" quietly walk into the sunset after having her evening meal, as she always does, outside, on the deck. She is feral, and refuses to cross the threshold into the house, and instinctively fears being indoors. For nine years I have tried to bait her with food, using every trick in my bag of bribery and reward techniques, but she

has remained determined to be a free agent...I have no desire to torture the animal by forcing her to remain in the house against her will.

However, this does create complications on the deck at feeding time. An aggressive, and handsome young male feral showed up for dinner about eight years ago, and shared the groaning board, and guarded his harem of Calli and her three kittens. He enjoyed the companionship of the three "altered" ladies for many years, patiently waiting in vain for them to become aroused by his impressive appearance. Calli mourned his passing, last year, when he was killed by a car. Eventually a band of opossums joined the dining table and I found the menagerie of refugees from the lost wilderness an added source of joy



CHIAROSCURO Sabrina Mendoza

and entertainment. My little family of feral friends lived together in harmony and gratitude for the tasty handouts. Ever since the passing of her handsome orange consort "Red" last year, I was able to become closer to Calli. She now eagerly jumped into my lap for treats and stroking, (as long as it was out of doors.) Summer and winter, we would sit in the sun together for a spell each day, and both Calli and her daughter "Jetta" would compete for attention and grooming.

There always remains that unsolved mystery of where Calli goes when she disappears for a few days without any signs or clues ... she just walks away. A few days later she reappears, in fine condition, and resumes her life as the lady of leisure, sunning under the dappled light of the backyard shrubs. Her casual demeanor does little to dispel the anxieties I develop with each passing day that she is gone. I would love to be able to conceal a camera on a collar, and follow her every movement when she leaves on one of these secret journeys. However, when I was a child, I had a cat that wore a collar, and died of strangulation when the collar got caught in a branch of a tree. I have fears about becoming too curious about tracking my wandering cat if she is encumbered by wearing a collar.

I have heard that this pattern of behavior was not too unusual for cats ... the Old Mother Goose nursery rhyme states that the cat was asked "Pussy cat, pussy cat where have you been?" Of course everyone knows that the valiant feline was in London protecting Queen Elizabeth I from a mouse. It was known at that time that the queen was terrified by mice. So, can we all assume that our missing cats are doing some valiant deed, while they are on sabbatical?"

Or, more realistically, was she locked in the neighbor's garage? Or in their pickup truck? Maybe she dined too well down at the community club house dumpster and was recovering from a tummy ache somewhere? Other possibilities? There are a few mean folks

No Poem Today

Mary Baumgartner

My heart is in dismay.
My mind has started wondering.
There will be no poem today.

My emotions will not sway.
My feelings are still missing.
There will be no poem today.

The birds that sing won't come my way.
The stars have stopped their sparkling.
There will be no poem today.

The Sun is quickly moving far away.
The Moon is slowly disappearing.
There will be no poem today.

The day and night suspended in time will stay.
The darkness makes me feel like dying.
There will be no poem today.

who do try to poison the many ferals, deemed nuisances. Sometimes warnings are posted that alert residents of wild animal sightings, advising that all pets be brought in at night. Often bobcats, foxes, owls, hawks, coyotes and even cougars are seen in the area. Sadly, the signs are also posted offering rewards for information about missing pets that never return.

I have seen a favorite young cat of mine, "Flicka" disappear one night after being permitted to go out for an evening stroll. Since that time I insist that all my cats come in every night. They grumble a bit, and settle on the pillows of my bed, and make the best of the situation until morning.

Today, I worry...and even grieve... my beloved calico feral friend for nine faithful years is missing. It has been ten days now since "Calli" came calling for her meals. Every morning, winter or summer she would be at my door, dancing with joy, performing an excited little pirouette dance while I performed my part of our ritual, putting down her bowl of food, then stroking her lovingly, to which she responded with gusto... and only then would she eat.

Over the years Calli won my respect. And I now miss her fiercely. I decided to write about my little friend ... and how she had shown up, quite young and pregnant all those years ago. I would describe how she brought her little kittens to us from their secret hiding place, after three months of only guessing that the big chunks of food that she trotted off with were for her babies. I thought of my amazement when she would leap on the back of a neighbor's dog and ride him out of yard to protect her little ones.

I would honor her memory with descriptions of all the gestures and traits that made her so memorable ... but on the 14th day of her absence, she returned ... I received no clue about where she had been, and life resumed its usual pace ... I suspect that she had been to London to see the queen.



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