

* Zephyr *



Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you could look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas....

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

* * *

When I play with my cat, who knows but that she regards me more as a plaything than I do her?

--Michel de Montaigne

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Presentation Piece

1.

*The scratch of the meows
On the drums of the ears,
The tug of the mewes
On the strings of the heart:
Could these fail to arouse
A twinge in the wires
And a twang from the sinews
Of lyrical art?*

2.

*Accept these thirty lyrics, then: the weak, the strong,
The all my art can give.
If they were thirty years, they wouldn't last as long
As I would have you live.*



Grand Entrance

The door swings open. Paws advance.
Important whiskers. Golden pants.
Sound the trumpet. Bang the drum.
Here comes the littlest Panjandrum.

Personality Profile

A cobby tabby,
Not at all crabby,

Inclines to chubby,
Legs rather stubby...

Stroking her fur
Evokes a purr

A pleasing chirp
Will oft usurp.

Her puffy coat
Is brown – but note

The downy white
Streaks that highlight

The chest and belly
(As soft as jelly).

White spats enclose
Tenacious toes

From which extend
Those claws that rend

In two the moth
And satin cloth.

Her morning chore's
To stop your snores

With urgent meows
Designed to rouse

You (with some screaming)
From pleasant dreaming.

Why ask the Maine
Coon to explain

Why the Maine Coon
Wakes up so soon?

A Maine Coon Cat
Is just like that.

Genealogy

Of hardy stock,
Foe to the lock,

This cat will pout
If not let out.

Bred on the farm
To do rats harm,

She slept by day
On bales of hay

In dusty loft.
At night, with soft

And stealthy tread,
She left her bed

To find and termin-
Ate whiskered vermin.

New England Gnomics

Under the sky
The vole will die.

But in the house
Death takes the mouse.

(The Maine Coon Cat
Will see to that.)

And let the bug
Upon the rug

Fall to its knees
And makes its peace

With the just God
Of the arthropod

When the Coon Cat
Inspects that mat.

April Lilies

When April lilies whisper under showers
That pierce the drought and drown the sterile powers,
Then Zephyr-Puss reeks with a sated breath
Of pungent creatures from the yard. When Death
(Alias Old Man Winter) grumbles and hobbles
Into the distance with his bag of troubles,
When the young sun sows his wild oats of lust
In glands and sacs that tingle, as they must,
To blossom hotly in the flagrant copses,
Then which of us is reading *Thanatopsis*?
There is a prickling in the vital air,
Spores are dancing, and Zephyr's only care,
Her poem, her passion, and her pilgrimage
Is to lay paws on the small fools that fledge
In nests among the branches of the trees –
Thus to curtail their mocking melodies.

Prinkle, Prinkle, Little Fig

Prinkle, prinkle, little Fig.

I'm so glad that you're not big.

Down upon the ground so small

Like a furry basketall,

Prinkle, prinkle, little Fig.

We'd be dead if you were big.

In Catilinam

For vehemence of declamation,
What squirrel could top that Cicero
Hopping-mad on the branches' tips?
Loftily conscious of his station,
He sneers down on the wretch below.
Scolding-hot scorn pours from his lips
While a grave senatorial bird
Appears to nod at every word.

Down there, in no particular hurry,
Deaf to this savage indignation,
The culprit yawns. The invective climbs
To further heights of righteous fury,
With pitiless enumeration
Of all the scoundrel's plots and crimes—
But if he hears, he gives no sign,
This furry little Catiline.



Need a Linguist?

Knee. / Kneading / Needling. / NO!



Innocence

A baby's hair smells like a bird's nest,
Innocent and fresh.

Your fur, too, smells like a bird's nest.

No Treats for Zephyr

How stale the untasted Bonker grows.
To snack tonight is not her pleasure.
No treats for Zephyr, I suppose.

Upon a bed of rumpled clothes
She lies ensconced in warmth and leisure.
How stale the untasted Bonker grows.

In vain the blustering east wind blows.
She does not feel its icy pressure.
No treats for Zephyr, I suppose?

She won't be flushed from soft repose,
Even by the tender of such treasure.
How stale the untasted Bonker grows!

Safe in the fortress of her coze,
Her appetite has filled its measure.
No treats for Zephyr, I suppose.

Her eyes are prinkly. Let her doze.
Although they're hardly getting fresher
(How stale the untasted Bonker grows)
No treats for Zephyr, I suppose.

Empty Bowl

She opens her mouth. Her intense
Eyes follow me, full of soul.
Declamatory vehemence
Denounces the empty bowl.

Conscientious Engineer

In case you ask what could induce
Such rapt attention to the rear:
A conscientious engineer
Also keeps track of the caboose.



