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## Midnight Pancakes

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## McQuerry: Midnight Pancakes

### MIDNIGHT PANCAKES

Claire McQuerry

That was the summer you carried me  
from sleep into the humid solarium, stars appearing  
through the glass ceiling, and at our feet,  
in a box, the smell of blood and slick fur, as Old  
Cat fought to release the last of her litter. We waited

with the voice of the river outside,  
and when this last one came, head first, and then  
all at once, the color was almost  
transparent. It took a flashlight  
to see the tiny heart and lungs shuddering  
against the kitten's wet chest. *This one was born  
inside out* you whispered, more to Old Cat  
than to me, lifting the thing into a clean towel.

Alone, I could almost see the cricket noise  
around me, like the sparkles from Fairy  
Godmother's wand in the *Cinderella*  
movie. Old Cat began purring, pulling  
the rest of the litter against her warm  
belly. When you came in again from the night,  
the towel empty, I said nothing, having imagined  
there were myriad things you could fix.

We went back to the house, the bright  
kitchen, where the little radio, always white with  
dust and spilt flour, played late night jazz. You made  
pancakes, while I sat on the counter—the first  
shadow of knowing that every new thing  
carries a death somewhere inside it. I ate those  
pancakes hot, straight from the pan; they did not,  
and never would taste, again quite the same.