

ANNE LE DRESSAY

The Cat Does Not Know

The cat does not know she is going to die.

When I first encounter that statement in my reading,
I look at the cat with amazement. The cat does not know
she ever was not.

She knows enough past to be familiar with every inch
of this apartment within her reach, and to know me,
and any person she meets frequently enough.
She knows enough future to hide when she hears
the footsteps of the person who brings the dreaded
vacuum cleaner every second Tuesday,
and to be upset when I come home late.

She lies on the windowsill with her paws
tucked against her chest. She meditates
upon sunshine, wind, and the quick movements
of squirrels or birds. She meditates upon food and drink
and the texture of afghans, upholstery, and pillows.
She does not meditate upon last things.

The cat does not know she is going to die.
To know that is my work, like knowing
I will die. Even the decision turns out to be mine
about the time and place and manner
of her last heartbeat.

Because I am the one
with self-consciousness. I open and close
the doors in her life—the door to a room,
or the apartment, or the cat carrier. I decide.

The cat does not know she is going to die.
She draws her last breath, and I think,
*Does she know now? Or does this come
like sleep?*

She lived and does not. She did not
philosophize
—and I who do
can only speculate on the nature of what and how
she knew
and did not know.

