

Cat Love

My cat always sleeps alongside my husband. She slides her white body slack against his belly, her ballet-slipper ears pointed towards his toes. If I catch them napping and she awakens, she smiles by blinking her eyes slowly, her lids hooding bright green marbles.

Matilda likes me from a distance. Perhaps it is my rambunctious, puppy-like enthusiasm, or that love to me looks like a full-body hug where no one cares where their limbs land. She prefers I stay across the room, but if I do get close, she'll let me rub her head, or sometimes, slip her fluffy body like a sack over my shoulder. Before she tenses, hops down, her hind legs kicking off out of sight.

I can have this type of relationship with her. I had one like it with my mother. She held me at arm's length, taking me in with her eyes. I couldn't hide anything. She saw what I didn't want to say, where I'd been, what I'd done. Once, I saw my mother holding a baby and didn't recognize her. *Who's that woman?* I thought from the softball field. *My mother doesn't hold things.*

But she did; she told my brother and me that she held us in her mind. I wondered what that could possibly mean. Now that she's gone, I think it's this: She'd rather watch us be free. Giving life to us meant that she could watch us carry out our lives. That was love to her.

It didn't stop me from wanting to cling to her. To touch, to hug. She'd place her arms around me stiffly, but only when I initiated. In the dark movie theater, when she couldn't pull away, I'd

reach for her left hand. It was icy with raised veins bubbling blue, fingers strong as the piano keys she played each day.

In the moments before she died, when her body shriveled, the skin hanging loose and tired, and her breath came in shuddering gasps, I clasped her hand. The left one. When the life slipped out of her, I was there; I was still holding on.