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# "Grandmother's Thousand Cats," "Boys on Winter Palominos"

Walt McDonald

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# Two Poems

WALT McDONALD

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## Grandmother's Thousand Cats

Grandmother majored in French and Latin  
and raised cats. She numbered them,  
digits in the French tongue lovely,  
and they purred. After Grandfather's horse

tossed him off in a storm, she taught college,  
the oldest bachelor of arts on the faculty.  
Her students liked her cats, learned French  
by riding to the ranch for practice,

counting her cats *deux, trois*, and grooming mares.  
My mother met my father there, branding calves  
for his mother, the ranch Grandmother  
left them, cats and a thousand cows.

Mother teased she taught him the tongue  
so he'd feed kittens, more than a hundred  
when I was born. He let them prowl, squeezed  
milk to their mouths from teats of cows.

When my children were toddlers, he lined them up  
like the last cats in the barn, tongues out,  
giggling and squinting, my father  
squeezing warm streams to them all.

## Boys on Winter Palominos

We sharpened icicles like assassins,  
milking the tips like teats to make them melt,  
sculpting ice daggers with our hands  
until they ached. Grandfather's leaky barn  
dripped like a grotto in blizzards,

cows' heat melting the snow to ice.  
The dark loft dangled stalactites  
five feet long and thicker than our necks  
Most crashed to the floor when we whacked them,  
but the best made lances, so heavy

we staggered. Daggers strapped to our coats,  
Eddy and I galloped around the corral  
on imaginary palominos, cousins  
hugging the butts of lances longer than us,  
Quixotes before we had heard the word.

Our fathers were off on battleships  
or islands in World War Two, but we were boys  
with movie ranches to rescue. Most icicles broke  
when we stumbled, or jabbed them hard  
at the barn to get at the bad men,

bank robbers barricaded, whiskey-drunk  
on rotgut and firing wildly. When lances broke,  
we dropped them and charged the barn,  
grabbing slippery knives and whooping like savages,  
leaping at shadows crouched behind the stalls.