

Address: Sammie

By Nate Sheehan



The cat was gone again. It was a cloudless, windy night and warm too. So every heart who caught a breath of the spring air grew agitated. Every wandering mind taken forward by the wind as it rattled an open window immediately leapt for the mouth of the door. The cat must have been restless too.

If anything like her last excursion, Sammie must have carried her oversized self down White Bear Avenue North. She'll lumber for nine or ten miles, obstructing traffic along the way, resulting in a few accidents, before settling on the shore of Pigs Eye Lake. With an oversized tongue and a frightening mouth (to those who've never gone in before), she'll lick oversized paws that never adapted to concrete. Maybe this time she'll find the energy to leap the Mississippi, greeting the Hispanics on the West Side. Or maybe she'll terrorize Highland Park. In all her laziness and all her might, she could greet F. Scott Fitzgerald or at least his mansion and the museum now attached to it. Two blocks from the cat's lot, Felix sat against a streetlight which shone yellow but sounded blue. His head rested between his knees, but nothing about his body language, the ways his muscles tensed and softened, suggested sadness. Rather, in an inhale, he seemed to be sinking into a calm. Felix was of average height and of average complexion. Upon lifting his head up towards the light, he showed an oval face and slightly juttred chin supporting a blunt he often felt too old for. He exhaled remembering the precision to which he wrapped the paper. His roommates were somewhere round here, up the street maybe, closer to the lot which appeared so bizarrely vacant. They were younger than him, a little more anxious. Felix was not alone under the streetlight. In fact, an entire apartment building stretched for two blocks from Felix to the vacant lot, many of them making phone calls searching for a couch to crash, or in some cases, a hotel.

This is because Sammie was not just an oversized cat, she was an apartment building on St. Paul's East Side who contained affordable studio rooms. Her oversized mouth as a door. Her oversized ears as passages to the roof. She'd lower her head anytime she sensed someone desiring to enter or exit the building. In her belly, apartments stacked one on the other, windows embedded in combed fur. When she disappeared the first time, three days ago, they said the landlords were furious. Now this was the second time she disappeared. CNN laughed. MSNBC brushed past the story. How could an oversized cat be so difficult to keep track of?

The wail of a baby. Felix spotted Triston, the kid's dad, who seemed to have already fixed his stare on Felix. It was one of those awkward gazes that lasted a little too long without acknowledgement. Triston and his wife, Lael, who was comforting the kid, lived happily enough three doors down from him. Given the baby's racket, Felix thought it'd be time to smother his smoke and stand up. He already knew where he was sleeping, so why stay for the circus? But then the baby suddenly went mute. A bright blue binkie appeared, attached itself to 14 pounds and a tiny face that paled in comparison to the pacifier, which sparkled in the cool of the streetlight. Whether it was the binkie or an itch under Felix's armpits to amend that awkward gaze with Triston, he ambled over to the young parents. As he shuffled through the anxious crowd, the binkie disappeared underneath the hood of a baby stroller. His smoke gone; he began to inhale the unease of the distressed voices around him.

Lael, in work and leisure always the liveliest when most exhausted, which always confounded Felix, beat him to –

“Hey! You!” Her voice was a little hoarse but affectionate, confrontational in a way that reminded him of his youngest sister.

Felix smiled brightly, slightly dissociated in his high. He glanced down under the stroller, where the baby appeared already to be asleep, as drugged as his self. He said, “My god, he’s out like it’s nothing.”

The frantic clutter of voices on assorted devices seemed to raise a little louder. Lael laughed airily, “Yeah, no, he sleep like he’s dead once you actually get him there. Has me worried sometime, but I think that just the way he is.”

“Right, right. I think I knew that. I haven’t seen y’all that much--“

“I mean, we’ve been a little busy”, She gestured to the stroller. “And I have ta’ go back to work next week! I *can’t* have Sammie running around. If this don’t get us no deductions from rent this month, ‘huH’ is all I can before-.” She took a breath, “... Thank god Triston’s Ma still in the area. I don’t know where we’d be. We got an uber on the way.”

