

Animals in Reverse

by Ann Bogle

Francis would have liked an orderly biography; Lucy did not want one. She was still alive when I started to write the story of her life, called *Lucy's Story*, about her recovery from catnip, but it was not the real story. In the fake story, she took the subway to A.A. In reality, she lost interest in the catnip, because it had gotten stale—one day she turned her nose up at it and walked away. She lived a remarkable life, for a cat—even if she had not been a cat—in a series of wonderful apartment buildings and in five cities. About this book of her life, she sat in my lap and pointed her ears back while I typed, not flat back, but enough back so that I could tell she wasn't a fan of histories of herself, even though hers is a good one, with few details too embarrassing to mention, or, if embarrassing in someone else—not in her—and for us instructive. In fact, Lucy preferred art, and before she died, she had learned to sculpt using her favorite red yarn—favorite since early childhood—in large cursive letters: G, L, J, and the symbol for *pi*. Lucy Rain Cat, I called her, and Lucy Bourgeoise.

Animals, part 1

Francis was a good, gray, wool cat whose father was likely Himalayan, which accounts for the way he strutted the barriers of the yard, walking on fences and edges, as if he had read the deed. Fran died at the age of nearly sixteen. We still miss him and end up lavishing too much motherly attention on his successor, Walter (Wally), whom we picked at the Humane Society.

Animals, part 2

When Francis died, he died twice. He had lost half his body weight—thirteen pounds down to seven pounds—and he had lost the

hair on the sides of his body due to renal failure. He had made a trip to the hospital just a few weeks before that and had regained half a pound after feline dialysis. He weighed ten pounds again within a few days back at home, then boom, his weight plummeted and his hair fell out. On his final day, he ate, drank water, visited the litter box and even went outdoors.

Fran was an outdoorsman cat and used to hunt each day as if he were on pest patrol; he headed out each morning like a fireman. The last day was no exception, even though his walking was weak and impaired. We were very fortunate in Francis that he was never attacked outdoors or hit by a car, even though he shared the woods with deer, raccoons, foxes, owls, hawks, and later a coyote. He survived a scare with neighbor dogs once in Houston, and that is the lesson that taught him to stay in his own territory and not stray. He led an adventurous life without injury.

On his last day, we lay in bed together looking into each other's eyes, something we liked to do anyway, and suddenly his eyes glazed over, and he wasn't there anymore, even though he was still breathing. I got up, called the vet, and we made an immediate appointment to bring him in. Emergency resuscitation would keep him alive over the weekend, she said when I got there. She estimated he could live one month more with constant dialysis. Since I wasn't paying the vet bill myself, I estimated what it might cost. The weekend alone would cost \$750. I asked the vet about euthanasia. We began to discuss it. She asked whether I was satisfied with the time I had spent with him until recently.

Yes, I said.

Since Fran had chronic rather than acute renal failure, we had managed to have a lot of quality time together, to the point of literally falling in love with each other after Lucy had died in 2001, also of chronic renal failure, a common condition in older cats. I

reluctantly agreed to have what was left of Francis put to sleep, as much as I wished he might die naturally on his own as Lucy had with agony and grace. His body was still too strong otherwise, and he might go on breathing, his heart beating, but never return to consciousness.

Animals, part 3

The vet put an IV in Fran's arm and injected him with a lethal dose of barbiturate. Fran's head folded over his paws, and he slept.

Because he died twice, once at home and once at the vet, his eyes and mind first, his body second, there were a series of visions after that. He appeared to me in dreams as a ghost, growing ever woollier and wilder, until he looked in the passage like a wolverine.

In the winter Francis had sat in the utility room downstairs, in the corner of the room called the sump area, a dugout rough and rusty looking, where the pipes all meet in vertical poles. His winter hunting was limited mostly to indoors, since he disliked snow on his feet and left the outdoor animals alone during the cold months. He captured about three mice indoors per year by staking out the sump area of the utility room. This hunting of his reminded me of ice fishing. He sat there in the dark in the middle of the night, concentrating steadily. I would come upon him doing his night ritual if I went into the utility room to do something—throw away something in the large wastebasket or get a hammer or screwdriver or change the litter box. There he might be, staring straight ahead, prepared to kill mice, or mice in theory. The number of times he managed to do that—catch mice indoors—reminds me of publishing, the number of times writers manage to do that, though they hunt indoors and fish for it.

The day after he died a mouse ran at me, where I stood in the middle of the office; I was in fact trying to think of a beginning of a

life without Fran, without Lucy. The mouse ran directly down the center of the hallway, veered into the office, and charged almost at my feet then turned away and ran to the utility room. Aghast, I thought we might be infested now with mice. Fortunately, that is not what happened. There was one mouse only, and when it died of starvation in the utility room, it smelled.

Immediately following upon Fran's death, rabbits, among his favorites for hunting, gathered in the back yard under the birdfeeder and stood there. They were not hopping, not running, and not hiding; they were standing about and lingering, loitering. I had never seen rabbits loiter before, regarding their cousins.

