



A week's break from the Romans series, thanks.

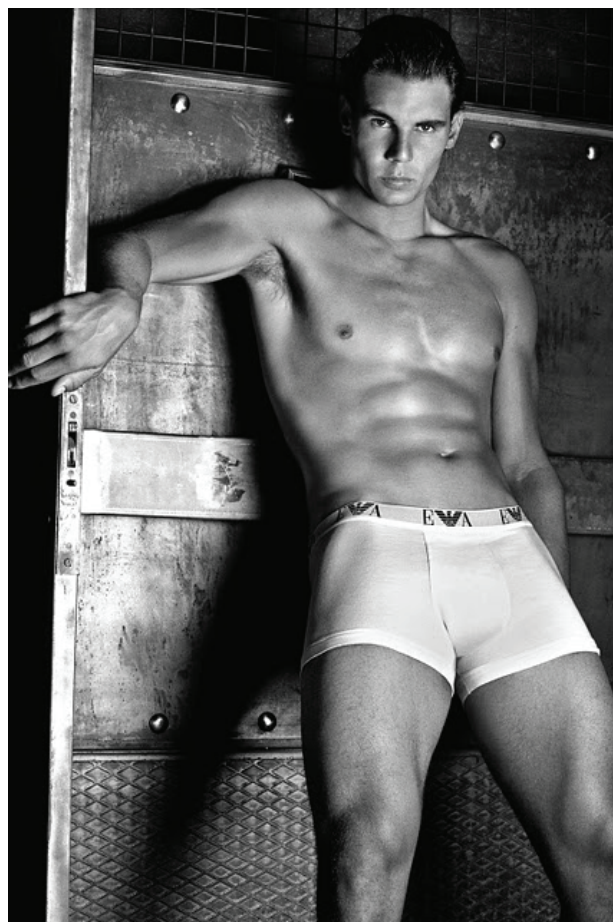
Thank you for allowing me this brief respite from the Romans series. I will be back next week with Part 16, and the beginning of chapter three. Can't wait! In the meantime, here are four articles I wrote in the early 90's, three of which were published in various newspapers. Back in those days, I had both a cynical and sober view on nearly every topic, from cats to kids, from hot air balloons to hairbrushes, from the human body to the body politic. I will be publishing these competing essays in a book called, "Fuzz-nuts." Watch for it this summer.

As you read this, I am driving to Florida. This is not a vacation, but a time for writing and escaping winter. I will be staying with various ecclesia members, perhaps through March. I will be writing at Broward College in Davie, as well as in several different coffee shops and libraries. I will also be typesetting the upcoming five books on human sexuality. (The two books just published will be offered soon. My audio show will continue five days a week.) If you are in Florida and want to have coffee, look me up!

Editor's note to the following articles: Back in the day, I had changed my wife's name to Melody to protect her identity. Those who know her as Melody may be surprised here to read of Marcia. It's the same person. And it shall continue to be the same person from this day forward.

Abdominals

by Martin Zender



Dressing rooms at cheap clothing stores ought to have long doors, but they don't. The doors are cut too high to do a person's privacy any good. The short doors invariably let

other people know that someone is in the dressing room. How do they know? They can see the dressing-room person hopping around in the small room, trying to get in or out of his or her pants.

I've always wondered what would happen if someone forgot to lock the dressing room door. I have always wondered what would happen if this hypothetical person lost his or her balance and fell out of the dressing room with their pants still down around their ankles, landing on their backs with their legs sticking straight up in the air in the manner of a dead armadillo.

I know what I would do. I have thought this through, believe me. I have analyzed this more than a fire drill. If this unfortunate event ever happened to me, the first thing I would do was wish I was a dead armadillo. Then I would get up off the floor right away. I would hop up like a grasshopper. Then I would kick my jeans off from around my ankles and try to make them land somewhere clever, like on top of the head of an attractive female clerk. Then I would walk very slowly to a mirror. Everybody in the store would be looking at me, I know

"I would kick off my jeans and try to make them land somewhere clever."

that. (You don't have to tell me this; I already know it.) But I would combat this terrible scrutiny by looking at myself. Up and down, up and down in the mirror, I would look at myself. While doing this, I would keep saying, "hmmm."

Then I would turn a little bit to the right, then a little bit to the left. I would check my underpants in this manner, from left and right angles. The wonderful saying, "hmmm" would be my best friend. Then I would face front and snap the elastic of the waistband many, many, many times. I would look satisfied, but of course I would not be. Then I would pivot on my toes and crane my neck to check myself from the back. I would say "hmmm" again and again. What a good friend this "hmmm" would be to me.

