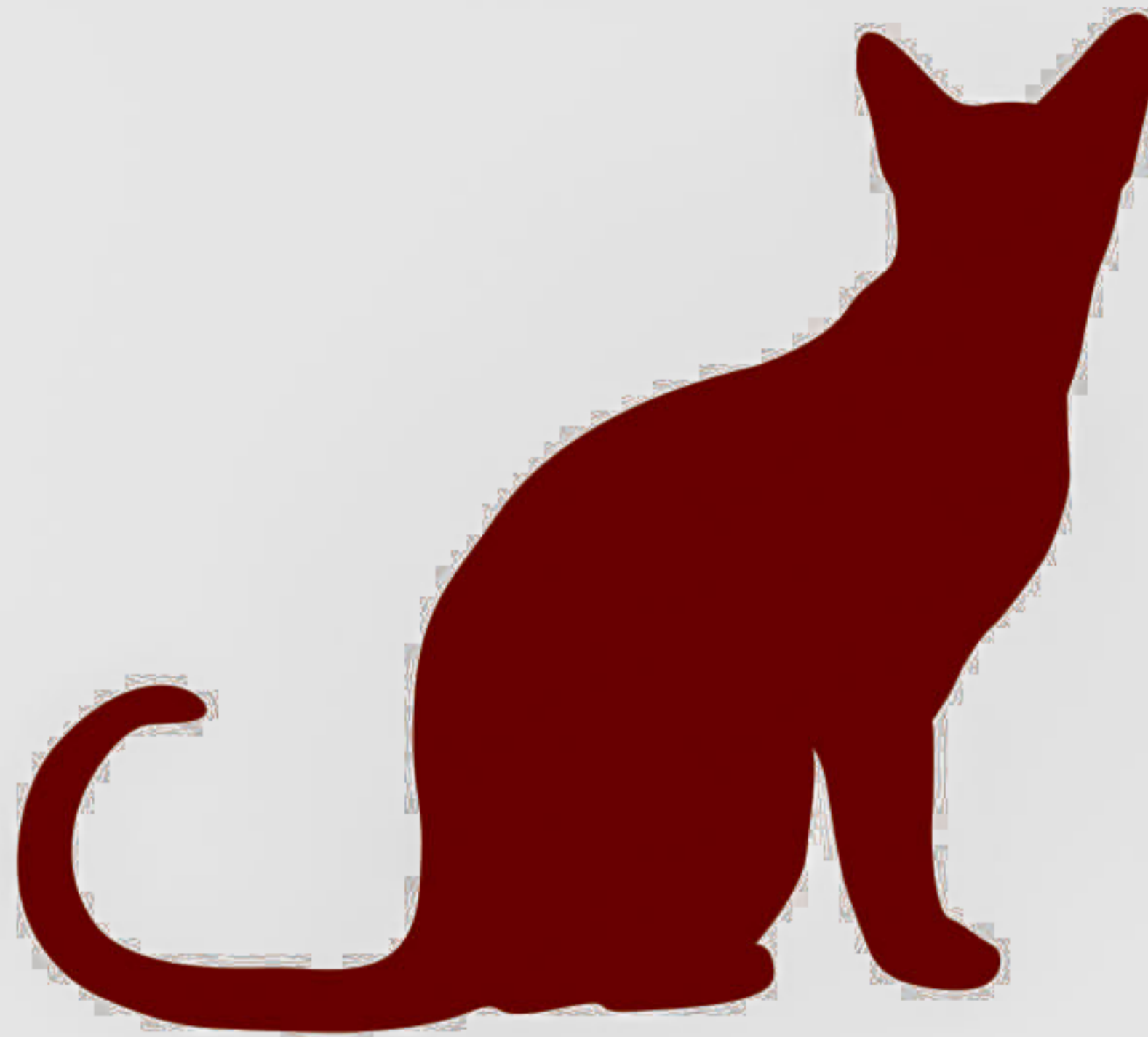


MURIAL



SHREYOSI ENDOW

I named my cat Murial, mainly because it rhymed with burial and the first time I saw her, she was scraping away at some dead leaves underneath the skeletons of an old oak, and they were lowering my grandaunt's coffin into the grave. I am not really the ideal funeral person- I couldn't just stand there amidst all of them in pretty black dresses and suits and weep while they were burying the remains of someone I held so close to my heart, and Murial was a good distraction. I bet she hadn't eaten in days, for I had never seen a cat so bony, and there were patches with no fur here and there and a deep red, almost oozy wound a little above one of her paws. I had to bring her home.