“I thought she was moving out of East. “

Triston broke his silence. “Oh... yeah... she was planning on pickin’ up and going over to this place in Minneapolis this March, but the house got some issues with the facets. Her agent was bullshitting her.”

Felix paused, a little confused. “I thought she was headed towards Columbia Heights.”

Triston released a hefty sigh. “Oh yeah, she’s looked over there too. She’s got the money. It’s all there. Ya know it’s been *three* years now.... It’s just-- cuh I don’t know. ”

Silence ensued. Felix stared at the ground. Lael cut the air. “Triston, that tone gonna depress the baby. I kin--”

Triston interrupted, “He not hearing anything.”

Lael offered him a threatening stare.

Triston stood up a little straighter. “No, no, you don’t give me that look.”

“What look I’m giving you? You know this is not the time or place to--”

“You’re the one who brought up my tone. How-- ”

A little softer, Lael said, “You’re gonna wake him. When you do, *you* can put him back ta’ sleep.”

A little softer, Triston said, “Yeah, I will. You think I can’t put *my* own kid ta’ bed. You think I’m soo inadequate. This isn’t a good look.... And we’re being rude to Felix who’s... still here.” He turned, “Hi Felix, how you been?”

Felix nodded, “I’m good.”

Lael picked up where Triston left off, “Yeah, and how your sisters doin’. Tell Camilla I been meaning text--.”

“And uh, tell your mom I say hi.” Triston cleared his throat. Lael gave him a strange, slightly amused look.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll do those things.” Felix peaked over the stroller again and was amazed to still find a peaceful unconscious face off in some other world, a bright blue binkie as transport? He was lost for a moment in the bliss the baby must be in and wished for a moment that he wasn’t too embarrassed to ask again for its name. He processed at that moment that like everyone else, all *his* shit was inside that missing cat. A stress in Lael’s voice brought his attention back.

“Now Felix, listen to me, if ya need anything from us, jus’ give me or Triston a call. We’re always happy ta’ help”. Observing Felix’s confused expression, she pointed to her phone, “Our driver says he around the corner... Sorry, I said that out of order. I was jus being friendly. I’m sure you’re fine. It’s jus it’s really tough with Sammie disappearing. ”

“I got it. Yeah it is. I know what you were-- yeah.”

As Felix spoke, Triston, Lael and the baby seemed to evaporate right where they were standing. In silence, Triston lifted the baby from the stroller while Lael folded it. In haste, they weaved through familiar and unfamiliar faces, barely pausing for acknowledgement. They disappeared around the corner onto Montana Ave E. In a gray sedan, they pulled into traffic. They passed by that vacant lot. Behind glass and metal, they sat in absolute silence, a silence so untouchably quiet that the baby would take notice and store some vague memory of it for years, decades to come. Lael would remember this moment too. It would gnaw at her and chew up her insides. It would follow her up and down stairways. Engulfed in the quiet, she trembled unnoticed as she stared out into the illuminated darkness. She would come to think of it as a warning, the world sounding an alarm, but she would never quite figure out what for. It would rest on the tip of her tongue and never leave her. That alarm bell would drift through her head and around her body day in and day out for 43 more years.

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At a steady trot, Sammie was not having it and there is nothing you can do to tell her differently. Three days ago, she didn't return to her lot during her 'breaktime', which, in reality, hardly qualifies as a 'breaktime'. Her hours are egregious and the compensation is second-class. Even when she's given time to herself (all residents must exit the building between 5 pm and 6 pm daily), someone's always watching and managing her. Today she left her lot at around 6:30. She believed a few residents may have even been inside her as she dashed. There was an elderly couple that always liked

to return at 6 on the dot. Sammie figured they were either perfectly fine, injured or dead. She felt assorted furniture shaking around in her belly which made her feel a little sick, but she didn't care. She was free of responsibility.