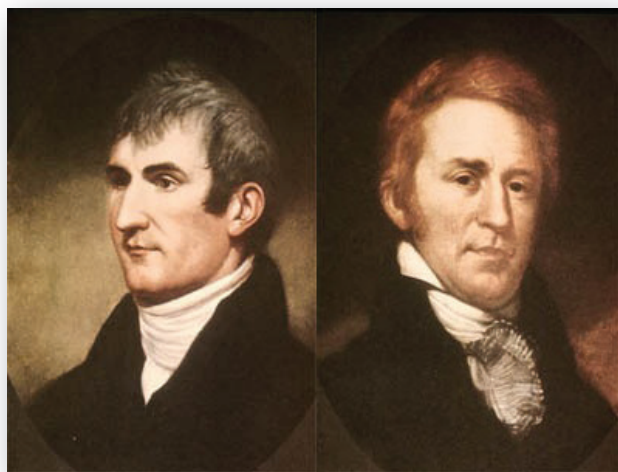
If Marcia was there, I would call her over to me. I would stand in front of her and say, "Well, Marcia. What do you think?" Marcia would be my next best friend. She would surely see the pain in my eyes, and would look me over and say, "A little long in back." Or, "They may need hemmed." Or, "I think you would look better in another color." If Marcia wasn't there, she would never find out

what had happened. Not from me, anyway. (The corner would have to tell her.)

I would then walk over to the underwear table and pick up many, many packages of underwear product. I would examine each package with great care. I would sample each package in my shaking hands, turning them over and over in my hands. I would check sizes and washing instructions. Every now and then I would say "hmmm" at the packages. I guarantee you that I would find nothing satisfactory.

Slowly, ever so slowly, I would peel my jeans off the head of the attractive female clerk, and shuffle back to the dressing room. All of this would happen slowly, ever so slowly. I would lock the door this time (*this* goddamned time) and put on the rest of my clothes. Then I would unlock the door, leave the dressing room, and nod to the gaping crowd. I would then leave the store in a calm manner, walk out into the parking lot and kill myself.

* * *



Lewis and Clark are two people envied by me. They make me write in the passive voice. In addition to this, they didn't have to worry about how fat they were. They weren't fat, anyway. They didn't canoe the Missouri River because of fat. Sir Edmund Hillary didn't climb Mount Everest because of fat, or to broaden his quadriceps. These men found oxygen, adventure and exercise on new frontiers. It just so happens that new frontiers are good for you. Lewis and Clark were very fit. Hillary looked good in boxer shorts.

The problem today is that there are no more frontiers to service us men. I can talk about men only be-

cause I am one. I don't know anything about women, not a thing. If men want to be in shape, they have to invent new frontiers where frontiers don't exist. I'm not sure what women have to do. Our wives don't even turn off their blow dryers long enough to hear us explain any of this.

Think about Daniel Boone; I do it all the time. Daniel Boone never had to tell his wife, "This is why I joined the health club and why there is \$60 automatically being withdrawn from our savings account every month." Daniel Boone was a normal frontiersman who wanted to look great in coonskin skivvies. But he was lucky because he didn't have to measure the distance around his stockade or design a Nautilus weight program. He didn't have to put inspirational Nike posters on his walls. All he had to do was pull on his buckpants and tell his wife that he would be sacking Fort Duquesne until noon, then settling some wilderness around the Kentucky River after lunch.

Daniel Boone never even thought about fat, or anaerobic thresholds. He didn't have any fat. He did have plenty of anaerobic thresholds, and these were good for his heart. Daniel Boone got fit by accident. Shimming up stockade walls was good for abdominal sidewalls. Settling wilderness was good for the pectorals. Running from the Iroquois kept Daniel Boone from colon cancer.

Mrs. Boone never complained about any of this because it was her husband's lifestyle. Lucky for Daniel Boone that his lifestyle helped his wife survive. It kept her from getting scalped by the Iroquois and other grouchy tribes native to America. Mrs. Boone didn't think it was foolish to sack Fort Duquesne. She thought it was a great idea. And the wilderness around the Kentucky River *needed* settled so that Colonel Sanders could eventually start a large chicken company.

