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Milking the Morning
William Barnes

The cat wastes not a second staking his claim
when milk caulks the floorboards.

To the flits of his tongue, she counts
as though she'll eventually reach an answer.
Paper towels—no. Another pint—no. Time—
she has poured so much into
weighing the worth of her floor,
of herself through the lens
of crude men, and
of a life spent laboring

to not live. Time,
through the clock's restless hands,
is pooled at her feet come night;
the days slip away.

She looks to the cat for salvation.

Falstaff. What is this mess to you?

He peeks at her, a glint of white in his eyes
like a claim to a dime in the street;
a gateway to cheap pleasures and praise.

Stupid. She knows she is worth more
and that the both of them have festered
enough by the hundredth lap of his tongue;
by the hundred odd hairs lost to the grain
made two by the sun.

Let's make this quick. She kisses the cat's brow and leaves him
to finish his meal, lurches
to the door with another scratch on her cheek, and goes
to feast on men again, without having eaten herself,
to make ends meet.