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Mrs. Klauss had never been inside a moving cat before. After her husband passed, she decided she needed a change of pace and scenery, but the oversized cat was moving faster than her comfort while the window was nothing but a blur. Her new "friend", Albert, had cut his head on one of her nicer lamps. It was from Simon Pierce too. When Mrs. Klauss first invited his lanky and surprisingly upright self into her apartment, she knew Albert would inevitably bump a light fixture, however the speed of his movement as he was flung across the room worried Mrs. Klauss that he could have broken it. Her wrinkled, winter-damaged hands clung to the windowsill. She sat in a kitchen chair, which she managed to shuffle over to the window as Sammie began moving. It was terribly dark, darker than the Arctic in winter. She could imagine she was riding through the subway, the whole world completely blurred except for her little shell. The continuous rattling of her possessions made her feel very small.

A sudden jolt and Mrs. Klauss saw herself take flight across the room, the kitchen chair following not too far behind her in as much in a blur as much as all else. The floor greeted her with indifference. As she landed, a sharp sting of pain jolted through her left hip. A short cry got caught in the dryness of her throat. She immediately knew she could not stand, which was inconvenient. ...

She looked around her knowing that time had passed. She dozed off, she thought. Carefully, she rolled herself onto her other hip, where her view became her mess of an apartment rather than the wall. She turned slightly, tempted to restore her sightline to the wall which did not appear to be in the same disorder as the rest of her home, but something along her left side rejected. This time she gave an audible cry, to which she was startled with a response.

“So you’re awake.”

It was Albert’s baritone, both soothing and irritatingly ironic.

“Yes, and you aren’t dead.”

“I thought I was at first. How bout you?”

“Do you know if you broke the Simon Pierce lamp?”

“The what?”

“The Simon Pierce lamp. The one you hit with your head. Did you break it?”

“No... um, I don’t know?”

“Can you look?”

“I’m afraid I’m just like you. I think I broke my back.”

“Oh. Well can you get an angle on the Simon Pierce from where you are?”

“No, but I can’t really feel anything anyway, so I can see if I can shuffle over.”

Mrs. Klauss heard the distinct groaning of a man who could not move. She was reminded of her husband in a sweet and twisted way.

“Uh... it looks like there’s a crack.”

“You fucking jerk.”

His voice shook, “What!? I didn’t have control over where-- where I was thrown. I was a *ragdoll*. Blame the cat for Jesus sake.”



If the neighbors were next door, they could hear Albert wheezing. He wasn't finished.

"You're-- you're a despicable woman. The Simon Pierce lamp.

"Mrs. Klauss huffed "Well, what do you exp--"

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Felix needed a walk. It was the perfect weather for night. His high faded, which was good in his mind because it was too perfect a night to be somewhere else, in a cloud or otherwise. But it also meant that the franticness of those around him on those two blocks settled in. It filled a pit in his stomach, but then drifted upwards into his chest, tightening and halving his breath so that ultimately that pit remained. Walking through the dark or under a streetlight, no one could have seen that pit or his tightening chest anywhere in Felix's body, except maybe his left hand, which shook slightly in his left pocket.

He half-heartedly fantasized that he'd mindlessly turn down an alleyway he never bothered before and see that damn cat. Felix had never seen her move before. She sniffed at him once and he swore the gust of wind her nostrils produced almost turned his hair into a wig. The bags of groceries he clutched smelled distinctly of cat when he got inside. Of course, some people not used to the oversized creature would tell him his whole apartment smelled of cat. Some people would tell him that *he* smelled of cat. Some kids that smelled distinctly of Edina, fresh cut grass and textured perfumes, would laugh and gossip about where he came from on the METRO.

The air was fresher than rainwater. The wind was desperate to disperse this new breath to every corner of Felix's block and city. His mother would tell him that this

meant that his ancestors were trying to speak to him through the thunder and lightning god, Xob. His father would tell him to listen to Father Merino. His mother agreed. But Felix's mother also told him that he had multiple souls inside his little body that could be drawn out by the Shaman her family saw when she was a little girl, who fled to Laos instead of the United States. His mother said she believed those souls also came to you in times of need, that it wasn't only the Shaman who could find them despite what was said. His father told him to not repeat these things or people would start calling them Baptists or Protestants.

