

1977

piper



## THE PIPER

--Edited by--

Lynn Gladden, Jamie Frye  
Judy Whisnant, Jeffrey Wright

Congratulations to the following:

"The Collar" by Carol Inglis  
1st prize Short Story

"Michiko" by Christopher Benfey  
1st prize Poetry

"On a Paperweight Given to My Mother" by Donna Scarboro  
2nd prize Poetry

Untitled poem by Holly Lu Conant  
2nd prize Poetry



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## HONEYMOON DESCANT

Green lasso  
love knot  
tied in a twink  
dragon bite  
twist in a twit  
a tight twat  
a bell hop  
a start stop  
a standstill  
posed for the  
loop poised  
for the kill  
the slip knot  
the lisp hot  
the thrill  
the love not  
tried in a trice  
tossed rice  
gay girlond  
grass  
a last laugh  
a long last  
a fast gas  
a peace past  
grasp

Donna Scarboro

## MY DANCER

The stage is set, the musicians draw back their bows,  
and the light dims, the music begins-  
Quick, here, there, swiftly moving  
Dancing in darkness, precise in movement  
of grace and beauty and moment  
captured in stillness and light . . . in awe

I watch her

Standing with the phone in her hands,  
beautiful in the light.

Wearing a pretty blouse and worn jeans  
Her eyes flash, her red hair shines, and  
The conversation is strong, emotional, backed  
By the strong soundness and feel of words  
Coming from her voice-reflecting the beauty  
of self-assurance, confidence and control  
of life within.

Break through the awe and illusion  
and discover the dancer . . . Is she a dancer?

She moves a dance in me, with her presence  
My emotions stir . . . quickly, swiftly  
flickering in what was once stilled darkness.  
And she is in me, and she is my outside dancer  
And she is real-in darkness and light.

Alan Lott

## CAVE FLICKERINGS

She'd hate to sound like an old film starlet  
who, after fainting  
looks up into his cool baby blues and says,  
'I've never felt this way before!'  
yet, not a spoiled suburban child  
with statuship clothes  
or smooth lines for a harem  
but a person with live feelings  
he called it spontaneity  
the most significant idiograph  
in Chinese expression

she maybe thinks she's fooling herself  
letting thoughts seep in  
assuring her of the mysticism  
in this infatuation  
some flowing sparks in their fingertips  
reflected in their smiles  
shared inside their music

depression infests at times  
causing some to flee the scene of actuality  
drives cross-country  
perhaps not letting on  
yet always seeking for a dream manifest  
like every young freak on the road to California  
will she confess she's done it too?  
induced hallucinations for a timeless year  
hoping to short-circuit her way to heaven  
instead cursed/blessed  
with an insatiable thirst for poetry  
that clay in her hands  
one day a pot that will surely hold water  
a poem that may touch the Infinite

and if she's brave enough to say all that  
she might as well leave him with another confession  
she knows what it's like  
to yearn for a flickering cave in which to meditate  
(oh hear those monks' ghosts chant)  
and she knows what it's like to long for him  
but she'll never forget what the Chinese potter said  
as he threw that superbly symmetrical vase  
the Center , you see  
is where  
there is no motion

Cynthia Gray Underwood

MICHIKO

On a corner in Kyoto I left you  
What I remember now is not  
    the night we took a train  
        to Sumo Beach  
and lay on sandstone boulders  
    our salt lips touching  
        and learning to say each other's names  
I have forgotten  
    how we stayed up till dawn  
        listening to Spanish singers  
and smoking  
    and talking  
        till our voices cracked  
I don't remember how  
    I tricked you into bed  
        and heard  
how you seduced  
    your philosophy profs  
        at Oxford  
I have forgotten  
    the stupid flowery dress  
        you wore day after night

The card you sent at Christmas  
    telling of your marriage  
        to a Tokyo insurance salesman  
that too I have forgotten

I left you on a corner in Kyoto  
    and I have forgotten everything  
        except  
your blind koto teacher  
    who plucked invisible strings making  
        music that terrified me

Christopher Benfey

## EXCERPT

He rolled over onto his back with something like a sigh, although it didn't really constitute a sigh exactly, and remained motionless staring up at the chipped, white plaster ceiling. After a moment's repose, he sat up reaching for a cigarette on the small table adjacent to the bed, itself being placed awkwardly distant from his reach as if to discourage the habit, but close enough to allow an occasional capitulation. He settled himself back among his own distinct wrinkles in the sheet, blowing smoke rings with an ensuing fascination for the configurations that took form and then dissipated into a haze about the room. He thought about nothing in particular save for the occasional movement on the other side of the bed which served to remind him that he was not alone. This annoyed him, he didn't know why or exactly how he was annoyed, except for the fact that experience told him that it was annoyance he felt. He didn't like the prospects of spending long with this thought so he made an effort to dispel it by dressing.

