

THE STRAYS

On the deck, leaning over it, hose in hand,
I spray roses below, expecting birds there
To hip-hop on mats of dead leaves and dry sand.

Strange, that today, no finches take to the air.
Then, movement beneath pink buds off to the right.
The crinkle sounds too big for birds, so I stare.

Curious, I un-grip the nozzle held tight.
Spots of white can be seen under the leaves.
Yet, ivory roses don't grow at that site.

Distracted by bees abuzz in the eaves,
I nearly miss -- the hiding baby cat!
Do dappled shade and green shadows deceive?

Sounds like four feet, and more, going pat-pat-pat.
One more paw, then two, then three white sets show.
Next comes big meows from the cat who begat.

Her paws broad and gray, tail curled as a bow,
Mama Cat comes forth, with her pint-size twin.
They stretch and slink, long and low, as if to go.

How long since Mama's last meal has it been?
She flops down, kittens nurse, each neatly squeezed.
Beneath her black stripes, Mama's tummy is thin.

"Where are you from?" I ask, secretly pleased.
Two weeks past, my old cat died while asleep.
Old Gray's work, I muse, as I hear a small sneeze.

In sequence they tire and fall into a heap.
Turns out, they're all living under the house.
How many little "shes" and "hes" shall I keep?

Soon, Mama will teach the trio to mouse,
Sharpen claws, wash whiskers, pounce, jump and land.
The quartet, when meowing, will sound like Strauss.

They'll be named, "The Strays," like a rock band.
I hope they won't stay afraid of my hands.

____ By Janet Herring-Sherman / Yamhill, Oregon