But Marcia did not understand when I told her two winters ago that I was going to bicycle twelve miles to work every morning at 4:20 a.m.

I have always been a fitness nut because I hate fat. Fat is fine on anybody else, if they can stand it. I just can't stand it on me. I have run over 15,000 miles since I was 15 years old, and have bicycled across the North American continent twice. But when I turned 30, I lost all my inspiration. My waist hung by three fingers to my waistband and said it would let go because it thought I didn't love it anymore.

I tried to start running again, but my left hip hurt. I tried to quit eating Raisinettes, and I did, but then I took up with its near cousin—Goobers. Then I stepped on the scale one day, and the number on the scale made me won-



der if the scale had been calibrated properly.

In September of 1991 I remember thinking to myself, "If only somebody would run the stop sign at Boughtonville and Walnut Road on my way to work and destroy my car. Then I would be forced into doing something positively Boonish, like using the insurance money to buy a mountain bike, Gore-Tex biking

clothes, down mittens, electronic foot warmers, a neoprene face mask, polypropylene turtle-necked pullovers and tights, a new bicycle helmet, a new pair of Lycra shorts with a sheepskin crotch, and an expensive bicycle light. Then I could bicycle the twelve miles to work during the upcoming and hopefully-brutal Ohio winter and become Boonishly fit and fat-free."

The wreck happened on September 19th; the bicycle light cost \$195; I got a deal on the bike because I bought it used from a friend; the Gore-Tex

clothing is guaranteed to keep me dry; the electronic foot warmers have four heat settings; four out of five doctors recommend neoprene face masks for people like me who risk freezing their faces off if they fail to wear it.

**"My waist
hung by
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to my waist-
band and
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let go."**



Marcia asked several good questions about my plan. These questions included: 1) do you have to bicycle to work when you own another car? 2) can’t you wait until summer to bicycle to work? 3) will this plan somehow ease the suffering of mankind? and 4) do you have to spend 45 dollars on a new pair of Lycra shorts with a sheepskin crotch?

My answers to these questions were 1) no, 2) I could if I was a baby, 3) no, 4) no, but think how good my crotch will feel.

What bothered my wife was that my plan would have no practical, social, historical, or financial use. My plan would be like every other amateur athletic event since the sacking of Fort Duquesne.

By doing what I was about to do, I would become as those who run around city blocks (they go nowhere), who do sit-ups in their bathroom (they, also, go nowhere), who swim ten laps a day in an indoor swimming pool (*they* go nowhere), and who enjoy spending eighty dollars on shoes with an EVA rearfoot wedge, a U-throat eyestay design, anti-pronation heel plates, and a 3M reflective tab (which work as well as many K-Mart varieties).

Where have all those frontiers gone? Where have those harsh gaps gone, where our forefathers trimmed their flesh? They have all gone away. They have gone away like Iroquois campfires. Now the frontiers exist only in the hearts and minds of the “frontiersmen.” These frontiersmen no longer worry about bears and bowie knives, but about cell phones and taco chips.

All the frontiers are now inside one’s own rib cage.

This world has gone flat. It’s flat! These are the days when anyone who would be Hillary has to make his own Everest. Any potential Boone must re-create Kentucky in the new and cruel world. His block becomes his wilderness, his bathroom a cabin outpost. His pool is a river near the Sacred Hunting Ground. His neon-green shoes (the fruit of wild science, slip-lasted on fiberglass lasts by men who themselves find purpose in purposelessness) become deerskin moccasins. The prey is always just ahead.

I finally told Marcia that Ohio was Kentucky, that Boughtonville was the Wilderness Road, that my bicycle was an ax, and that winter was a measure of whatever Daniel Boone yet inhabited my breast. She finally saw the wisdom of it.

It's tough. I'm due at the Willard, Ohio, Post Office at 5:45 a.m. but I live in Greenwich—twelve miles away.

My alarm goes off at 4:20. Marcia makes me breakfast: a batch of Ultra Slim Fast blended with bananas, a bowl of Malt-O-Meal, two blobs of grape jelly with toast underneath, and a cup of coffee. I burp and wipe my chin. Marcia thanks God she's not me and goes back to bed.

My breath comes in steam. It's sixteen degrees, but I'm a heater. No. My body works like no heater ever worked. At the base of the hill before Greenwich-Milan Road, I'm warm.

Cold oxygen comes to my brain. My brain is alive now. Animals crawl from the safety of their road bed, just to see me. I am famous to them, a celebrity to the deepest burrowers among them.