Dressed to the waist, he lit another cigarette and looked about the room, trying to avoid the corner which held the bed. His smoke rings had become one forced stream, leaving his lips as an impatient whistle while he leaned against the wall. The silence was broken by an unintentionally released laugh which came from the young man's mouth, some would say his depths, seeming to carry the

heavy weight of some newly realized irony. The half-laugh brought the girl's head from the pillow, to a moment of disorientation, to the focusing of her eyes upon the half-clad owner of the voice who now returned her glance. She lifted her head slightly, bringing a hand from beneath the covers to clear the hair from her face and moved her mouth in such a manner as if to identify some lingering taste which had become stale overnight.

"Good morning," she said, wrapping the blankets closer around her body which could have been for the sake of warmth or modesty, either one.

"Hey," he replied, the smoke coming out in the same breath. She was staring at him now, not really scrutinizing, but more of a "what are the possibilities" glance which carried with it a maternal characteristic. He nervously drew on his cigarette in hopes that, given time, she would lose interest and either fall asleep or redirect her attention.

In desperation for something to say, anything that would not come across too contrived, he settled on the topic of breakfast, it being a logical and thus warranted prospect seeing how it was morning. But then again, he thought to himself, there was no need for him to say anything except for his shadowy observance for the rules of common courtesy which remained with him. He suggested going out for coffee, regardless.

"Are you hungry? I thought we might get some breakfast or something."

"Sure, let me get some clothes on first."

Her last remark had seemed ridiculous to him, as if the fact that going out dictated putting clothes on was not self-evident and he considered the possibilities of making some reply to the effect, but decided against it.

The young girl sat up in bed stretching her arms to her sides in a motion which seemed over-exaggerated and which succeeded in tightening her full breasts in mock display. His thoughts regrouped themselves from the night before as he remembered noticing and making some comment as to the girl's bust which at the time had seemed the appropriate thing to say, but now took on the sounds of a cheap proposition. He lit another cigarette as she slowly made her way from beneath the covers toward the chair where her clothes were draped. In crossing to the chair, she stopped before him placing her arms around his waist as if to reassure herself of something which she had left behind in the bed; his hands remained limp at his sides, his face on the side of her head.

"Do you love me?" she inquired, almost in the tone of one pleading.

"What kind of question is that?" he answered.

"It's a serious question. Do you love me?"

"No, I don't think so."

The girl remained silent, with her arms still about his waist, giving no signs of emotional

outburst, but there was something different now in the contact between the two. He wasn't sure exactly what the difference was, maybe a weakening of her grip, or a loss of hope on her part, but there was an unmistakable decrease in the intensity of their contact. He twisted to snuff his cigarette in the ashtray behind him which she decided was a sign from him to let go; she withdrew to the cloth-covered chair and proceeded to dress. Standing before the mirror fastening the buttons of her dress, her eyes reddened, yet not succumbing to overflow. He rose from his seat on the table to stand behind her in the mirror, not looking into the reflection but placing his forehead on the back of her head, his hands resting on her shoulders. His words, if that is what they were, came out as a sigh, blowing her hair toward her neck, causing something like a shiver to envelope her and move them both toward the door.

Anonymous

CORN POME

Are we not all a-maized  
at the height of ignorance  
the depths of stupidity  
the extent of Kansas

Don White

## THE APPRENTICE

Shout with your hoarse, hot breath  
To the young man in the doorway!  
Tell him, Blacksmith!  
How hot the fire is, how brutal the anvil,  
As you sweat profusely, breathing the warm air,  
Hammering the crude red iron into shape.  
Tell him! You must!

Then you! you sailor! tell him!  
Tell this fool kid about the life.  
Tell him how it is, climbing up the ropes,  
Dunuding the ship of her sails  
Which, sanpping and roaring in the wind,  
Casually brush men off, headlong into the sea.  
Tell him now, sailor.