Felix sniffed the wind. He heard no ancestors or did he feel Baptist or Protestant. He looked up from his thoughts and realized he was in somebody else's neighborhood now. He scanned for a street sign but couldn't find any. Across the street, a Dairy Queen perched proudly in all its bright red and pink. A faded sign told Felix it was "Open All Year". A school building rose a little further down the block, which called itself "American Indian Magnet School". He now was orientated. This was Earl St. A loud thump sounded behind him. He almost jumped out of his skin. He turned, squinting for the source of the sound in the dark. He began walking back quickly from the way he came. This must be a hunt for his home. A solution of desperation and desire swirled behind his eyes. A second thump. Were those spirits fluttering in his stomach? Sprinting down 4th street, its intersection with Earl unfamiliar. Huffing as much as his lungs allowed. Passing by little trees on a thin road verge like distance markers. It was the 400. His eyes were wild now and he felt wild. He felt the sweat forming around his forehead. A third thump. Lights. Lights! Up ahead. He needed that extra kick of adrenaline before his heart popped out of his chest. It arrived and he arrived. Upon a lot

covered in dirt, broken concrete and a CAT excavator. The fourth and loudest thump from the excavator into a dump truck.

No cat.

“Fu-,” he began to exclaim, but his breath got caught in his throat. He choked on it and coughed. Bile crept up his throat and he grunted. He gazed at the ground lost, struggling to breathe. His cheeks burned red. He felt dumb, as if the universe hadn’t a single thought for him. Out of the corner of his eye, someone in a hard hat gave him a funny look. A fifth thump. But this time the CAT excavator wasn’t dumping. Felix put his hands behind his head. He sagged his shoulders and began to turn back the way he came. A sixth thump. The CAT excavator still had not moved. The crew began to give each other funny looks. A seventh thump. This time it was the excavator. An eighth thump and Felix noticed its lack of source and decidedly walked away from it. A ninth thump already in the distance, on its way towards the Mississippi. Felix was on his way too.

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Mrs. Klauss was thinking about death. She was thinking about how novel it was. She had never died before. Her husband knew what it was like to die. He died twice. The first time he died, he was skiing. The avalanche punctured his lungs. He was 48. With his neon ski jacket, the paramedics were first to find him.

He had a passion for handmade children’s toys and ran a shop when they were younger. She once found that cute. That shop developed into a moderately successful chain in Central Canada. He sold the business as they approached retirement. None of

their children wanted to deal with toys. And then he had that heart attack when he was 83.

She moved to the United States because the healthcare benefited people like her. She would laugh at the irony if she was physically capable of it. She also had never lived in a cat before. Her friends told her she was adventurous like that. They admired her. Mrs. Klauss hadn't heard from Albert in a little while. He would get quiet like that even with a functioning(ish) back. She wasn't worried. She allowed her eyes to wander the room. The walls were always a palest blue that she had not encountered anywhere else. Her furniture -- mahogany, leather, 'purposeful', richly meaningful and old for the most part -- scattered across her line of vision in painful contrast to the brash, 'cartoonish' wall color. She seemed to have refused to notice the clash of aesthetics before, but in pain or boredom, she became conscious of them now. 'Why the fuck did I move here anyway.' A reek of some sorts drifted over to her side of the room. She couldn't tell if it was shit or death. Someone in her throat growled animalistically and she screamed, "Do you know what you've done, Sammie?!? You've turned me into a fucking--"

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Sammie had never felt so alive. She was a free-range cat now, bouncing between buildings, ducking under trees. The world was so very small. The air was fresh. But maybe it was time to lay down. Maybe it was time to go North where there is next to nobody. But first it was time to lay down. She halted to a stop. She laid down, a loud thump reverberating under the asphalt through the night. She obstructed the entire street. Her tail swung around a telephone line. She daintily lifted her left paw and began

licking. She worked her way up the leg. She was about to begin on her right paw when a different thump sounded a little ways off. Sammie stopped cleaning and perked her ears. Her head slowly swiveled. Her nose quietly sniffed. She was absolutely still. She jumped up. Her own thump. An oversized cat can only be so silent. She moved in silence, however. Her ears rotated like satellite dishes. Her big yellow eyes shone like light beams. She froze. She spotted lights larger than her own eyes beam on an empty lot for the thrum of a construction crew.

