

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

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Double Life

Somehow the kittens are doubling. I just keep coming home to this. I touch a calico between the eyes with my fingertip and it mews like I hit a sound button. All of their fur has absorbed the scent of my patchouli incense. Each one has scratched something inappropriate. I do not understand what is happening.

My normal life was 0 kittens, 1 bad weed habit, 2 halfway decent friends in the apartment complex, 3 jobs, all worth bullshit. Not where I figured on being at 40. Let me explain.

On kitten day number one, I walked into my dishwashing job at Mornin' Glory and told them to "fuck the fuck off." They complained that I was too slow, cut my hours, did whatever they wanted to me even though I tried my hardest to keep up. Well, no more of that. No more, "Jesus, Borden. We're out of mugs again." "Jesus, Borden. Did you forget to wipe your ass this morning? You smell terrible." Of course I smelled terrible.

I had spent the night before mopping floors of The Croft-Bower Reception Hall after a fundraiser for a kid with leukemia. I barely got a chance to sleep. I barely ever got a chance to do anything, but work. I needed the weed to mellow me out enough to not kill myself.

So I was down a job. My breasts hurt and my back ached. PMS gives zero fucks. I picked up a 6 pack and some snack cakes and went home. There was kitten 1. She was on the rug in front of the door and I hit her in the face with the door edge. She backed up a few paces and grumbled. I closed the door behind me and looked at her with disbelief.

"Bluuuuurrrrrmmm," she said.

Saying this made her ears wing out to the sides, folding the triangles of fur like origami. I didn't know how she got there, but she was very cute and seemed at home. I patted her on the head. She nuzzled into my palm, leaving a little bit of cat spit between my fingers. I went back outside, taking care that she didn't follow me. I took sand from the play area in the courtyard, collecting it in a large pal. Children eyed me suspiciously.

"Excuse me," I said, rolling my eyes.

I didn't even look at the parents. Most of them were looking at their phones anyway. I went back to my apartment and threw the sand into a plastic tote that had previously held my under the bed sweaters. I named kitten 1 "Blurm." Blurm laid next to me while I smoked down and called up my friends. Occasionally, she yawned and half-heartedly licked a paw.

Annie and Rick came over and I told them about how great it felt to quit Mornin' Glory.

"I really did it," I said. "I pissed in the dishwasher."

But they weren't really all that impressed, giving only half committal nods. Maybe they knew I was lying, at least about the piss part. All they asked about was "Blurm."

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"You got a cat?" Annie asked.

She rubbed her fingers together to draw the kitten's attention, but Blurm was firmly snuggled up to my thigh.

"You?" Rick asked.

His eyes looked a little glassy and he said it kind of slowly. Yoouuu?

"This is Blurm," I said.

"Bluuuuuuurrrrrmm," Blurm corrected.

Her ears folded again, top points flaring left and right. I got up and opened the fridge, giving out another round of Miller High Lites. I threw Blurm a slice of lunchmeat turkey. She ate it violently, shaking bits of it in her teeth and growling. I knew then that I loved her more than people. More than any person. Ever. Blurm.

So the next day when I got up and left to go work my shift at the gas station, I smoked weed and sighed. I never wanted to go to the job, but leaving Blurm actually made me sad. It was a ten hour shift at minimum wage. I was selling myself off to these bastards for about \$50 bucks after tax.

At work, the lady who is consistently a bitch came in and yelled at me. The thin green veins of her neck looked explosive and her chin trembled between words. Her fury this time involved our lack of coffee stirrers and lack of non-dairy creamer for her machine made cappuccino. She was drinking the gray concoction, but refusing to pay for it. I covered my mouth with my fist, hoping to look thoughtful or meditative, but I was actually biting my fingers until I could taste the metal tang of blood on my tongue. She bought \$10 of gas and a lotto ticket. I had to eventually block out the sound of her voice with mental white noise, sort of like tinnitus.

That night, kitten 2 sat on the rug beside Blurm. I opened the door slowly because I didn't want to hit Blurm again, but I was confused when I saw a gray tabby seated next to her.

"Mwow," said kitten 2.

"Hello, Mwow," I said. "Hello, Blurm."

"Bluuuuuuurrrrrrrm."

They followed me to the kitchen. We all ate grilled cheese. I put in a DVD of season four of The Simpsons. After that, both kittens looked at me like I was a hero when I launched a tampon into my vagina. I slept a little better than most nights.

Yesterday, I left the Croft-Bower Reception Hall half-stuffed with the cake I ate off of the scattered paper plates left after the graduation party. Chocolate with buttercream frosting. If you eat around the bitten parts, it's pretty clean.

There were 4 kittens on the rug, lying around half asleep. Blurm and Mwow, plus two white kittens that introduced themselves as "Layyll" and "Mrroo." I threw all of my turkey lunch meat on the floor and attempted to sift the litterbox with a potato masher. It didn't go well. That night we

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all got into bed together. I felt odd and anxious. Blurm washed my face and I fell asleep. I think that I was happy.

Today is 8 kittens and I know that that is probably an unreasonable number. I brought home actual cat food from the gas station. We had a power outage due to a thunderstorm and I hiefed it when the cameras were down. It felt so good when I got home and saw my 8 that I didn't even bother to smoke. I just reached in the magic sack of seafood crunchies and tossed them in the air, listening to them pling-pling on the linoleum in the galley style kitchen. Blurm was growling and shaking the bits until they slipped from her teeth and she had to start again. Mwow was purring, some were slapping others, and one of the new ones was completely silent, only eating when I directly handed him individual morsels.

Right now, we are all on the couch. Most of us are sleeping. A few are washing up. Rick and Annie text, but I don't even bother to read what they are saying to me. I glide my fingers over the sea of fur, it yields and pushes out, all of our breathing ever so slightly out of sync.

I wonder when it will be too many. I wonder if it will ever be enough.