Poem: Her Tongue, How It Sticks Out

So much is packed into your microcosm
(Item: one exquisitely creased nose blossom),
You have so many golden links with Heaven,
I'm pressed to give each genuinely Pseudo-
Dionysian charm its proper kudo
(Or is it kudos?) in these poems you live in.

Thus if I slight your pink slip of a tongue
I slight the All. (How could I leave unsung
Even your smallest stubs of grace? They tip
The world.) – Rose petal, slim slice of prosciutto,
All unexpectedly it will protrude, oh-
So-daintily subtending the upper lip!

With that sublime naïveté a few old
Statues embody (gaudy eyes bejeweled),
You stare, clueless what joy you give sad Pluto
As he peers up at you from his dark meadow:
You, brightly banner your fail bravado,
Your slice of rose, your petal of pink prosciutto.

Skeletonics

Diminutive Zephyr,
Though slow as a heifer,
Likes raw Hasenpfeffer,
And will endeavor
In ways that are clever
To seize the leveret
By the neck bone, and sever it.

Ah, the spring fever it
Must be that plays deliberate
Havoc with prudence,
Making the blood dance
Hot in the veins of the two tense
Legs of the bunny
In weather that's sunny,
That makes him incautious
When he should be nauseous
With fear of the huntress
Who will flay, or will undress,
If you will, the poor coney
Down to the bone, he
All the while screaming
At his unseaming
While blood comes streaming
From guts that are steaming
And the bad dreaming
Ends only with death, and bugs teeming.
(It's nature's law.)

And then the guffaw,
The religious awww!
At the white of her paw
And her delicate claw
Stop short at the ghastly jaw

Gaping aside
Naked of hide
Of the creature that cried
As he struggled and died
In the jaws of the Zephyr:
Last week's Hasenpfeffer,
Gone now forever.

We rub her nose
In shames and no's
But each of us knows
That that's how it goes.
She does what she does:
She is what she will be and was.
We clean up the bones and the fuzz.

And should we ever
Locate the lever
The turns off her habit
Of killing the rabbit
I'm not sure we'd grab it.

Nine Life Slices

1.

A crack in the door.
A paw. An arm. A shoulder.
Two green eyes. A cat.

2.

Come over here you
Make me uncomfortable
Go away pet me.

3.

Sitting at the door,
Déjà vu. Wasn't I here
A moment ago?

4.

Sitting by a tree
I am startled by the sound
Of one leaf falling.

5.

Loud noises issue
From a mouth whose shape outlines
A small, empty bowl.

6.

Since I don't know how
To pull the door open, I'll
Keep pushing at it.

7.

Clearly the world is
Structured like a scratching post.
Good thing I have claws.

8.

Cherry blossom.
Cherry blossom. Cherry blossom.
Cherry blossom. *Finch!*

9.

Crouched behind the bush...
What you see is a rose, not
A rose-colored nose.



** Triolets **



from the Garden of Zephyr

1. *Butterfly*

Creeping discreetly through the grass,

I see a butterfly flutterby.

(The snack's too light. I let it pass.)

Creeping discreetly through the grass,

I'm stalking robins, which – alas! –

Though plump and slow, my form descry

Creeping discreetly through the grass.

(I see a butterfly flutterby.)

2. Mockingbird

The Mockingbird's a shocking bird.
Why must she squawk at me? It's rude.
Even Audubon, I think, concurred:
The Mockingbird's a shocking bird.
And am I in the least deterred
From my designs upon her brood?
The Mockingbird's a shocking bird.
Why must she squawk at me? It's rude!

3. Tawny Interloper

That tawny interloper pissed
All over my catnip patch again.
Instead of wincing when I hissed,
That tawny interloper, pissed,
Just raised his tail, and then — and then —
That tawny interloper pissed
All over my catnip patch again!

4. Waldo and Michel

That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.
(I'm playing in the catnip with Michel.)
We note (it really seems beyond the pale)
That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.
We watch, we search for clues, and yet we fail
To find sufficient reason why the Hell
That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.
I'm playing in the catnip with Michel.

Cuisine Beguine

I'm bored with what rattles in cardboard.
But as for the steel that won't stain,
It is filled with things fit for a lord:
How I love what the bright cans contain!

From the locker of Mr. Jones, Davy
Come some of the riches I crave,
Harvest reaped from the salt-seasoned wave:
For this I'd enlist in the Navy.
(And I don't understand why you skimp
On the cans that envelop the shrimp.)
Yet the flesh of the chicken is braver
(I refer to its splendid flavor).

But above all I wish to assert
That I think I'd desert from the Navy,
Even crawl through the desert, if only
I was sure that my just dessert
Would consist of the *Slices in Gravy*.
(With milk on the side, who'd be lonely?)

I confess it has caused me some hurt
That you've chosen to be so inert
In perceiving how awful a crisis
You cause when you hold back those beautiful *Slices*.

