



## //LIMITING//

A cascade of rain that strikes metal and storm drains. Cars rush down the street, tires colliding with pools of oil slicked water that erupt into waves. It's all a thunder in my ears as I trudge through the cold night, water splashing on my boots. Phantom neon lights shine in my downcast eyes, reflecting off the dark-wet concrete - the ghost of nearby signs.

A familiar alleyway is a welcome moment of respite from the noise and rain. I pause under an overhang for a cigarette and watch the narrow passage. The torrent of rain is lessened, too many obstacles above. The sound of cars and crowds diminished, too much distance. Instead, a cat dives from a fire escape into a dumpster with a crash. Rustling, then hissing, and another leaps out. Off into the night it goes.

I pull a torn envelope from my pocket, stained with acidic rain. Another drag from my cigarette and I consider it again.

*Tired or just Lonely? There's nothing wrong with both. Don't you think this all feels so ghostly?*

*You can trust us. Our word is not without oath. Let us cure you of that infected pus.*

*This twisted mind. We all have our needs for growth. Let us help you become defined.*

*The clinic is what you need. Don't succumb to that loath. We will help you feed.*

Tired or lonely, I'm just sick. The cat follows suit as I step into the rain. It slinks along, parallel to me, watching.

"Are you tired or lonely?" I ask. "Or are you just sick?"

The cat lets out a shrill meow, a cry for food that I have little of but still I'll share. I want to believe it has an answer for me. So when it gets close, tempted by synthetic food filled with corporate toxins, I scoop it up.

"We don't have to be tired or lonely." I say. "And maybe you don't have to be sick."

## //RELEASING//

A dim apartment, a sink of dirty dishes, an ashtray filled to the brim. My door slides shut and I drop my new companion into the home that it did not ask for. It explores, searches, slinks, and seeks. Ultimately, it claims my bed. No longer tired or lonely. We are still just sick.

I consider the letter one last time, running my fingers over the rough paper.

"Lonely, us, mind. Ghostly, pus, defined." I say. "Why should I trust? What need must I feed?"

I set a plate of cold meat delicately separated from spaghetti onto the floor. I hope my feline friend accepts the offer to feed.

I look around, and what do I see? Sorrow and pity, this bitterness eats at me.

Leaking pipes hide in my walls. All of these secrets, revealed by mold. Have I just devolved?

An alley cat, so accepting of a new life. Its claws are like a knife.

Maybe that's why it doesn't fear. Maybe that's why I do.

*We will help you feed.* It rolls in my mind, making me internally bleed.

Lonely or tired, I'm just sick. There's nothing to feed, just a cure I need.

I fall on my knees, and my alley cat friend comes to me. Not focused on her need to feed, but to seek comfort with me.

She rubs against my outstretched hand, then paws at it with demand. I scoop her to me once again, and feel her warmth fill my veins. She nestles in and drifts to sleep, something I know won't come - it's always been cheap.

## //BECOMING//

A long night well spent. An unexpected friend lying with me. Her food long since eaten and her own space taken, but the catharsis of connection lasted longer than the few hours we shared. My home feels brighter, my tasks written down in my mind. I can trust myself, an oath so defined. I step onto my balcony and my friend escapes with me. She hops to the ledge and sits so pretty. I pull out a cigarette and consider the rain. A city so dark, lit by an artificial din. Neon ads and streaking headlights are all I could see. But now there's more, a haze that's been lifted. Connection so sweet, I'm hungry for more.

I consider the letter one last time. I press my spent cigarette, still aflame, into the paper.  
And watch the flames  
Spread from the center  
I am no longer tired or lonely  
My sickness was alienation  
And connection was the cure  
A society built on loneliness  
Has a need to feed  
On our own need  
To explore, search, slink, and seek  
Finding another and others  
What a sickness they spread  
But connection is the cure  
It's not just in our head