Tell him!  
Then turn away,  
For the crazy fool'll never heed yer advice.

Jeff Martin

instead of smashing my glass  
against the wall  
(leaving sharp edges  
that might wound your famous fingers)  
i fill it up again  
with cold beer that goes down my throat  
                        like sandpaper  
this drought you carry with you  
as easily as a picket of loose change  
has left my lips  
cracked and swollen  
it's nothing new-  
i've learned the map of your arid continent  
                        too well  
to expect shaded paths  
i tell you that i'll be an oasis for you  
a handful of yielding green  
in these infertile miles of sand  
                        where you wander  
drink of me deeply  
i have reservoirs still untouched  
i believe it myself-  
until i wake up  
at some sweatsick hour of the morning  
my mouth tasting like ancient dust  
my bed suddenly become a desert  
then i think less kindly of you  
fat with my stolen water  
asleep in my uprooted greenery  
while i turn withered and grey  
lover-  
i would not have you thirst

ii

you said that we had come to a divorce  
stealing words from other poets  
after calling my poetry blind  
i answered that abortion was a closer word  
for love ripped bloody loose  
and dropped into an overflowing pail  
your fingers are gloved in thin rubber  
and show no stains  
the thick black blood is only mine  
and the hollow aching place  
and the finally broken tears  
(i'd never fall into tears  
in front of you--  
you'd lock each one into ice  
across my eyes)  
i only had my own twisting hands  
                        to hold  
but even they were more comfort  
than you would offer  
you don't remember  
that while you were unbound  
                        in sleep  
you searched for my body  
all night long  
and my fingers opened warmth  
over the coldness in your skin

but in the morning  
when you had woken safely back to distance  
i watched you break a thin stick  
into tiny pieces  
then tear the night into as many pieces  
and show me  
the ruined handful  
it would be insanity  
for me to say that i'm still here for you  
waiting with a cup of tea  
to warm you again  
but winter makes crazy  
i am here

Holly Lu Conant

## ON A PAPERWEIGHT GIVEN TO MY MOTHER

Wrapped in rain and night  
Memory rises, suffusing glass  
To blue-black rock  
To oldest hue  
To slate sea under barest moon.  
Star shapes, anemones dance almost  
At the bottom of a blue without light.  
Some such old rock, picked up  
Was blown into glass  
Made heavy, useful, pretty.

Frozen sea wings now moulded into unmoving water  
Hold breathless still in this quiet parlor,  
Where no calm, but dust and emptiness are its element,  
A heavy elegance oppressive to the memory of cold sea.  
Old is antique here—  
And here is your memory of motherhood,  
Bound, mute, flowering from my hand.

We have seen you sit here in the dark  
Smoking chains, wreaths, stacatto fingers.  
Now take this pattern, hold it in your lap,  
And if it cannot still unnatural life to stone,  
Then use it as a weapon against mirror, door, or us.  
Break it.  
Pour out the balckness  
Of old, old sea  
And free the wings of sea birds  
Vibrant, loud, shining in dark borders,  
Holding to no pattern  
Holding not the center  
Of cold pearl heart.

Donna Scarboro

NOVEMBER 26-10:00 p.m.

We stand in  
front of St. Luke  
carven from white  
marble and the  
church steeple  
bright against  
the night.

We ramble  
endlessly leaping  
from one subject  
to another and  
back again.

Our feet dance  
on the pavement-  
because we are cold,  
of course.

Ten minutes ago  
I was singing  
"Alelulia"  
and now I know why.  
It is almost  
Thanksgiving  
and I am seeing  
Peter.

Meg Brown

## ONE REVOLUTION

Slightly off axis, but steadily spinning  
the world turned.

Clockwise to some (some flowed with  
the current) and yet the opposite  
to others, resulting in disgrace or  
indifference.

It was in this school where he led  
his first life, where piece by piece  
a foundation was made.

His pencil was sharpened every day,  
and his hand wrote a life uncertain.

A separate day, a different way, he  
passed and failed until the pencil broke,  
the mortar fell apart, his status fell,  
and down he came with a crash.

To each his own is safe to say,  
a defeat to no one but himself.

This was the first life, a quitter once  
will always be, for the power to overcome  
will never be there, leaving no sweet  
memory of that day when they stood and  
he watched their faces calm  
and content.

