

Domestic Sketches

by Gary Hardaway

Outside

I've closed the screen
and left the sliding door
ajar the width of a cat's head,

minus an inch, in order to bring
a bit of cool and rain-drenched air
into this small and stuffy apartment.

The cats sniff at the small opening,
one by one, in a furtive casualness.
They think the outside air is sweet

and the outside sweeter. Neither Seamus
nor Enkidu could survive a week outside.
I guard the apertures to freedom carefully,

knowing both the cats' desire
and my horror of losing either of them
to the cars and coyotes that wait outside.

Domestic Crimes

It's true. I had time to sweep
and vacuum. Time to scrub
the bath tub and toilet, time

to dust the desk and bookshelves,
time to take blazers to the cleaners.
I ignored each task as if on a mission

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to abdicate all responsibility. The fangs
of guilt pierce the skin of both wrists.
The venom paralyzes me.

Genteel Squalor

My life is a sequence of neat piles-
books I intend to read or re-read,
magazines I have thumbed
for the cartoons and highlights,

compact discs I spin as their mood
approximates my own. The dust
and cat fur decorate the spaces between
the piles and the fake wood floor

beneath the big chair and coffee table
I also use for each evening meal.
The piles grow until they teeter
and the suppressed work ethic

manifests and I shelve or discard
a few things. Alone allows this.
Were there cohabitants or expected guests,
the piles and dust would be better managed.

Shedding Season

As weather warms, the fur comes off
in clumps, sometimes big as your hand,

and floats to join the dust along

the baseboards and under the upholstered

chair. Another of the joys
of multiple cats, like hair balls

chuffed up and bits of undigested
kibble propelled across the floor,

awaiting the bare foot at 5:00 AM
on it's way to piss. Enkidu

and Seamus cuddle and nuzzle just
enough to stay well fed and sleek

despite their generous contributions
to the general mess at home.

Flies

Where they come from, I don't know.
Some nearby turd pile or carcass, I presume.

How they get in, another mystery.
But here they are, fat or slim, buzzing,

somewhat lazily, at the west window
or the sliding door of my living room,

annoying and noisy. Though sluggish,
they evade my swats and so I resort

to chemicals and aerosol propellants
to end them and their buzz. Sad little

bodies populate the thresholds
and sills of doors and windows

everywhere in this small apartment,
sometimes still trying to fly.