At the Treats Casino

The House is sorry to announce
That the Countess Flauntz
Von Pauten-Huffenpuff
Has left in a puffy huff.

It seems the Ball
We threw for her
Would not do for her
At all.

And the steaks at the Table
She saw fit to decry
As being far too high.
Most regrettable.

Scratching Post

How
can
this
human
stand
to
stay
on
his
two
thin
legs
that
way
day
in
day
out?
What
is
it
he
begs
for?
It
must
be
a
truly
HUGE
treat.
(On
those two flat feet!)

Gardening Tip

You plant the stuff because you like to watch a

Cat nip catnip:

How cute to see Yours Truly

Go about it!

You never thought to put, beside that patch, a

Bit of ratnip –

Which shows how much you really

Know about it.

Look into it, then, could you, while I catch a

Little catnap? –

Try not to be unduly

Slow about it.

Nightly Rondeau

The fugitive from us just dis-
Appeared around the corner (or is
My flashlight trying to deceive
Me?) Darkness has her up its sleeve
Somewhere. (The shed?)—How tiresome, this

Nightly dragnet to flush the miss-
Ing purr. (From which bush?) Weariness
And justice both suggest we leave
The fugitive

To fend among those rogues, the piss-
Ing toms, who greet you with a hiss.
Just when we're ready to believe
She's turned to snuggling, to receive
Foreign goods, our little pet peeve
Undisappears. (We stoop to kiss
The fugitive.)

Leave Me Alone

Leave me alone.

I have no truck with your untidy ways, your Brobdingnagian pretences leave me cold as stone.

Leave me alone.

I do not speak your tongue, your unportending syllables to me are as the click of bone on bone.

Leave me alone.

I'll sit here by the window and gaze out at the lawn, so prickly with the life of birds and bugs, which I shall make my own.

Leave me alone.

Do not attempt familiarities, nor try my tummy with your clumsy, prizing hands, you shan't extort from me the rusty tribute of a groan.

If you would win the softening of my sneer today, there's nothing you can coo or babble, nothing you can say.

Just go away.

Winter's Echoes

Blankness is blindness, anxious eye.
You see a snow man, but no snow bird.
You have scanned the leafless branches high
On the maple tree, and seen the no bird.

How hard it is to feed your hollow
With the silence of no swallow,
O idle vigilante of the ear.

Gone is the flapping of those wings,
And the little ghost that sings
Is the wind bird. Winter is what you hear.

Will and Testament

Item. – To Michel:

Half of my soul,
The wishing well
Of my slices bowl.

Item. – To the tawny-furred

Tom: the mockingbird
And his joy-buzzer rasp,
Just past his grasp.

Item. – To all mockingbirds:

Such things...! I have no words.

Item. – To my humans:

More discernment
Than they have hitherto shown.
When they sit out on the lawn,
May they be lonesome
A little,
In the evening.

Also the Busy Ball,

Long idle
And spent.
Plus, my catnip mouse,
That bit of old string,
Any old thing
Of mine they find about the house
In the weeks ahead
As my absence settles in
Like dust
On the chairs in the kitchen.

And oh: my wrinkled
Papers, that clutch
Of crinkled
Bags and such,
Tamped thoroughly flat:
They can have that.

My Green-Eyed Blonde

My green-eyed blonde, my troubled fiancée,
Circling the house in the rust twilight,
Calling into the breeze: why do you stray,
My green-eyed blonde?

What name is it you are calling as the night
Gathers gradually around you? Gray
Is the evening, and the breeze is chill, though light:

See how the day's last embers die away?
What are you seeking, with a face so white?
Zephyr! Zephyr! Zephyr! is what you say,
My green-eyed blonde.

Where Do Good Cats Go?

On tippy-toes you nibble at your ease
Those juicy treats that hang from tuna trees.
Mice run from you or yield, just as you please.
That's all I know.

You knead the clouds, leap down from shelves of air
And land on puffballs. Oh what handsome fare,
What creature comforts, tasty creatures there
Where good cats go!

Discreet, obedient angels come on call
To keep your food bowl brimming, or to haul
Away the kitty litter – then they all
Leave you alone.

You rub your cheek against the world, you toss
It in the air and pat it with your paws
Until its yarn unwinds. You can, because
It's stuff you own.

A downward glance will show the place of howls
Where fire-cats poke at veterinarians' bowels
And dogs in trees wince at those thunderous growls
And glowing eyes.

And mockingbirds won't look so smug or sly
Seeing Death's wingèd fur ball hurrying nigh
(If what I've heard is true, that cats can fly
In Paradise).

You lie on flowers beside the River Cream,
Dismember bugs (with which the grasses teem),
Or simply curl into a ball and dream,
Where good cats go.

Into the flow you dip a drowsy paw
Sometimes, and from the milky liquid draw
A fish, and watch it dangle from your claw.
That's all I know.