She was three blocks over from them. That seemed to Sammie a suitable distance. She sat where she was. She watched them work. One machine dug dirt from the ground while another held that dirt. The machines repeated their actions as machines often seemed to do. While Sammie stared entranced, the lights turned on in the house in front of her. Curtains were drawn from a living room. Cynthia had never smoked once in her life. She wore a light blue bathrobe and an alarmed expression on her square lips, her square eyes and square face. When she was younger, an awkward man once told her that her head looked as if someone beat each side of it with a whack-a-mole hammer until each side was perfectly flat. He said it with such sincerity that she half-wondered if it was an attempt to compliment her, though she had no interest in allowing him to clarify himself.

When Cynthia laid her eyes upon the oversized cat, first she listed everything she ate and drank that day. Once stepping, re-stepping, backtracking and looping through each meal, she considered waking her wife. Never wanting to make a fuss, even over possible delusions, she considered the whack-a-mole hammer theory. After quickly shaking herself out of that strange comment so many years ago, she read the news. She

never knew that that cat on White Bear Ave N was actually capable of moving. Some people were missing their apartment building.

Mathew wandered into the living room in green, dinosaur covered pajamas. He inquired “Why are you awake?”

Before Cynthia could answer, he flunked himself on the couch, taking no notice for the drawn curtains. He always seemed to like to sit at any opportunity.

She said softly, “Have any of your friends or your teachers talked about a missing cat recently?”

“Mama talked about it with me.”

“Yes, well, guess what? She’s right outside our window right now.”

Mathew rushed past Cynthia to that window.

Cynthia smiled, “We’re going to have to call 9-1-1 so someone can pick her up, but I’m going to wake Mama first so she can see her too.”

Careful with her robe, Cynthia trekked the stairs. She made three times the noise she normally would at this hour. She almost laughed. It felt strangely freeing. Like she was floating. With a little more quiet, she nudged the door open to her and Rebecca’s room. She tiptoed to their bed and put her hand on her shoulder.

“Becca, Becca, hey.”

She drowsily mumbled, “What... .”

Her voice raised in excitement. “You know the oversized cat that’s been in the news, it’s on the street... right in front of us.”

“... Not interested.”

“Mathew’s gushing over it.”

She sighed. “Ok... I’ll be there in a moment.”

As Cynthia headed back downstairs, Lael walked up the stairs of Triston's Ma's house. She already moved over a pair of pj's to the guest bedroom, or Triston's old bedroom, after Sammie's first disappearance. She dropped off a toothbrush and some shampoo too. She figured if Sammie could disappear once, she could disappear again. And she did. A part of her seemed to sink into the wood floor every time she was reminded of how right she was. The pjs, the shampoo, the toothbrush, her makeup, conditioner, phone charger. Sabrina, Triston's Ma, was going to sleep with the baby tonight, which was a blessing.

The shades were still open. Lael walked over and moved as if she was a little older than she was, something she'd never allow if she wasn't alone. She stared out the window: a street, streetlights which showed yellow but sounded blue, lines of two-family houses tightly packed and misshapen like a cubist painting. But Lael saw none of these staring out the window. She was transported back into that uber. Lines of people tightly packed and misshapen like a cubist painting, a bizarrely empty hole at the end of it all, a blur of life and anxiety. She looked lost for a moment while her fingers caressed the shade's string, her line to reality. She pulled on it and the window vanished in front of her.

Lael sat on her bed and frowned. Cynthia dialed for the police. Mathew screamed, "Noooooo" and Rebecca held her son to explain that people needed their home. Felix wandered into a house that he knew would provide him something a little stronger. He never did much more than weed before. Lael bit her lip and thought about her baby's future. She thought about the futures she worried he wouldn't have.

