

NOT MY CAT

My cat has no hat.
He once lived right here.
But now he is elsewhere,
not lost, just unclear.

I posted online,
then printed a stack
of missing cat posters
I taped and thumbtacked.

Messages came in.
Sightings were plenty.
But none were my cat.
Not one. Not any.

A woman with soup
on a faraway stoop
sent a message: "He's here...
he just jumped in my coop!"

I peered at the photo.
A good-looking chap.
But I sighed once again:
"My cat takes no nap
in a coop, in the rain,
in a yard over there.
He walks with the wind
and avoids every snare.
His map is made
of scent and air."

Two girls at a taco bar
called me to say,
"He danced in a hat
across the greenway!"

We met. They were giggling.
I saw where I sat.
I bit into my taco.
"Not him," I said. Flat.

Then I heard my words echo,
The rhyme circling back.

Was I just a verse
in a tale that talks back?

A neighbor found cats
on his porch in a pile.
“Not mine,” I replied,
but I stayed for a while.

We posted their photos,
each tail and face.
Then someone replied
with unusual grace:

“Those are McConaughey’s.
He’s out of town.
They slipped from the gate
and wandered down.”

Even movie star cats
can vanish and stray.
They nap on new porches.
They too slip away.

I once thought him mine,
a bold little friend.
But love isn’t kept,
and it doesn’t depend
on collars or fences
or bowls on the floor.
He knew other places.
He opened more doors.

Was I his? Was he mine?
What strange human claim,
to label, possess,
to give shape and name.

But cats are not ours.
They come and they go.
They follow the wind.
They sleep in the snow.

And though I still ache
from the space where he’s not,
my heart has been widened
by all that he taught:

To see without owning,
to care without cage,
to grieve, and still marvel
as he walks off the page.