

THE LOT WHERE RED TRUCKS PARK

Pussycats are the nicest animals and they are kept in buildings at the end of dirt roads. Our house has no cats but many boxes. Packratting is something Mom and I do and it does not involve rats at all. If rats were involved we would need a big fluffy few cats.

Many boxes are involved in packratting. There are a lot of small things that must go in boxes when you packrat so you can make more room for more things. Cashiers like my mom work at Winn-Dixie on Highway 54, where the boxes are kept against walls like in my bedroom: stacked high. Boxes are empty when they come home smelling like potatoes and you have to fill them with your dad's things. If you do not do what they say, mothers get angry and their voices shake the windows of your house like loud music down the road in the night.

Nobody comes up the street in red trucks to see us through open windows. Men park red trucks in the dirt lot of the Pussycat Lounge, which if they did not cover the windows of the place with black paint like boxes-on-high or keep the door stacked shut, the pussycats would escape and run up our road. Mom says cats like to knock over high-stacked boxes. I wait in the road for cats to escape but they must see my green shirt and think I will tear a hole in their collar too.

Men do not packrat though they have many things to go in boxes. If your dad comes back to get his things it will be when hell freezes over. If your dad comes back boxes will turn to ice cubes. Cats will come to crack ice and shatter in the dirt road like windows of red trucks in the night.

It is hell hot outside. It is too hot for shirts, so my dad left all his in the closet and now they are in boxes in my bedroom stacked against the

wall. That would be a good bed for cats. My dad sleeps in someone else's bed and men knock up pussies, but you can only learn that from eavesdropping, which is easy because there are many things in the house to hide you. Many plates stack on shelves and pretty porcelain angels sometimes shatter when you bump them over or voices shake loud.

There are two easy ways to eavesdrop. The first is you cup your ear like you are about to hear a secret and press it against the wall next to the bookcase of old records. Most of the time you do hear a secret and you say aha to nobody. You could tell cats aha if you had them. The second way is you crawl more than walk in the back bedroom where boxes stacked crack the ceiling and you pick up the second phone. I am not even a baby and I still crawl faster than walk around boxes. You must hold your breath when you pick up the phone and be very quiet. I am very quiet.

I can hold my breath for almost a minute underwater. When Dad used to sleep in Mom's bed he took me to a pool and timed me. Aha, he said, almost a world record. My dad's watch is the nicest thing he has. He got it from Granny. Mothers give children nice things and I am waiting. My dad's silver stopwatch is not in a box. It is not on a shelf. One day Mom snatched it and threw it toward the trees across the road. It was like a flying saucer. It was the nicest flying saucer to ever come to Elfers, Florida. It landed in the dirt and Dad chased after it. Like a dog, Mom said.

All men are dogs. That is why they chase after pussycats and knock them up into high trees where dust stacks.

Carly is my babysitter. I am not a baby, I tell her. Many high school girls have come



here to babysit me, but none are cheerleaders like Carly. She does air splits in the front yard. They are the nicest air splits Elfers has ever seen. They might slice the day into night and that is why the sky turns red like it bleeds. Sometimes she jumps so high I think she will be knocked up into the trees like a pussycat. Or like dust, she will hide in the trees then come back and settle on the road and collect underneath my nails. Then I will dig the dirt of her out with my teeth and let the mud slide down in me, so that I have Carly in me. I will have clean nails. I will be just like her inside and cats will come see me because I am so nice.

When I try to do air splits I get a pain in my right side groin. Carly says girls don't have groins. You just pulled a muscle. So I sit and watch her split air and listen to Poison come out of her car stereo. Mothers warn never to drink from bottles under the sink because they are poison. Even if poison smells like the pine trees across the road it will kill you. I tell Carly that Poison is killing me. Her car windows shake like stacked plates.

The music is so loud it will scare the cats away, I say.

There's never any cats around here, she says.

What do you mean? There's a whole building of them right up the road.

Oh, she says, I forgot.

Then she holds her knees like she's been poisoned but she laughs. She can't stack high like boxes when she laughs so hard her voice's ceiling cracks. What is so funny? Is it the screen door that hangs like cats knocked it down? Do the clouds look like white rats swimming across the sky?

