

Rain Falls New

by strannikov

Rain now falls, first in a spell, rain with its fever dropping into drought.

This rain also has its own scent, not like rains before the drought. This rain smells—poor, diluted. Doesn't have weight, doesn't rinse or wash, no mineral content. You can't use more than half as much to attempt a cup of coffee, you're compelled to drink espresso by the quality of the water, and anyway, the vigor of coffee today makes it suspicious.

Rain woke me at six, the unresponsive phone rang at six-thirty, I was sucking down shredded wheat blueberries milk orange juice by seven, the day. Time held still until seven-thirty when Pennicent arrived for coffee, and of course her kitchen, her cat, who twined before leaping to curl into her lap for breakfast, ready to get brushed just after.

Whenever Pennicent finished brushing the cat, or as Pennicent finished brushing, the cat had learned and taught itself and Pennicent both: at the end of this daily encounter, he would reliably twitch his tail (Floughers, or Mr. Floughers, her name for his blue Persian fluffiness and the rough shape he regularly appeared in, hairs tied plentifully in knots, plus he had a nasty habit of camping under beds and wallowing in dust rabbits on the pine floors underneath, complication enough brushing this cat without the dust in his coat, but at least he'd be patient the first few minutes for her to cut the worst knots out with a pair of safety scissors, and no matter how much she brushed him, she'd reach a point where she felt she was brushing tangles into his coat until she'd end the proceedings herself). Whenever Floughers twitched his tail this one way, Pennicent knew he was through with her brushing and that he wanted down, and she would part her arms for him to leap to the floor.

This one day just following the famous tail-twitch, Mr. Floughers lay in her lap as if in a trance, one puzzled stare.

This was no longer her cat. Floughers would be out of the room by now, this cat is still on my lap. Is he breathing?

The cat breathes. His eyes don't move, though. Is he blinking? The cat blinks. But the cat's owl-like stare does not move, the cat doesn't move, this is some other blue Persian, this cat lies still, Floughers would be climbing or leaping or racing somewhere by now, he's through with the brush and here he lies—no, not the same cat, this is not my cat!

Pennicent finally grew impatient enough to put Floughers on the floor, since he wouldn't leave her lap, so she could get her second cup of coffee. Crazy cat sat staring straight ahead, still breathing, still inert. Pennicent was alarmed for one moment until Floughers put his paws in motion and stalked from the kitchen in a slight huff.

The red plastic coffee tub Pennicent stored in the freezer, once atop the counter, exhaled as she pulled the lid off. A hideous grey-goo fur ball with a comparable volume of dust embedded, the size of an unappetizing pancake, lay atop the ground coffee.

Pennicent never threatened to toss me out, but I was obliged to leave by the end of the month. Oh yes: the cat had it in for me, Pennicent never would believe I didn't put that hair ball there, but I concede I never could account for it.

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