

The Underground Catwalk

by [Eddie Borden](#) (October 2024)

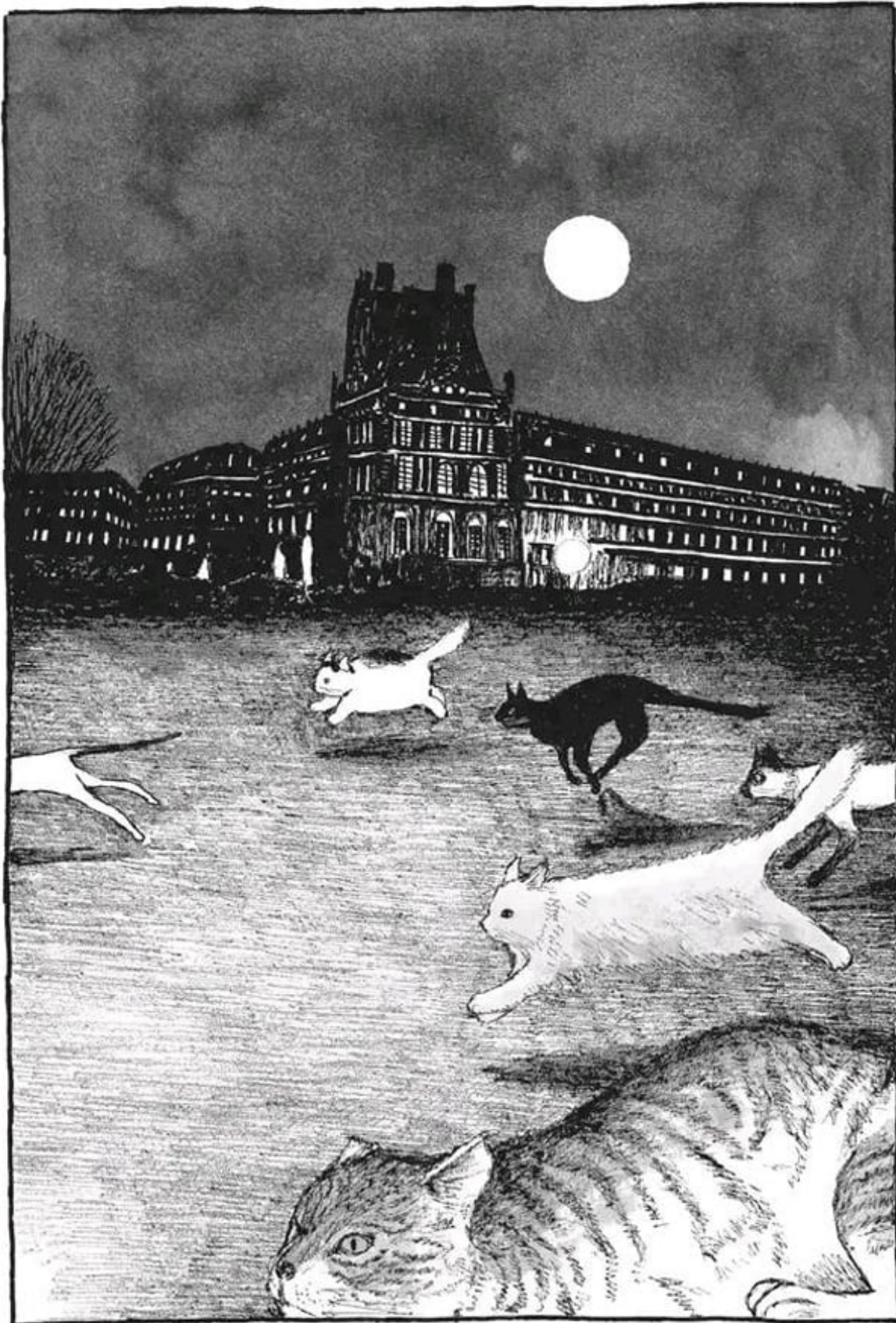


Illustration from Cats of the Louvre (Matsumoto Taiyo, 2016-17)

They waited in the pitch darkness. This road had no light and they were away from the highway. Above the sky was filled with stars but no moon. She choose this night and this time because the moon would not rise for two more hours. Conrad was not use to seeing so many stars. He was deep in the dark skies area of Texas. The Davis Mountain observatory was to the west on a piece of real estate, prized for its remoteness, elevation, and atmospherics. Marcia Corbett, had her own use for the darkness and remoteness.

"Timing is vital," she remarked. "Always arrive right on schedule. Never early, hanging around and arousing suspicion. Never late, making the other party hang around. The transfer needs to take as little time as possible." She checked her watch, then hit the ignition button on the dash. The V-8 under the hood growled to life and then hummed. Head lights bathed the road in light. With a crunch of gravel they were on our way.