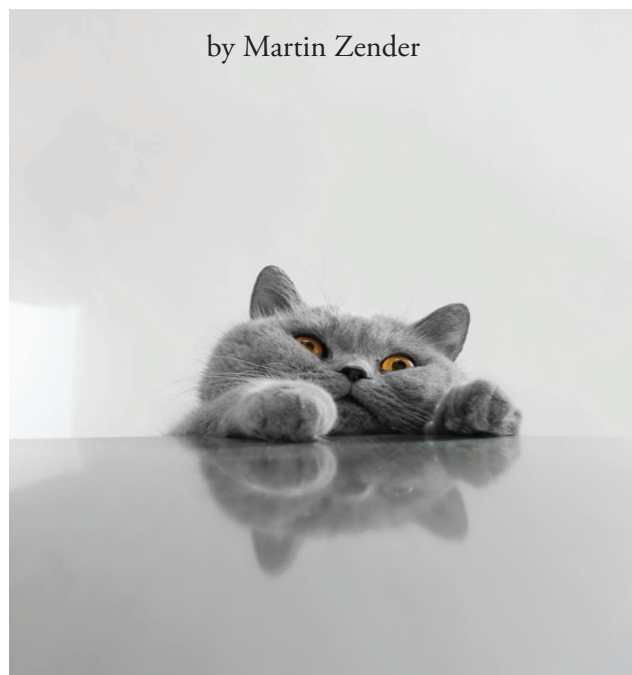
Two deer are running now—there they go. I am alive, like them. My legs drive to the rhythm of my heart. My hip has returned on the midnight train and my bones sleep near the fireplace. My waist was talked down by a caring bystander. And here on the pre-dawn Wilderness Way, there are two things that I know—no, three:

1) scales generally work, 2) the fourth and fifth doctors never wore neoprene, and 3) Iroquois headhunters chase pre-dawn bicyclists all the way to Willard. —MZ

“*I am a celebrity to the
DEEPEST
BURROWERS
among them.*”

Cats

by Martin Zender



Zender: How many young boys do you know these days named Ed?

Normal Person: NOT MANY.

Zender: How many girls do you know named Beth?

Normal Person: SO FEW.

Why have normal names gone the way of Dick and Jane books? Now kids are named Granby, Weston, Brandon, Nicole, Alicia, and Kayleigh.

ARE YOU TRYING TO TALK TO US ABOUT CATS AGAIN?

What if I am? Parents will throw darts at a map of Thailand and name their son “Khon Kaen” before they will name him “Ed.” Yet after all of this trouble these same people will not think twice about naming their cat “Mittens.”

WE KNEW IT!

Be quiet. This is important to me *and* to you. In the time it takes you to read this sentence, 1,990 Americans will have named a cat “Mittens.”

OH, MY GOSH! YOU'RE RIGHT!

Of course I'm right. It isn't like I haven't studied it. Naming a cat “Mittens” is like naming a dog “Bow-Wow” or a parakeet “Polly” or a goldfish “Mrs. Paul.”

WE DON'T TREAT OUR KIDS LIKE THIS.

I know.

WHY DO WE EVEN BOTHER NAMING CATS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Because it's a great name.

THAT'S NOT WHAT WE MEAN. WHY NAME CATS AT ALL?

Because it's another great name. "In The First Place," "At All"; I love these names.

NO. WHY DOES A CAT *NEED* A NAME?

So veterinarians can make targeted statements about the animal's health.

WE'RE NOT FOLLOWING YOU.

"Bo Jangles is dead."

VERY WELL. BUT WHY DOES IT HAVE TO BE A DIFFERENT NAME? WHY *CAN'T* A CAT BE NAMED "MITTENS?"

Cats have a sixth sense about ordinary names that have befallen them. Researchers in Minnesota have subjected this hunch to experiments. These experiments have shown that cats named "Mittens" don't groom



themselves as often as cats named "Ripnuts."

WHAT ABOUT BILL?

He doesn't groom himself at all.

ONCE AGAIN, YOU MISUNDERSTAND US. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOUR FRIEND BILL. THE ONE WITH THE CAT NAMED MUFFY THAT HAD FIVE KITTENS.

Oh, him. Bill realized his mistake after Muffy and spoke to many of his co-workers about never repeating

his terrible mistake. Bill was not about to name the kittens what his wife wanted them named.

WHAT DID HIS WIFE WANT THEM NAMED?