They had overcome the rapids.

The successful faces now began to dim  
leaving him alone, while darkness and water  
stained his face, and to him the world abruptly  
stopped.

Alan Lott

## THE RETIREMENT HOME

Now that the leaves have fallen  
and the trees  
hang like black lace against the evening sky  
I see rising

seven stories from the mud  
a huge white block of glass and marble

Behind this solitary monument  
the Sun is setting  
I see figures  
slowly moving in a dining room

They move so slowly  
as if they have a life ahead of them

The room is lit by golden chandeliers

Christopher Benfey

## THE COLLAR

Sun. Dirt. Distant hum of traffic melted into the buzz of flies. I dug my back deeper into the ground, relishing the gritty feel of the dirt in my fur and half heartedly swatted at a butterfly that fluttered around my dangling paw. It had been a beautiful day for doing dozy things; so nice after a brisk night sporting with the others in and about the hundreds of passages that are the city haunts of cats and mice. I might have purred in contentment, but at the moment even that promised to take too much effort, so I didn't. I just lay, soaking the sun into my soft cream-colored belly fur.

What kind of sensation it was, I couldn't have said. Though I prided myself on being keenly aware of every message the air might carry, I had never met with this one before. It was Different. Tingly. And it definitely did not belong to the lazy currents of the day.

My curiosuty aroused, but loathe to give up the hazy stupor of the afternoon, I rolled over and rose to my feet, stretching each paw--one at a time--in high feline pleasure. A quick shake rid my coat of most of the dirt and I sat down to wash my face as if nothing had disturbed me. But I was now totally alert and every nerve in my eyes, ears, and nose scanned the area closely for whatever was sending out the strange message.

Everything appeared to be as usual. Those who lived in the houses across the field were inside avoiding the fall of dusk. The only

thing moving, other than a few passing cars was a distant figure that had appeared, walking slowly along the road that eventually led into the back streets of the City where my Person lived. It still had not reached the first houses that marked the beginning of those that would become the suburbs and I could see cars slow as they neared it, then speed up to pass on into the City.

I scratched absently at my collar and stood. It had to be coming from that figure and I felt irresistibly drawn toward it. I began to angle in its direction, easing into the long, gentle lope that could cover large distances in a surprisingly short time.

Not far from her, I slowed and turned to pace alongside. It was indeed a young woman, but like none I had ever seen before. Although her features were like every other human, still everything about her was strange and I could see now why the people in the cars stared at her as they passed. She was tall and slender with long rippling hair that reminded me of cream pouring from the wide mouth of a pitcher. It flowed as she walked, gleaming like real cream against the green of the dress she wore.

Now I'm not one to particularly notice what humans wear. My Person has worn some pretty strange things in her time and I only take them in because there is not much that misses my eye, whether I take note of it or not. Still, I have never seen anything like that which this young woman had on. It was of a gauzy

material, a rich leaf green, and seemed to have no shape of its own but always molded itself to her motion in such a way that made me wonder if the wind was woven into the fabric.

It may have been this that caught the eye of the passing motorists. But it held no more than a mild interest for me. Rather it was the air about her; not just the type of personal scent that all living things might be individually identified by, but an electric sensation that was part of her and part of the air within which she moved. It was unnatural and yet wholly natural to her, and it was this that had traveled across the field and drawn me to her.

"Peh-ru." I perked up at the strange accent her voice blended into the harsher name of Peru, given to me by my Person when I was a kitten. It did not occur to me to wonder how she knew it, however. I flicked an ear at her, suppressing a shiver of delight, but continued only to trot along beside.

"Peh-ru." She had stopped and held out her hand. It was an irresistible command to come. I stalked over toward her, concealing my eagerness in a mask of casual unconcern. But when I was within a few feet I stopped.

"Come." The voice was soft and musical but strong and rich. I wriggled and weaved about her, but kept my distance. I wanted to approach her as I had no one else, yet something me warned me to keep my distance. There was an enchantment about her, and I somehow knew that if she ever touched me, I would never be my own again. Already I had forfeited too

much freedom, and the red leather collar about my neck was a constant reminder of that.

I felt her questioning thoughts reach out to touch me, then withdraw with understanding. She rose and began to walk along the road again. Still drawn to her, I once more paced beside her.