My green shirt tans with dust. The wind has come up and there is too much dust. It wants to choke me. It wants to spit birds through the air like they are Winn-Dixie plastic bags.

Carly says to hurry-get-inside. She puts up the car windows so they can shake off the dust. She turns off the music. The silence settles in our hair and lips and far off there is music play-

ing for the pussycats in their building. It is the nicest sound like being underwater.

If you close your eyes you can pretend you are in a pool. You can do this in your one swimsuit even. Girls like us shouldn't wear swimsuits around the house though. What if men in red trucks drove by?

Cheerleaders like Carly feel cramped in our house because they need room to air out their splits. Carly doesn't like boxes. When we play Sorry boardgame in the kitchen she stares at boxes like they are a bunch of right side groins.

She says, I mean how would you know what all this stuff is anyways let alone why your mom needs it?

It's valuable possessions. Don't you have stuff too?

Yeah.

Do you have a cat?

We have three cats.

Did you get them from that building?

No. That building has no cats.

Are you sure? Let's go there and I'll show you.

No, okay? There's no cats there. It's full of women. Nasty nude women with tape over their nipples.

Where did you learn to do an air split like this, the type that kicks your foot high toward Carly's face? Cheerleaders are very good yellers. They almost shake windows. They stack words up so you cannot reach them and you are very quiet. You are very quiet. You whisper Sorry. You mouth Sorry. You pick up the pieces of Sorry and put them in the Sorry box. You go to your bedroom and get into bed with dust still on you and pretend to sleep.

When mothers come home babysitters like Carly tell them you had a bad day and are sleeping when you aren't. You just have your eyes closed pretending. When you open your eyes, there is only black because boxes stack so high they block the moon.

Packratting is something you do while having conversations. Moms like mine, who talk on the phone to many people, like to have conversations. You can talk about babysitters.

What did you do to this one? mothers will ask.

She told me there's no cats.

What did you do to her though?

I didn't do anything she didn't do first.

What? mothers will scream. Did she touch you?

No. She did not.

What did she do to you then?

Mothers don't like it when you ask them why a woman would wear tape over her nipples. My mom doesn't wear tape over her nipples. I've seen her breasts many times and they are the color of fresh eggs before you crack them on the edge of a black iron frying pan. The dust that sweeps off the dirt road to swallow your face and how your mother's hair moves in front of the fan when the sun sets like an orange dropped from your backyard tree are the color of fresh breasts too.

Conversations are better with tea or if you had a cat, you could let the cat sit on your lap and rub its collar. Mothers heat tea-water in a kettle and when it whistles you should run in and take it off the burner. Mothers forget a whistling kettle. Mothers scream and you cannot take them off the burner. Their eggs fry and their water boils. You must wait for hell to

freeze over.

You should wait outside, so your eardrums don't crack like the lot where red trucks park. Outside dust moves up and down and into your mouth, so it can settle in your bones and it is all that matters. Girls like us are all dust because we live on dirt roads.

Since there is nothing left today but the sky that spits blood across itself as night splits from day, no one notices that I am at the back door of the Pussycat Lounge. I don't know to go inside or lay down in the back of a red truck and wait for men to knock pussies up into the trees and I will catch hold of a tail and go where the cats take me.

I open the back door and walk inside. There are no cats here. Many boxes stack like at home or at Winn-Dixie and you know how to crawl around them. You crawl toward a hallway which must lead to cats. Two women in silk robes lean against each other at the end. They must scare the cats with their bony limbs. How can they feed the cats if they can't feed themselves? They hug each other with arms like drumsticks and you know you shouldn't be watching. It is like the time your mother wrapped her arms around you as your dad unstacked plates and threw them like Frisbees in the midnight kitchen.

You wait by the lounge's back door. It does not hang crooked. Music plays and shakes the walls, the floor, the boxes stacked. You are very quiet. You cannot see them but the men in red trucks laugh and hoot like night birds perched in high trees. Any minute the cats will come out, when they get used to your smell. You know this because the boxes now are purring. ☑

