

The cats are complaining that they're not getting into the story often enough. As if all things, birthday parties, and turkey by the plate load, stories and everything wonderful needs to have some cat involvement. Well okay, let's go with the mountain lion. After all I got a road out there in the far hills geography named after the big cat, Mountain Lion Road up from Black Horse Creek and around two bends from Bald Hill where I feel confident to say the ravens spend a good part of their day protecting anything they see as theirs.

Mountain Lion Road was a dirt road switchback, leading uphill in a dense forested area. Normally I pass by along a lower fire road and Mountain Lion Road comes down on an away angle in front of me, a steep angle, thick with brush, and I have no idea what might be coming down and would eventually come out onto my road, up in front of me by less than a hundred yards and so it did one early morning. There was still fog clustering in the redwood tops but as it was after six thirty in the morning, the light was bright, and I'd taken off one whole layer, and would soon take off most everything except a tee shirt and such. I bundled up for the hillside, cause of the poison oak but on the old roads, many overgrown and seldom visited, on these I'd strip down. The heat gathers strength quickly.

As I move along in no big rush, I hum to myself, fill my noodle brain with music, thereby eliminating any thoughts of danger or fear. I'm kinda like a rolling jukebox. A.M.I., Amy we used to call it, tunes from the outside world. So I'm going and suddenly right in front of me stepping out onto my road, not even looking back, was this big animal, like a Great Dane, big-boned and skinny and tall and intent on its task, eyes down. I had two thoughts simultaneously. What's a big dog doing out here? Look at the size of that tail. That ain't no dog. The tail swept down to the pine needle road then bent up a wee bit. Holy cow, that's a cat. That's no dog and Christ, I'm probably doomed right here. This stuff passes in a flash. I haven't taken another step. I stand frozen. I don't even blink. The cat is moving leisurely on up the road ahead of me. He, I figured it must be a male, is studying the long grasses and fern clusters along the side of the road ahead of me. We're under a tall redwood canopy and there is much forest debris on the road, which goes up a slight hill, and the cat moves silently and I go nowhere. I stand right where I am, looking at the bend up ahead, that the cat is approaching, slowly. If the cat goes around the corner, what should I do? Run away? But I've slugged it out for almost two hard hours to get where I am and I don't feel like running back. Yet, once he goes around the corner, I'm not going to know where he is. Right now the cat is checking the shrubbery for mice or snakes and he's takin' his time about it. The cat pauses, steps in the ferns for a moment, snoops around and re-enters the road, still heading away from me. I'm still. I haven't blinked for six minutes. My eyes are dry. There's a burr in my sock. I don't know why he hasn't turned around. He's not blind. I can see that. He moves in and off the road, searching with eyes that can see. Maybe he's deaf but I'm quiet. The blue jay's making all that racket but not me. I'm one of the pair of Gilbert and George, the British performance artists whose gig is statuary work. They pose stark still for hours at gallery openings. That's me Gilbert or George. Man, I am standing still and I'm trying to make an art of it. My audience, if I fail, if my chops are not up to British public school standards, if expensive wine is hurled at my performance, if I fail this piece and my audience turns around before the bend in the road, turns as I would, the thought that I might have missed something titillates, if I am the bad actor, in another guy's bad story,

his bad dream, where I appear as a jackass out in the woods, thinking he's a jukebox and death meanders down a switchback, and in this bad guy's bad dream, this big cat decides to internalize some music it finds on the trail . . . A rare moment the cat thinks, a bit of a walk to stretch the old limbs, perhaps find a couple of mice along the way, mice being late sleepers. Night work keeps them up. A little walk, a few mice, and oh lucky day, there's a jukebox. Seems frozen to the ground. I'll pop over there and liberate the music. Play the jukebox. Punch in A19, that's Aretha Franklin. Now why do I remember that?

Well he doesn't turn around. He meanders around the corner and is gone from my sight. I don't move. I've booked this hall for an hour and I'm getting my money's worth. I do not even sit down. I watch the bend and begin to think, what's next? He could tire of this walk and decide to return. That was my next thought. I take two long leaps off the road to the one side, where I take a seat amongst the ferns and look around for an escape route, if I even get to that advanced point. But no cat comes. The sun climbs. The heat builds. Time is passing and I've got to move on. But I measure my pace. And if I got three or four senses that operate out of my fingertips and other extremities, they're all working on high alert. The four and twenty blackbirds' call went out. Christ only knows who's on the trail now and moving about, expectations filling the Easter baskets, out with the chocolate bunnies, in with the fortune. That's my mantra. A carrot draws me towards the fateful bend in the road. Whew, what if this big bastard has decided to give himself a good cleaning? As an aside, an acknowledgement from the pet cat on the bed behind me as I type this out. The cat behind me says, yes, cleaning yourself is good and a good ear scratch is necessary. But I do not think, if there is a big cat cleaning itself just behind this bend, that ear work is going to be part of the ceremony of introduction. But as any poor schnook knows, I doodley do, what I muddily must, till I bodily bust. A line from an old pal but it has the stupid ring of truth. I have to go around this bend ahead of me. I have to assume the cat went on along the way it was going and I have to assume that enough time has elapsed where he'll be somewhere else. Perhaps on another switchback, one free of jukeboxes and British art practitioners. And there was no one. The road ahead was empty but had quite a few quick little bends. It was now impossible to see ahead very far. I had no idea where he was but I went ahead. I never saw him again. Don't know where he went. Have no clue. Did not look for him. Emptied my head of jukebox and got to the jobsite within the hour, a seasonal best for that time of year.