It's funny what a bit of fish and milk can do to a cat, for Murial had grown to be this curvaceous (yes, I called my cat curvaceous) lady with luscious red brown hair. She had also grown to be terribly clingy, almost like one of my psycho ex-girlfriends, but I loved her. There was a difference. She'd wait for me at the windowsill every morning next to her bowl for her breakfast. She'd greet me with the softest purr when I'd wake up, she'd drink her milk both gracefully and gratefully and then she'd see me off at the door when I left for office. She'd be a good girl for as long as the neigh-

bour looked after her, and she'd wait at the garage door when it was time for me to come back. I kept her waiting all night many times, when I myself was drowning in things I'm not proud of, with people I don't talk to in broad daylight. I'd come back home to find her asleep outside in the cold. Poor kitty.

Her wound did not look up though. Neither did my job. Or my personal life. Don't get me wrong, I had a pretty good job at one of the leading architecture companies in London and I became pretty popular wherever I went. But everything seemed meaningless at times, I didn't feel the same way about designing buildings the way I did when I had started out. I blamed the London clouds, those thick, black clouds that loomed above my head everywhere I went. I wished someone could just scoop me out of my dull office to a wooden attic overlooking the Eiffel Tower. Now that's what I called inspiration, that'd be a good muse. Murial would be there with me though. She had to be there.

She would turn into this totally different cat every time I brought a girl home. I remember the first time Stacy came over, she began scratching at the mattress like a maniac and soon all that was left of my bed was cotton balls, feathers, fur and drops of blood from her wound. Stacy and I had bandaged her paw together in the couch. Stacy talked about how

Murial reminded her of the cat she had when she was a teenager. It was a Scottish breed and pure white. She even went on to show me its picture on her phone. I aww-ed. Murial groaned.

Stacy left the next morning with scratch marks, and Murial plummeted into this state of depression and guilt. It was just the bed, I thought. She was exceptionally apologetic every time she had caused any harm, and that was one of the things I liked about her. But her sadness remained for way too long, like black clouds after monsoon which I absolutely hated. She became annoyingly lazy, and didn't even bother to greet me in the mornings anymore. I wondered if Stacy had scarred her for life. It was obviously not what she thought it was.

I realized Murial was going blind the day I put three huge chunks of salmon on her bowl and she didn't even stir. She sniffed the air for a while, but seemed unbothered. This was why she didn't greet me in the mornings anymore, this was why when I'd come back from office after a long, tiring day of listening to my boss say how irresponsible I was becoming, she didn't jump on my lap and lick my hands. Because she couldn't see me!

My neighbour complained about how Murial would scream the whole time she was at her house these days. She chased her with a broomstick when she ran all over her mahogany furniture. Murial

