

Accounting

by Gary Hardaway

A breach in our perimeter— the glass
back door was left ajar— prompts a panicked
census. It shouldn't take that long to count
to six but when the six are cats, arithmetic
assumes Heisenbergian properties
as the objects counted defy the count.

Our tabby, Seamus, is fine. He had his one
terrifying encounter with some of what
awaits outside-- the horns, the low-pitched thrum
of radial tires, the sharp-toothed leaves of certain
shrubs-- and sticks around.

His buddy, Enkidu,
who joined him in that escapade through
the flimsy window screen, is easy today,
his wispy black with tufts of brown resting
under the table in a breakfast chair. He is
a bit of a recluse and goes invisible
for hours.

Mia and Blanche, the sweet-natured
girlie-girls, are taking the sun, side
by side, on the white dresser below the window
facing south. Both have known the Texas
sun and suddenness of Texas rain
and seem content to stay and watch whatever
falls from the safer side of the glass.

Despite
his twenty-seven pounds of bulk, Moose
can disappear at will. The khaki brother

to demure and faintly peach-striped white
and slender Blanche, he pushed, perhaps was pushed
(by Seamus?), through a sunroom screen we thought
secure one recent morning. He was found,
his pupils wide to any way back in,
scratching and leaping at the window. He lost
a claw to his adventure out. He shies
from outside doors and windows now. He saunters
through the living room, accounted for.

Which leaves Medea-- truest copy of her
feral mother (caught in a safe-trap like
her kittens, but spayed and re-released)-- a striped
orange beauty with her amber fuck-you
eyes; a hiss, scary as a fanged serpent's;
and teeth and claws adept and sharp enough
to follow up the hiss. Our contacts are
the monthly trauma when it's time to cut
her nails, with her secured within a towel,
her occasional begging of a bit
of roast chicken, and, most astounding,
her grooming of our human toes, out
from under covers, when the nights are warm.
We look throughout the house and worry; then,
she struts across the corner of the room,
her face a wary mask of Colchis royalty.