"Mittens," "Morris," "Boots," "Tabby," and "Muffnuts."

EXCEPT FOR MUFFNUTS, THOSE NAMES ARE KIND OF UNORIGINAL.

At last I have to agree with you.

WHAT DID BILL NAME THE KITTENS?

Bill found his Rand McNally road atlas and opened it to Missouri. Then he closed his eyes and poked his finger as randomly as possible five times. His wife felt very sorry about everything and so agreed to write down where Bill's finger poked. These cities of course were then transformed into kitten names.

THIS DID NOT WORK!

Yes it did. It worked for "Newburg," "Boonville," "Moberly," "La Grange," and "Kansas City."

IT'S SO NEW. AND YET WE LONG TO APPROACH IT, FOR WE HAVE CATS AND WE WANT TO DO OUR PART, ESPECIALLY AFTER HEARING ABOUT BILL. BUT WE ARE NOT AS CREATIVE AS HE.

I know. But you don't have to be. There are easier ways. Try the "physical observance" method if you want.

OKAY. WHAT *IS* THAT?

It's a method whereby you base your cat's name on one of these three physical observances: looks, sex, personal habits.

ARE YOU PLAYING GAMES WITH US?

I don't even know you. Large laboratories in the Midwest have proven the above techniques using scientific experiments. Suppose you want to name a cat by the looks method. You pick a name based on your first reaction to the animal's physical appearance.

GIVE US AN EXAMPLE.

A cat wandered into our yard one day. When I used this method I instantly knew that the cat's name would be Mudface. And it was.

THE METHOD APPEARS TO WORK! IT DOES APPEAL TO OUR CARNAL NATURE. AND YET—WHAT IS THE SEX METHOD?

It has to do with sex and is trickier because you have to lift the cat's tail. If the cat is female you give it a very womanlike and sexy name. You name it "Sophia," "Marilyn" or "Madonna." If your cat is a male you name it in a man-like manner. Male cats could be named "Burt," "Clint," or "Arnold Schwarzenegger."

WHAT IF WE'RE NOT SURE OF THE CAT'S

GENDER?

The cat may then be named "Michael Jackson," "Pee Wee Herman," or "Liberace."

WHAT'S THE LAST METHOD AGAIN?

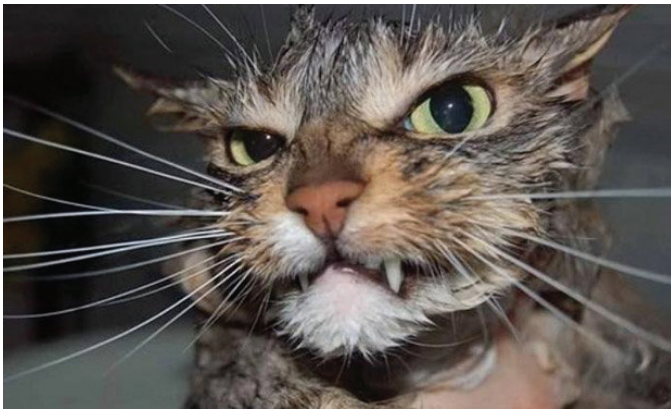
The personal habits method. Just find out what the cat does best and name it accordingly.

WHAT IF WE DON'T LIKE THE NAME "ACCORDINGLY?"

That's very funny. Do you want to learn now?

WE'RE SORRY. PLEASE GO ON.

My wife Marcia and I once named a cat using the personal habits method. We had a cat that liked to dig its claws into human scalps. Marcia tried out the names



"Ripper," "Scratchmo" and "Scalpie."

THOSE ARE PRETTY GOOD NAMES. WHAT IS THE ADVANTAGE OF THE PERSONAL HABITS METHOD?

Think about it. The cat's name automatically warns people of its maladjustments. Marcia and I believe you would think twice before inviting "Old Leaky Brown" into your home.

YOU BET WE WOULD! WE CAN'T ARGUE THAT THIS IS A GREAT METHOD. OUR QUESTION IS, WHAT DID YOU END UP NAMING YOUR CAT?

I had to veto "Ripper," "Scratchmo" or "Scalpie." The names were original of course but I still said no to them. I talked Marcia out of them. It was so much fun watching the cat dig its claws into unwary scalps. "Scalpie" would have given it away. In my mind it would have put a damper on the fun.

SO?

So we named it "Ed."

TELL US ABOUT CALICO CAT.