Some time farther on a familiar scent brought me to attention. I looked around as I sorted it from the others, questioning the air for what it might tell. Beside me I could feel the woman watching me closely, trying to decipher what it was that had disturbed me.

In a very short time I was sure I was right. A police car was approaching, its odor--common to no other vehicle--came clearly on the air. And somehow I knew that in this was danger; not to me but to my companion.

Follow me!

I dashed in front of her, heading across the field we had been skirting, aiming for the woods on the far side. I glanced back once to see if she came and was surprised to find her not far behind. The wind in her clothes seemed to carry her with it, never tangling the garment around her feet but lending wings instead.

There was time. I leapt to the top of the cracked clay culvert that lay forgotten half in and half out of the trees where it waited for the housing development that was to have spread out this far many years ago. In only seconds the woman had reached me and ducked into the round shelter.

When I was sure she was safely hidden inside,

I lay down on top, panting softly. Wearing the appearance of a dozing farm cat, I watched down the road, knowing no one would see anything strange in the picture I made. Yes, there it came, now parallel to me, its lights flashing slowly. I could imagine the men inside scanning the road and fields as their vehicle crawled along, and the tip of my tail flicked in amusement.

I waited for a long time--until I saw them once more return to the City--before I rose again and dropped down to the opening of the culvert. The woman sat patiently in the cramped shadows, awaiting my return.

"I thank you."

I sat down a few feet away and acknowledged her words by grooming my paw.

"I have much to learn about this world."

Yes.

She smiled and there was a soft glow around her face.

"I am honored you have chosen to speak to me."

I cocked my head at her, switching my tail slowly.

"I am a stranger to this land and do not understand its ways. I do not seem able to speak with those who look as I do, though I understand those of your kind well enough."

I blinked up at her, somehow not in the least surprised that I could understand her words clearly. There was a naturalness about it that I took for granted in the same way I took it for granted that my Person spoke little more than nonsense most of the time.

"Peh-ru." She reached forward to stroke me,

loneliness seeming to overwhelm her. I scuttled back quickly and again sat, unper-turbed.

"Oh, I am sorry." (And I could see she meant it.) "For the moment I had forgotten you are not of our world. Still, I must ask your help...if you would give it freely."

My tail twitched and I waited for her to go on.

"I search for my brother, the Prince of Raiatha. Long ago he set out upon a quest to recover the Ring of Rai which had been lost or stolen many years ago, before we were born.

"We fear it was stolen, for the Ring of Rai, alone, can establish the True House. When it disappeared, my parents were denied Throne Right, though their family had always held that right. Raiatha now is torn, for it has no ruler and the people fight amongst themselves.

"So my elder brother Anyan set out to find the Ring and thereby reestablish our Right. Rumors came to me, not many days ago, that he had finally traced it to this world and that he is in danger. Hence it is that I, Lanya, also of the True House, have come to find him. Will you aid me?"

I scratched at my collar as I considered her words. Independent even for a cat and bound to my Person only by the one tie I could not break, I have never owed duty to any other person. But Lanya had not demanded. She had asked it of my free will. I rose and yawned.

What would you have me do?

She leapt to her feet, stooping as she stepped out of the culvert.

"You are of this City. He is here. His voice calls me, but he cannot tell me where he is, and I do not know where to look. He does not even know why they hold him captive."

I'll find him for you. Wait here and don't show yourself.

With that I was off, racing across the field, not even looking back to see if she had done as I had bid. Behind me the sun was moving into its evening line and, with dark, I felt sure that she would be secure until I returned.

I had one stop to make before I set out to learn news of Lanya's brother, one required of my bond. Nightfall found me padding up the back steps to my Person's apartment.

"Where have you been all day and last night, Peru?" she asked in a scolding tone as I pushed through the swinging door. They had made so they would not have to continually open and close the door for me. Of course I did not answer, but went over to my food dish, allowing the usual fuss to be made over me as I ate, ignoring the exclamations of how dirty my coat was and the admonishments against my being out so much. The Man added his usual "One of these days you're going to lose that cat for good," and as usual neither one of us paid him any mind as I arched my back against her hand as she stroked me.

It was part of my duty to spend the evening with my Person, but immediately after the lights were out I darted through the door and down

the steps into the alley.

