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Two Poems

Ruth Fainlight

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Two Poems

RUTH FAINLIGHT

Animal Tamer

You would have made a good animal tamer —
I can tell by the way you're taming the wild black cat
that appeared last week at the bottom of the garden.
Every morning she comes a little further.
I watch how you go outside with a saucer of milk
and put it down as if you didn't care,
but each day move it an inch nearer the door.

The black cat's glaring eyes have a baffled look.
There's something about you she cannot understand.
You've activated her curiosity.
But still she crouches watchful under the bushes
until you glance away and fuss with your pipe,
and then she dashes across and gulps and laps,
the fur round her neck bristling with suspicion,
peering up at you several times a minute,
relieved and yet puzzled by such indifference,
as though she missed the thrill of flight and escape.

Today, for the first time, you turned. I watched you stare
at those yellow, survivor's eyes and the cat stare back
a moment before she swerved and ran to safety.
But then she stopped, and doubled round and half
gave in, and soon, as I know well, you'll have
that cat, body pressed down on the earth, ecstatic,
stretching her limbs, and completely at your mercy.

Terra Incognita

A day that makes me feel I've lived already long enough — almost forever; with nothing else especially to wait for; as though I've had as much as anyone can have, both good and bad: a day it would not even matter if the coming few decades (the most to hope for) were to be erased from my allotted tally. Is this a fear of what portends, or recognition of a lucky fate?

What chafed, the bonds' constraint, was my support. I never realised the cords I strained to break were safety nets. Failure can change into success of sorts, perhaps. My perseverance led to just this place. I must admit the paradox.

And yet I'm left in an absence of faith so absolute that any suppositious future mocks the prospect of change: awareness which moves far beyond the spiralling, recurrent plunge into despair — terra incognita —

nor, on this calm, soft, perfect autumn day, lets me forget winter's worst storms still have to be faced.