Forty minutes on the paved surface, then another twenty on a dirt stretch that took them close to the river. She knew exactly where to stop. The spot was marked by a hand full of red marbles held against the trunk of a hackberry tree with plastic wrap. If the driver was not alert they would miss it in the darkness. It was obscure enough to be overlooked but distinct enough to signal the initiated, that they were at their destination. Here she stopped and put on the parking break but only put the pickup in neutral, the engine remained running. Conrad noticed the placement of the shifter. Marcia was always ready to put the old Ford in gear and hit the accelerator for a rapid escape. She opened her door, exited the cab, and Conrad decided he should do the same. She lit a cigarette, took a puff then set what remained on top of a

boulder with a rock holding it down.

"We're being watched," she said.

"Is that cigarette a signal?" He asked?

"You're catching on," she said.

"Well, I can tell that you don't normally smoke. No stains on your fingers or teeth. No cigarette smell on your cloths." A flicker of light came from the direction of the river. "Is that the signal?"

"Stay here," she directed. "You're not wearing snake guards above your shoes, and I assure you there's a pair of fangs with your name on them between here and the river." He could barely make out her silhouette moving toward the river. Evidently, from much experience she knew her way in the dark. He could barely make out a conversation in Spanish, which ended with a female voice saying, "Adios muchachos." Then the sound of climbing over a chain link fence, followed by quiet. He knew she was returning as her footfalls grew louder, and there was the distinct meows of a number of cats. Soon she was beside him opening the tailgate of the pickup. From one of the deep pockets on her cargo jeans she withdrew something, that glinted in the starlight. He heard the sound of a can being opened by a ring pull lid, then the smell of sardines. The contents was emptied into a bowl as a couple dozed shadowy figures hopped from the ground to the tailgate all the time meowing. When all had entered the truck bed she closed the tailgate and the hatch to the shell top.

"Let's make tracks," she said. In a second they were both in the cab. A dust kicking u-turn and they were going back the way they came. "I take it that was one of the infamous Burros de la gatos (cat mules), that J.D. Vance has been vlogging about," said Conrad.

"I prefer to call them childless Mexican cat ladies," she

answered.

"So she just risked her life swimming the Rio Grande, towing an inflatable raft to get her precious cats north of the border?"

"Scoff if you like," said. "But she wants a better life for her pets, better than they will ever know in Mexico." It was hours until sunup and she drove to the nearest town without incident. Into the parking lot of the local animal rescue center, she stopped, honked, and instantly a man and woman appeared, wearing white lab coats, pushing a cart filled with cat carriers. There came the metallic creak of the tailgate dropping and each cat went into his own carrier. A second cart came out of the building also full of cat carriers. These were deposited into the trucks bed, amid more meows and again the creak of the tailgate. The entire operation took less than two minutes, and again they were on their way.

"Wow, that was fast. So what now," asked Conrad.

"We go to the drop off point," answered Marcia. "The cats that they put back there have all been vaccinated and fixed. The ones I dropped off will get the same."

"So where is this drop off point," asked Conrad?

"The less you know the better," was the terse reply.

It took the rest of the night to reach a rest stop in the panhandle. Conrad watched as some rough looking characters came out of a couple of box trucks . There was a brief exchange of words. The rough characters opened the back of the trucks, Marcia stuck her head in, looked around, seemed happy with her inspection and then half the carriers went in one truck and half went into the other. Empty carriers went into the back of the pickup. It all ended with a lot of clanging and squeaking as doors and tailgates closed. The Mafia looking gentlemen then held out a roll of bills that Marcia refused

with a wave of her hand. All returned to their vehicles, then they were back on the highway heading south.

"I hate dealing with characters like that," said Marcia. "But it is necessary to get the cats to their final destination.

"Where is that," asked Conrad?"

"Some big city, with lots of alleys, full of garbage cans and rats, and mice. Restaurant owners pay a premium for Mexican cats. They work for less food and treats and kill more rats than their American counterparts. Plus they will kill vermin that no American cat will touch, no matter the reward."

"So they don't actually take jobs from American cats," Conrad asked?

"No way," said Marcia. "Rat killer is a job that always goes begging. In this country they get a better quality rat, raised on more nutritious garbage and cleaner water."

"Why did you have to look in the back of the box trucks," asked Conrad?

"Had to make sure they had air conditioning, if they didn't the deal would be off."

"I notice that you refused the money the thugs offered you," inquired Conrad.

"Money always opens a can of worms, like tax evasion, and money laundering," she said. "I do this strictly out of humanitarian motives."

"How long have you been awake now," asked Conrad.

"Too long. When I get home I'm gonna crash like a Boeing 737." They drove on as the sun rose over the horizon.

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Eddie Borden is retired and shares his abode with four cats, a dog, and various uninvited guests. He writes plays, poetry, novels, short fiction, and songs.

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