There are many lines of communication in the City, known only to those animals that toam at will, and I searched them all with a speed uncommon even to me. Day was hardly breaking by the time I learned what I needed to know, and I wasted no time in carrying word back to Lanya.

"I must go to him. Please show me the way!" she cried, jumping up.

I spat in frustration at her sudden movement and backed hurriedly out of the way again. Smoothing my ruffled coat I reminded her of the strange air about her that had disturbed someone badly enough to cause them to call the police to pick her up.

I will lead you to him after dark, when there is less danger.

She was forced to be satisfied with that, and we spent a pleasant day together in silent companionship. It was almost uneasily that I found that the longer I was with her the more drawn I was to her, and several times I had to catch myself when I became tempted to let her pet me. It was only my strong desire to remain my own that kept me back, and I soaked up her presence from a safe distance.

It was late before I finally gave the word to go. I had made one brief visit home to make ceratin my Person would not miss me and, re-turning, was pleased to find the streets already quieting with the work day schedule. Still, I played with extra caution and did not give in to Lanya's urging until I knew it was as safe

as it would get.

By the time we passed the houses of the suburbs the City was just the way I like it. The streets were almost entirely empty except for the shadows thrown by the dirty street lights. Even so, I decided it was best to keep to the back alleys, to avoid patrolling police cars. I was forced to rearrange my route somewhat from the one I had planned earlier. Walls and piles of boxes and other discarded junk formed no difficulty to me. I love to climb and have often led the other cats--and sometimes enemies--on exciting chases over the most difficult obstacles I could find. Yet watching Lanya clumsily scramble over one backyard wall reminded me that I was not leading another cat.

If I had not sensed her growing anxiety, it would have been a very enjoyable trek. At night the Cith is my realm. People seem so far away and the shadows create the illusion of mountains and canyons that I had once seen and treasure in some vague memory of my kittenhood. I trotted gaily beside her, sometimes maneuvering along a ledge or wall, or dashing ahead to shoot up a tree or pile of boxes, all the while keeping a sharp eye out for dogs and gangs of boys that can make the alleys dangerous for the unwary.

Lanya walked along quickly, following my lead with a trust I had never experienced from another human. She said nothing, but I could sense that uneasiness underneath her eagerness. As I felt this was none of my

business, however, I did not ask her about it.

It took longer than I had counted on to reach the palace we sought. Even with our brisk pace, a person cannot move along as fast as we cats and the longer route took the hours I knew she counted so fearfully. The sky was just greying into dawn when we stood looking up at the sign on the big iron gate: DETAINING HOME FOR THE EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED.

"He's in there?" Lanya asked anxiously.

I did not bother to answer, but unconcernedly sat down for my morning washing. I had done my part and normally would have slipped away at the first opportunity. Yet that same enchantment held me near her. So I waited to see what she would do next.

"But where in there? It is so big." She stared in dismay at the giant stone building.

I knew the answer to that, too. When I do a job, I do it thoroughly. I got up and began to follow the fence, assuming she would be right behind me. The fence was long, its grillwork covering several blocks, and I led her around to the back.

Up there. Third window, top floor.

I rubbed against the fence, scratching my back with the iron bars.

"Oh no." Her voice was a whisper. For long moments she stood staring up at that window. "I must find a way. I must."

I stared at her, unblinking.

Climb the fence.

"I cannot. I cannot touch metal." As if in proof, her fingers reached toward the bars,

springing back as if they had been burnt even before they touched.

What was it that drew me to her, made me wish she would touch me even as I was afraid she would? I fought the urge to rub against her in sympathy. She seemed so alone.

"Peh-ru..." This time I felt the call rather than heard it, and I knew it did not come from Lanya. It was more distant and more penetrating. It crept into me until it became a part of me, questioning, asking, pleading. "Peh-ru..." It came not as a command but as a call that was as deep within me as my desire to be free. And I knew I would answer.

Two bounds and I was scrambling to catch my balance on the top bar of the fence, poised between the iron spikes. Then I was over, streaking across the yard and up the huge maple tree that brushed against the stone walls. The window I was aiming for was shut, but a narrow cement ledge ran along the wall, even with the window sills. Calculating the distance between tree and wall, I balanced on the branch, then sprang, twisting sideways in the air. My claws grated on the ledge and I tottered...then held. It took a moment to steady myself, then picked my way along surefootedly. There was no major trick to this, once I had my balance. I had followed many runways much narrower in may rampaging around the City. The only trick would be to find a window open this early in the morning.

