

Street Cat

By Charli Burrowes

'Have you ever fucked up so badly you feel like it'd be easier to kill yourself than to keep going?'

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My housemate has adopted a cat off the streets. His collar says Timmy, but she's named him biscuit.

'I don't like this cat,' I say. 'Weird vibes.'

'You don't understand him,' she says, while sitting in the bathtub scrubbing the cat. 'He's special. And he's been hurt. He needs extra love.'

'But he hisses when you try to hold him.'

He struts up and down the street all day and loves the attention of people passing by, but won't let anyone actually get close. People are always taking photos of him or crawling under cars trying to get him to come out.

He likes my friend though.

'It might be good for you to learn how to look after something,' she says, as she dries him off.

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My housemate loves taking care of things. For a while, she had to take care of me.

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I once made a mistake so big, I could not get the grief out of me. It left me hissing and scratching for months on end.

After ten years telling stories online, I was afraid I wasn't a real artist. Just an influencer making weird shit on the internet. I felt like my work was missing something; this special thing that the art I loved had. Some kind of magic that made people feel less alone.

But I didn't know what it was or how to find it.

So. I decided to step off a digital stage and onto a real one.

I put on an ambitious one woman play that cost over \$100k, sent me broke and completely destroyed my entire life.

I lost all my friends and all my money trying to figure out how to say '*something real*.' I wanted to be as brave as my heroes; write the next '*Fleabag*.'

But I couldn't do it. I got scared.

I strutted around and talked about wanting to be loved, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything honest, that let people in.

So the show that was supposed to be 'a bitch on a box telling a great story,' became a bitch on six boxes covered in flashing neon lights, strippers and strobes, telling '*kind of an okay*' story.

It's not a great sign if all people have to say after is, '*I really liked the lights*' or '*gee, how do you remember all those lines?*'

The closer we got to the show, the more stuff I added to make me feel okay.

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Everything came to a head the day before opening night. We hadn't sold enough tickets and the budget had completely blown out.

I had a full blown Christian Bale level meltdown in my dressing room to my producer.

'THIS IS GONNA BE A FUCKING DISASTER. I CAN'T WORK WITH THIS DIRECTOR. SHE IS DRIVING ME FUCKING CRAZY. THE SHOW IS A FUCKING JOKE. THE TEAM ARE JUST A BUNCH OF AMATEUR THEATRE KIDS PISSING ALL MY MONEY UP THE WALL PLAYING WITH AN EXPENSIVE THEATRE RIG AND THEY THINK I'M A DICKHEAD WHO CAN'T DO THIS. AND MAYBE I CAN'T. I CAN'T. THEY HATE ME. THEY FUCKING HATE ME. I CAN FEEL IT. I CAN FEEEEEEEL IT. EVERYTHING WE ARE MAKING IS SHIT. I AM SHIT. THIS IS SHIT.'

My microphone was on. Everyone in the theatre heard; the entire team, including my director.

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I tried to escape out the bathroom window, ripped the bars off and backed out.

But my ass got stuck. Being a white woman with a ginormous ass is both a blessing and a curse- sometimes it really holds me back.

The show went on, but after that things went from bad to worse.

My world imploded.

I went from high flying hot parties to baked beans on toast.

Selling out art collections, to counting coins for instant noodles.

I'd fucked up my reputation and my friends by association.

After I lost all my money, I started to lose things that really mattered to me.

The people who held my hair back after nights of celebration.

The calls with my dad to make sure I was okay.

Conversations with people who made me feel seen.

I'd borrowed a shitload of money.

I'd hurt people.

I'd been the reason someone else threw up in a carpark from stress.

I'd received emails from people I loved calling my behaviour 'disgusting.'

I'd sobbed in the arms of my mother and asked if I've put my life into the wrong things?

'Should I have spent more time kissing boys and less time making art? Would I be someone to love then?'

I couldn't pick up the phone to talk to my brother for a year because I couldn't take the pity in his voice on the other end.

Had debt collectors harass and scare people in my life, looking for money.

