

On the significance of cats

Gently mocking cats
tidy their paws in the afternoon sun,
observing our passage
like indulgent spies from another world.

*The ways of these creatures are strange
but meant to be harmless.*

Children young enough to believe that cats
speak an English as impeccable as their coats
dash with balls and hollers,
begging the cats to come and play.

*Shrill young voices pluck at my ears
like the pull of danger on my fur.*

Women pass along the sidewalks
with crackling parcels and clicking steps;
always in a hurry, always flushed,
sometimes bending to touch a cat in their way.

*The quiet nights are suited to my ears,
the interesting dark air to my nose and eyes.*

Men are larger, gruffer, bonier,
often unmindful of this or that cat;
the cats shift economically and stretch each claw
in relaxation, in invisibility.

*The life here is odd but pleasantly varied.
I will stay.*

Cats' curved claws pin the city
firmly between the heavens and the hells;
these wide slow cats' eyes hold whole worlds now
as they did when the cats were gods.

Clare Beghtol

Ice Wind

I will not drive the car today.
When sunlight sharpens ice upon my eyes
I cannot see salt-slushed glistening roadways
under the intense glare.
I cannot risk violence, skids.

A woman marooned on a corner huddles
shrinking into her coat against northern winds
that whistle and yank at her skirts
like bored men distracted
in summer by hurrying women in groups.

As I walk, no eye meets mine;
as I pass insulated bundled bodies /
warmed by puny blood against the callous ice
I too celebrate anonymity.
I am cautious with my glances.

A woman waiting at a bus stop shifts
from foot to foot with slow calculation,
afraid of attracting slivers of wind
into sleeves, up arms
to shoulders lovers have touched.

Obediently I stop at sparkling lights to cross
a richly iced street few cars dare travel.
Now I understand:
pummelled by the uncouth wind
I will fall heavily before I reach home.

A woman with parcels presses ahead into the wind
as if it were a familiar mattress
lush with the breaths of love
welcome and full; fearing frost,
she averts her face in pain.

I will certainly fall on the overnight ice
that mocks today's sunshine;
wrestled by wind, I will mistake my step.
I will feel the windswept frozen ground
wet beneath my face with tears.

Clare Beghtol