I had edged around the corner of the building before I saw exactly what I was looking for. A

hnd was putting out breadcrumbs for the pigeons and the window was wide open. Now, if I could just time things right...

I inched forward cautiously. I did not want the person to shut the window before I could get there, but neither did I want her hands free to grab me. The hands moved up and the window began to grate down. Now!

"Hey!"

I whizzed through, racing down the hall.

"Stop that cat!"

The shout was hardly a loud whisper. It was still too early for any but the night shift to be about so there was no one to hear and he did not want to wake the inmates.

I skidded around a corner and into an open door. The room--some sort of supply room--was empty of people but full of crates and boxes of various sizes. I crawled into a tight corner and lay frozen.

"Kitty, kitty..." The voice was loud just inside the door, then faded as the person walked away, mumbling something about dratted strays and letting the day-shift find it. I waited several minutes before venturing out of my hiding place, even long after the person was gone. Then I wriggled out of my corner, pausing in the doorway as I considered which way to turn.

"Peh-ru..." The call crept through me, promising a silent guide. I slipped back the way I had come. Instead of returning to the window, however, I headed in the opposite direction.

"Peh-ru."

My ears flicking back to make sure no one

had come up behind me, I slowed, knowing I neared the source of the call.

"Here."

I stopped, looking up at the tall door. A large window, covered by a wire mesh screen, took up the top half of the door. Behind it, but not touching the wire, I could see the outline of a man.

"I am Anyan. Will you help me?"

The words echoed through my mind, though he had not spoken aloud, and my heart beat rapidly with an eagerness that I could not understand. More than anything else, even more than my freedom, I suddenly wanted to help him. I stretched up on my hind legs, reaching for the door knob with my front paw. Long ago I had learned that sometimes a door would open if you hung on them just right. But the knob was beyond my reach.

Returning to my four feet, I paused for a moment to listen, then leapt against the door. My paws caught at the knob and I hung dangling until my shoulders ached. It was no use. I slid back down, my claws scratching down the wall in frustration. I sat down and stared up at him, suppressing the desire to cry for my Person to let me in.

I can do nothing.

His shadow vanished and I could hear him pacing the room. Then he was back and, though I could not see them, I felt his eyes on me.

"We had hoped there would be another way. But I see none. The door is locked and I could not use the key even if I could get it. Will you let us change you?"

Some self-preserving instinct sparked me to my feet and I snarled at the door. I did not wholly under-

stand what he was saying, but a sudden terror swept over me, nearly overwhelming even the growing bond I had felt to him.

"It would only be temporary. You would be human only for as long as it would take us to leave the city. Then we will return to our world and leave you to yours."

I struggled to take this in. Me? Human? I fought the desire to run that flooded through me. In one more minute it would win.

Do it! Quickly!

Unable to resist myself any longer I leapt to escape. With a thud I was thrown to the floor, totally paralyzed. My throat opened to cry but no sound came out and I lay helpless. Slowly a tingling sensation crept over me, beginning as a mild current and increasing to violent spasms that shook every corner of my being. Then it was gone, and I found I was able to move. Still slightly stunned, I got to my feet. There was a queer feeling to my movements but otherwise I was unhurt.

"Please. We must hurry."

I looked over at him, and only then was I fully conscious of what had happened. I raised my hands, staring at them in disbelief.

"I am human?"

"Yes, but do not be frightened. It may feel awkward for a short time but I will help you in the same way I guided you here. Now please, the key hangs beside the door at night."

I looked up to where he directed. Yes, it was still there. Stumblingly I stepped forward, tottering unsteadily on my clumsy legs. Then a rush of warmth swept through me and my coordination

returned with, I was sure, Anyan's help. I grasped the key, and in an instant a taller, older version of Lanya stood beside me.

Once more my cat wariness came over me and I backed away, but the movement was more reluctant this time.

"How do we get out unseen?" I asked, the words coming from my mouth easily but with a strange resonance.

"How did you get in?"

"The window..."

"Come, then."

"But only a cat could follow the ledge," I protested as I followed him, remembering the clumsiness of all the humans I knew.

Anyan looked at me sharply but did not slow down.

"You are a cat. Do not forget. You have lost none of your skills, and I shall draw from them."