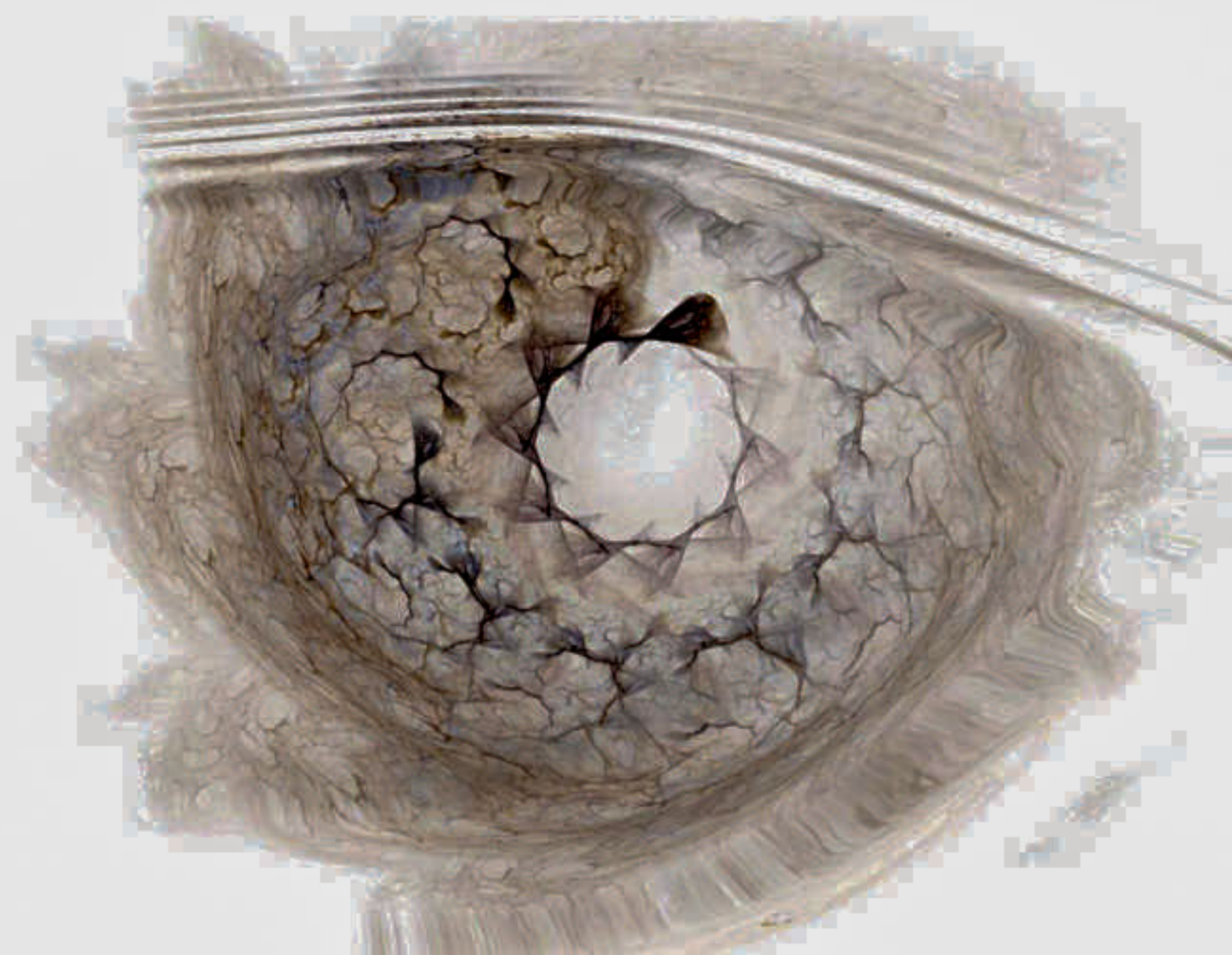
couldn't run. Her wound had spread to the rest of her leg; she must've been in so much pain. I couldn't trust her with the old hag anymore. I took a few, well maybe not a few, but some days off from work, and gave her company. She didn't seem to notice me round the house though, even when I gave her an extra bowl of milk, even when I threw her favourite red ball towards her so that we could play, even when I rested my head against the softness of hers and bawled my eyes out. She was becoming so inactive I'd be lucky to see her move even once a day. One night, I sat next to her and videotaped her while she slept, waiting for her to wake. When she did, I had already set out three bowls of milk. I caught her eating on camera. I would need something to hold on to in the days to come.

They said time healed everything. It didn't. She had a year and the wound had spread to her other legs. We went back to the graveyard the morning her breathing had started to slow down. The oak was bare again, and the ground beneath full of dead, brown leaves. And we sat there for hours, just the two of us and witnessed three burials. And when the graveyard was empty again and the sky went orange as the sun set, Murial began to whimper. Her breathing slowed. And it slowed. And it slowed.

STORMY-EYED

ZOHEB MASHIUR

Thunder-witch.
Her voice splits the sky
When she sings her song
That'll tempt the wind
To lay down upon her,
Send his billowing strength
Howling through pale flesh
And her bones older than
The black country beneath her pretty feet.



He leaves her stormy-eyed,
Through lightning lashes
Her eyes crack like whips upon
The flesh of the now,
Her spells leave red flay-marks
That lay Time's secret flesh bare.
The future is soft fruit and her mouth is hungry.