

Dog Days

by Jack Swenson

A man and woman go outside and wander off in different directions, she smoking a cigarette. The man makes his way down a boardwalk and around the side of the house with a handful of paper plates and crushed napkins and table scraps for the garbage. He opens a green can, tosses in the recyclables, closes the top, turns, looks up at the pale blue sky.

A girl walking a dog passes the house on the sidewalk in front. A forgotten sprinkler is going in a neglected flower garden, water overflowing the bent wood borders and flooding the ground on either side. A crude stone wall is dark with water. A young stray cat is lying calmly on a half fence bordering the rock garden. A family of quail whispers across the street and disappears into the bushes on the other side of the fence. The cat is aloof, serene. It gets up, stretches, and taking its time, slips off the fence and paces slowly toward the street. When it gets to the end of the fence, it curls around the post like an eel.

The woman opens the gate and walks into the front yard trailing smoke. She shades her eyes and watches the yellow hills rising beyond the dirt field across the street. The air is dry and smoky from a fire some miles away. The air is cool. A pair of vultures is soaring in a circle high above the rising land, above the hills that will someday once again be green, someday, if it ever rains.