By this time we had reached the window and I began to clumsily release the catch. Movement reflected in the glass made me spin around. There was no one behind us. I turned back, puzzled, to stare at the lean face that met my gaze. Around his neck was a narrow red collar.

"Someone's coming!" I heard the step on the stairway long before its maker had reached our level but I knew we did not have much time. The catch finally gave way and I heaved the window open. Anyan shoved me.

"Out quickly. I'm right behind you."

I swung out, and the thought that this was impossible hit me. No human foot could fit on that ledge. Yet I was on it, sliding swiftly but silently around the corner, Anyan close behind.

"...Must have forgotten to shut it," we heard as the window shut behind us. There was no choice but to go the rest of the way. I had no idea how much time had passed since I had left Lanya, but it could not have been

too long. The street was still deserted and the sun was only a little higher. Yet Laya was not where I had left her.

"Where is she?" I asked in concern as I jumped and swung into the tree. "She has gone to hold open the Gate for as long as she may," he answered, landing beside me and following me down the trunk.

"She waits near the Culvert. Which way do we go now?" Instead of answering, I jumped up, catching the bars of the fence near where I had first come over.

"Wait, I cannot follow." I looked down from my perch. I had forgotten. I landed near him and was up, racing around the building to the front gate. This sort of movement felt strange, but by now I was accustomed to my new body and, though it did not move as quickly as I was used to, we reached the gate in a short time. Luckily it was locked only by a latch on the inside. Soon we were out and running through the streets, the real early risers staring at us curiously but giving no signs of wishing to stop us.

It was a new and wonderful trek back through the City. After we were out of sight of the prison and off the main streets we slowed to an easier pace. It was then that I became conscious of a new awareness, as if I was seeing everything through eyes that could see two realities. Climbs that meant nothing to me as a cat suddenly seemed impossible. If I tried them without thinking about them, they proved to be no more difficult than before. Everything else seemed to exist in a double level as well. There were the same old sights and scents that were so familiar, but I noticed colors, heights and shapes that were important to the human world. Even more wonderful was the companionship of this strange young man. I listened enrapt as he spoke of himself, of his

family, and of his world which seemed so alike and yet so different than the one I knew. His dreams of what he would do when he returned with the ring, and how things would be thrilled me. If he looked at me with worried eyes as I questioned and, for the first time in my life, betrayed my interest and admiration in someone else, I was only half conscious of it.

The only thing that marred the wonder of that beautiful morning was the persistant presence of the red collar I wore about my neck, and its reminder that freedom was of the human realm of which I was not a part. It was the mark of being owned by another.

Lanya stood waiting by the culvert as we ran across the field that lay just outside of the last houses of town. She came forward to meet us and, though they did not embrace, I felt an electric current of joyful greeting flow between them. I stood awkwardly by until Lanya turned to me, her eyes dark and warm but somehow sad.

"We must hurry. The Gate is already beginning to close and will not hold much longer. Yet I wish we could thank you if it were in our power."

The idea hit me with a longing so strong it hurt.

"Please, take me with you."

"That we cannot do," Anyan's voice was troubled. "The way is forbidden. We cannot free you in that way, though I fear for the hurt we may have given you in this brief semblance of freedom."

"Please don't leave me. Take me with you!" I stepped toward them but stopped as they backed away.

"It is both a curse and a blessing that brought you into our reach. A blessing that will restore peace to our world; a curse allowed us to take ad-

vantage of your free choice to aid us. The only hope we may wish upon you is that you will not remember the pain with the memory. Yet perhaps there is one small thing we might do for you." Anyan came toward me and I once more felt a fleeting fear of his touch, though I remained still. Then his fingers brushed my throat and searing fire ringed my neck.

"Please...take me...with...you," I whispered. But they were gone. The red collar lay at my feet where they had stood.

The morning sun blazed down on the fields that had somehow withstood the pulse of the City. There was the promise of stifling heat under the towering buildings; a heat that would try but not quite touch the open land. Far to the West, following the road away from the City a line of trees marked the promise of more fields and forests. And somewhere beyond them lay plains and hills and mountains.

An early butterfly wafted past my head. I pounced at it, missed, and sat down to comb my whiskers pretending I hadn't seen it in the first place. The grooming completed, I rose, stretched, and trotted off, my shadow leading the way.

Carol Inglis