Oh. Wow. There once was a cat who walked by herself. All places were alike to her in her satisfaction. You

bring back these memories.

HOW DO YOU MEAN THAT?

I'll just never forget this Calico cat, is all. I don't know where she came from; none of us knew. One day she was just full of different colors and staring at us through the screen door with eyes made of chocolate and radar. Then out came a raspy "Mew!" This was a command for us to open the door, which we did. We picked her up beneath her armpits, which were sweaty. It was clear that she had been fed, and often.

And she would be fed again, too. By us. American cheese right out of the plastic wrapper and torn into small pieces. And a brand of cat food baked in special shapes that helped the food retain its crunchiness in milk. Or would she enjoy it dry?

Milk, please, she said.

But where did you come from?

Not yours to know.

Then she clawed around our sofa and steered her way around it, even around the corners. She found more speed along the straight-aways.

Don't you get dizzy doing that? I asked her.

Yes, she said, *but it's worth it to me.*

And then the big flowered chair in the living room became her enemy. I would say: "Get that big old chair!"

I will make it wish it had never been upholstered.

And she did, too. She bounced her belly on it and boxed the petals and bit the stems as well. Then she dismounted with an accidental somersault that she walked away from pretending it was purposeful.

It was purposeful.

Right, Calico.

I don't know what came next except maybe her rich soft skin that hung loosely from her bones with cat grease. It moved with our hands when we rubbed it





against her bones with handfuls of fur.

What fur. Alive. So rich. It was very soft, very colorful, very lovely fur. It was a coat. That's what it was. It was a true coat.

I like my coat.

So do we, Calico. To stroke it is fun because you push into it to get more and more feeling from the stroke. The first stroke gets you to push while the second stroke makes you forget your composure and footing. The third stroke makes you purr.

You don't have any of those things figured out.

Yes we do, Calico.

You've seen Garfield's face. You've seen his two round ball-jowls with the pout in-between and the whisker stubs. That was Calico's face exactly.

Roll on the ground, you! Roll on your back, White-Belly! Barrel-Belly! I'll rub you there on your belly until I can fathom the miracles of your rib cage. I now call you "Co-Co" (like "Cocoa") because we're friends.

In a very loose sense of the word.

Where are you going, Co-Co?

To a window. To a sunny spot near a window.

Faithful pet. True pet. But she never let on that she was faithful pet, true pet, because it was always, *I could do without you, probably*. Or, *I may leave you tonight, possibly*. But always in the morning it was the eyes of chocolate and radar at the screen door. It was the American cheese, the belly-rubs—

I tolerate the belly-rubs.

Sure, Co-Co.

Her Hartz 90-day flea collar was a token of ownership that reflected oncoming headlights for 300 feet. I swear it was a joy to her because she strutted with it on. She tried to duck from it when we first put it on her but we told her that it was for her own good and that it was handsome and that it would prove her an "owned pet."

I think the last part found her heart because she slath-

ered me with chocolate when I said that. For once she did not argue. Then she strutted away toward the barn and I knew then just how important proof of ownership is (and even though Calico would never admit it, proof of love is) to a cat.

Marcia's mom and dad had turned up the heater in their uptown apartment during our visit. For an October evening it was cold. And when we drove home, it was dark.

I've often wondered at which happy moment that evening the car struck and killed my Co-Co. Why did the pain come all at once when my headlights caught the flea collar lying strangely in the road? Why did the pain come so hard when Marcia said: "No, no, not Calico. No!"

Why did death in my hands and in my arms have to be so heavy? Why did some of my tears fall on the road while others fell onto Co-Co's rich fur? Why did I keep having to say over and over again, "... precious friend, precious friend, my precious friend ..."

Death doesn't move. It should move and you want it to move. It *must* move—but it doesn't move, no, not even on a porch beneath a naked light bulb wrapped in a blue blanket.

It was night. Marcia and I did not yet have children, but Marcia was large with our first son.

I cried hard onto my wife's lap, near where the baby was.

Today the boy loves cats. I know the exact spot beneath the apple tree where I laid my friend's body, where I laid that terrible body without life. I have not told the boy about it. The tree makes rich shade in the summer. We swing on swings beneath the tree and eat picnic lunches there.

And your son rolls over and you rub and rub his belly.

Yes! And you! Where are you going, Co-Co?

To a window. To a sunny spot near a window.

God bless you, Calico cat. —MZ

