

When Janey Sees Cats

by T. M. Upchurch

Wherever she looks, Janey sees cats; staring in at her through the kitchen window, peering out from beneath cars, and eyeing her through hedges. With their sinuous bodies and merciless stares, they remind her of her sister.

"Plain Jane and Scary Mary", the dog and the cat; Jane the dotting fool to Mary's capricious sprints and bites.

Janey never minded until she had her daughter, whom she called 'Beautiful' and 'My Lovely' more often than 'Leah', but when Leah died, Janey ran herself through purgatory for giving her such a delicate and weary name instead of something gritty.

It would never have happened to Mary. Mary would have borne wildcats, feral and tough with names like Jack or Bob. She'd have had four or five, and they'd all have survived, chewing up playgrounds and hissing at poxes, clawing their way through childhood.

Janey looks down at her belly, tiger-striped with scars and wrinkles where Leah stretched her. If she were Mary, she'd go again — brave the pain and spit forth more babies, moving on. She wouldn't tremble inside large clothes, alternating between the window and the mirror, staring at herself but really looking for cats.