"9-1-1. What is your emergency?"

"Hey.. hi... you know the oversized cat... hello?... Hello?"

Cynthia turned to Rebecca, “I think she must have lost connection or something?... ”

Rebecca responded, “Dial again.”

“9-1-1. What is your emergency?”

Cynthia took a breath, “Hey-”

The dull hum of a dropped call permeated what was otherwise silence. Matthew, who was supposed to be back in bed, crept to the top of the stairs.

Cynthia ended the call herself, stopping the hum. She stared at her phone in befuddlement and said to Rebecca, “You call.”

“9-1-1. What is your emergency?” A different voice this time.

“Hi. My name is Rebecca Bengston, a resident of 568 Mendota St. I’m calling to report a sighting of the oversized cat that recently left a few people homeless on East Side... ”

Silence ensued. Finally,

“... Hi Rebecca. Could you please state where you last saw this cat.”

“It’s outside my house right now. 568 Mendota St... St. Paul... obviously...”

“568 Mendota St. And what precisely is the cause of concern regarding this cat?”

“It’s taking up the entire street... and it’s the apartment building that’s gone missing. It’s--”

“Ma’am. I’m going to need you to calm down.”

“Um-- I- I- am calm. I was calm. I-”

“The St. Paul police unfortunately have a lot they’re dealing with at this time, however, we’ll send someone over as soon as they are available.”

“But the cat could move! It could leave any time, it--”



The lifeless hum returned. Neither Rebecca nor Cynthia could look at one another. Their living room grew five or six times in size. The drawn curtain became a gaping hole that needed to be shut, or at least for the sake of Cynthia's and Rebecca's downcast gazes, not so present in the space. A few minutes later, Sammie leapt and sped South down their street. Cynthia drifted to the window and closed the curtain. She proceeded to mount the stairs that she raced up not too long earlier, but now her legs carried extra weights and she couldn't quite explain to anyone exactly why. She collapsed on the mattress while Rebecca remained in the living room downstairs. She found herself a glass of wine and drained it, took another and finished it a little bit slower. She considered a third, but instead pursed her lips and carried her relief back to the fridge. Her gaze settled on brightly colored magnets of letters, fishes and caterpillars. She choked on a smile then sighed. Becca was fairly sure the police would never come, but if she didn't stay up, she knew then Cynthia would. So instead, she'd sleep on the couch. The curls of her hair disagreed with the static of the blanket. It was far too warm for static. She closed her eyes as Felix exited an engagement on bath salts. There were three people he knew in that house and one of them was the right person to get what he wanted.

His name was Derik. Felix told Derik what he wanted and Derik got it for him. Derik watched Felix to make sure he was okay for a bit, but then was quickly drawn to some other end of things. Felix seemed to be doing fine. If Derik returned less than fifteen minutes later, he would've realized Felix disappeared. Felix saw a giant cat peak through the window and decided to chase after it. He giggled and yelled. He called after Sammie and leapt for her tail. The night blurred. He felt like an animal. He felt as if he had exceeded past reality, passed by Usain Bolt. His heart shoved itself in his ears and

pumped so vigorously that he swore the veins running through the side of his forehead popped, allowing his mind to ooze down the side of his cheek and onto his shirt. It was bliss and chaos.

He discovered a singular massive cat hair spread across an intersection, a few blocks over from the continuous thumping of an excavator depositing rubble into a truck. What would those men create? No one would tell him. You didn't hear it from me, but plans were in place to rip up his apartment building too. No one would tell him. Sammie in flight. At that intersection, Felix spotted a house with a large front window, a light still glowing softly under the drawn shade. He thought he had never seen a sight more inviting. He stumbled onto the porch and laid down. The wood was cool at night. He snuggled into the ground. The wind began to sneak down the street. It played with and tossed about Felix's hair. Another loud thump so close he tasted its breath. He rolled over. Then he looked up.