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### **Snowflake, the Cat in a Drawer**

After dinner, my Uncle  
Mark leads us down  
to the spring house,

a small shelter on his  
five-acre property,  
the pond-side structure

in which my cousins  
and I spent whole years  
making jokes at a table

with the video camera  
turned on. It's my dad  
and me with him,

my dad who used to  
wake early by habit  
and not just on the days

when I'd peek out  
from my sleep-filled bed  
and see him

hauling away cut trees  
in summer and lifting  
tall shovelfuls

of snow after a winter  
blizzard, my dad whom now  
I feel the need to warn

about the driveway's ice, who  
appears more frail each time  
I see him, when it's clear

the Parkinson's has burrowed  
more deeply in,  
my dad about whom,

at the party the next day,  
my cousins will speak  
as if he is already

a black-and-white photo  
revered, then forgotten,  
in a worn frame on the wall.

“In the old days, Uncle Joe  
would have,” I hear them  
say again and again, reminded then

of how I married too late to procure  
one of Dad’s famous speeches,  
how he stood instead with a glass of beer

shaking in his hand, my brother  
holding the microphone, to say a word,  
a blessing, maybe seven words,

all he could manage. But now  
he’s managing, not even irritated  
by his daughter’s warnings,

the illness having rendered  
him patient, humble, kind,  
reflective in ways he probably

always was but I didn’t see,  
as we were, together, caught up  
in the fast that life seemed

to ask of us, needing to get  
somewhere more than  
just be.

Now no matter how  
slowly we move,  
we know where we’ll

end up: at the cold,  
open door of the spring house,  
where Uncle Mark has

what he says is a gift for us  
to see, my cousin’s son’s homemade  
science experiment, a creature found:

a dead cat my uncle calls Snowflake,  
who once prowled the property,  
was hit by a plow, and for the winter,

preserved above ground.  
He pulls out the old  
cabinet's wooden drawer.

"Isn't it beautiful?"  
Uncle Mark asks us,  
his signature grin on his face,

as the three of us  
stare at the half-furred  
skeletal body of the petrified cat,

who from its expression  
makes abundantly clear  
that, despite entering

into a fatal battle with  
a force a hundred times  
its size, it didn't go down

without a fight. We see its resolve  
in its bared teeth, its wrecked jaw,  
nose of bone, in the hollow sockets

of its wild, unblinking, absent eyes.