Publicly humiliated myself. Multiple times.

My best friend and I went from dancing til sunrise every other weekend, to not being able to make eye contact across a crowded room.

Now she looks at me with a hate I never knew she had in her.

Late at night, I'd lay awake wondering if *maybe I was just a self-centred artist?*

A selfish piece of shit.

*Was I just some broken kid who didn't believe they got enough love or attention,
who got an iPhone when brands decided they were done colonising countries,
they wanted your time instead? Had I got caught up on it?*

It drove me crazy. I couldn't sleep. I've never hated myself more.

I'd sat on the floor of my shower screaming for an ambulance because-

I can't fucking breathe-

why can't I fucking breathe?

I'm so fucking scared of what's going to happen to me.

And if I can't do this, do I matter?

Does any of it?

My failures fucking stuck as I stood in crowded rooms that used to love me.

'Crazy bitch.'

People pulled my busted dreams down and

pissed all over what was left.

'Delusional.'

'Embarrassing.'

'Who does she think she is?'

Friends of friends would sit at some dinner table and bring it all the way back to me with a
sympathetic-

'I just thought you should know, these people were laughing at you.'

My messages became a series of *'let's catch up?'* left on read.

I watched people that loved me move on- have a fucking baby, buy a house.

Panicked, as I pissed the currency of my youth up the wall.

I wondered if I'd wasted all these nights on the internet tearing myself apart-

When I could have been in the arms of a lover?

Bringing up a family?

Becoming something more?

Is it too fucking late for that?

I became the person people talked about that made them feel better about their own choices.

The one they'd whisper about behind closed doors and take pity on.

'At least I'm not like her.'

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Not too long after the show, I googled *'non painful ways to kill yourself.'* Then I checked into a hotel with a bunch of sleeping pills, and a tiny candle.

It was either going to be one helluva self-care session or death.

My housemate was the one who came and stopped me from doing something dumb.

She found me and my tiny candle.

She picked me up and pulled me in and she tried to take the shame away from this thing I'd done.

She told me about the times she had failed- ugly, honest stories about her own mistakes, that helped me feel less ashamed.

She was patient. She listened. She saved my life.

But it took me a long time to see that.

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It is not easy to live with a depressed person.

In the months after, my housemate would open my door in the middle of the night to make sure I wasn't dead.

She helped me reset my life and go to therapy.

'I know you can change. I believe in you.'

She took me rock climbing.

'Do something people wouldn't expect of you. Prove to yourself you can do hard things.'

She showed me documentaries of people overcoming failure.

'And if they can survive Woodstock 99, why can't you get through this?'

She left me maltesers on my bed and notes on mirrors and poetry around the house telling me it would one day be okay.

I was convinced the only way to fix my life was to 'fix my play' and make it big.

Once I'd made it as an artist, all this shit would be worth it.

And people would forgive me and come back.

I cried and screamed and raged while I tried to put my life back together.

The walls in our house were thin.

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It was around this time that my housemate adopted a street cat.

As she cared for this cat, she continued to care for me, even while I clawed and cried out in the middle of the night.

She kept telling me to turn my attention to the people around me who had chosen to stay.

But I was caught up on everyone that had gone.

I wanted my friends back. I didn't want to be the cunt in the story. So I kept trying to rewrite it.

I remounted the same show once, twice, three times, trying to get it right.

She begged me to let it go. Start something new. Begin again.

But I couldn't.

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My housemate is gone now and I miss her. I haven't seen the cat for a while.

Sometimes late at night, I walk to the corner of my street in the dark.

Stand under the lamplight. And wait.

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One day the cat appears. And he sits beside me.

And I feel a little less alone.

I open my phone and see my housemate in the arms of new people who love her.

There's your person, walking around. Going on, without you. And she looks okay.

Better than okay, there she goes being spectacular.

She's spectacular.

I look at her and I cry for not getting to be there for this part of her life.

I think of all the things I really miss.

And how she made me feel.

And I pick up her cat

and he lets me hold him.

And I feel the weight of what she did for me in everything that remains.