

## Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

*Lynn Lifshin*

### WHEN THE CAT HOWLS

nudges you, it's like  
a woman down on her  
knees, rubbing herself  
against you. She's got  
new food and water.  
What does she want?  
Isn't she like a woman  
with a good man of her  
own longing, inconsolable  
as the cat. Something  
under her hair sucks her  
toward bad boys. She's  
got her claws out for  
him. She's putting her  
deepest purr on the line.  
Someone ought to put  
her in a cage for her  
own good. Someone's  
got to let her know  
what's what



*Lynn Lifshin is our first Gertrude Stein  
"rose" prize award winner*

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**SO WHEN HE LEFT**

I longed for the old  
house I had. So often,  
late summer in that  
house, marigolds  
on the steps for a  
lost weekend.

One year I raked  
maple leaves until  
I passed out. The  
long shadows,  
the long space  
where his body  
was. Only the hand  
print on the wall,  
all that there was  
of him

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**IT WAS ALWAYS LATE SUMMER  
WHEN HE WAS LEAVING**

longer shadows,  
first leaf burning wildness

more emerald in  
the grass

no more banging  
my knuckles to blood

no more blue sweat  
shirt man drooped

over the table, smashed.  
But still, how he took

me in his arms and  
for July I thought my

heart still dancing,  
it always would

PASSING ARLINGTON CENTER

Sunday, the metro, this  
late summer. The tangle,  
stations shut when a  
man leaped from the  
platform. Cool and dry  
enough for my hair  
not to curl like child's  
hand curls about a finger.  
But September curls  
back to that first time I  
heard his voice. Upstate.  
Enough years back that  
his daughter, calling the  
all night radio show:  
she couldn't find peanut  
butter, is old enough to  
have a daughter her age  
then, visiting her father.  
It was an afternoon, clear  
like today when driving up  
the Helderberg mountains  
to do a reading, when I  
heard his voice. Not the  
first man I fell for before  
I met him but something  
in his voice, what he was  
saying, I knew I had  
to have him