

Eulogy for Johnny Thunders

by Brian Alan Ellis

Johnny Thunders is dead. Hit and run. Not even a year old, and for my money, the coolest kitty ever to walk this whole good-for-nothing planet.

Hadn't seen my poor, neglected Johnny in months, and here I am burying him. With my bare hands and a shovel I am burying him. In the backyard of the house Phoebe and I had once lived in together, he is being buried.

I look over and see Flora, Phoebe's rich-bitch mother, the same woman who's convinced everyone, including Phoebe, what a "childish mess" I am; which, in a sense, is true, but Christ, what a lousy thing to tell people—to take so much pleasure in telling people.

Phoebe and I had found Johnny—as big as my fist, then—living under a couple's trailer. The couple (friends of Phoebe's) had agreed, after much begging, that we keep the cat. "For Christ's sake," they said. "Take it, take it!"

They had many cats, those people.

Yet who knew that one day *our* feline friend, *our* once prize, would get run over?

I'm sorry, Johnny, but no one bothered calling the number on your silver UFO-shaped name tag. No one bothered taking your smashed body out of the road. No one bothered.

This, to me, is terrible cat-killing etiquette.

There are rules.

A few years ago my brother Seely and I, on our way to some mush-for-brains party, struck Mimi, the neighbors' cat, while pulling out of our parents' driveway.

Seely said, "Shit! Let's step on it," but I said, "No way!"

So while reciting what we thought would be a smooth apology but was anything but, we wrapped up Mimi using an old issue of *Leg Show* we'd found crumpled in the backseat of the car (lousy etiquette) and delivered her to the neighbors, a saintly old couple who took the news as well as one could, which is more than I can say for Phoebe and me.

In fact, if I knew where the assailant (or assailants) lived, I would go over there. I would knock on their door. When they answered I would present Johnny to them. I'd hold him right up to their hit-and-run face and say, "Look, just *look* at what you have taken from us!" They would of course gasp, and I would maybe toss in a blood-curdling "Argh!" or two.

For dramatic purposes.

For good measure.

It's hot as balls out. Phoebe is on her knees. She is sobbing, pulling up fistfuls of grass and dirt. Johnny Thunders, wrapped in a *Star Wars* blanket, dead, is about to be lowered into a small hole I've dug in the ground. Flora, standing with her arms crossed, looks on. The smirk on her face, like she has better things to do, like she deserves a bronze effing star for even being here, makes me want to clock her in the head with the shovel. I bet she finds our little ceremony to be trivial bullshit. Screw her. I wish I were digging *her* grave, not Johnny's.

Following the split, I'd agreed Phoebe could keep Johnny. I didn't really want that, but because Phoebe had insisted and because I was doomed to surf couches for a while, it seemed only proper. Despite the daily fourteen-hour shifts Phoebe would work as a nurse's aid. Despite my righteous indignation.

Me, I had plenty of time to care for Johnny. But it was too late. The decision was made. So I spent several straight days either drunk or hung over—when I wasn't at work I was at the bar spilling drinks, getting into fights, making a real ass of myself. Girls would sometimes let me make out with them, but never would they let me fondle them or have me take them home, which wasn't a surprise:

I no longer had one.

So I cut off all communication with Phoebe—first deleting her from my FaceSpace page, and then erasing her number from my cell-phone. Still, I missed Johnny. I missed Johnny more than I did Phoebe. It was strange, heartbreaking, and I knew that instead of being the pushover I was, I should have been more like the guy going through the custody battle in that one Dustin Hoffman movie—only instead of a child, I'd be fighting over a cat. A cat named after a dead junky, mind you. A cat I loved.

I think of Johnny—snow-leopard white, with brown and gray spots circling his belly—sitting outside the bathroom door, purring, as Phoebe and

I showered; or sleeping at the corner of the bed, somehow peaceful, during the sound and fury of Phoebe and me hate-fucking.

Then there's Johnny peeing on Phoebe's great-aunt's ugly home-made quilt (an heirloom); Phoebe knocking him around with her shoe, screaming; me knocking Phoebe around, begging her to stop.

After a while, Johnny didn't give Phoebe the time of day. It was only me he trusted. There was resentment, of course, and our relationship never recovered. It only got worse.

And to think things were finally looking up.

I'd curbed my drinking, found my own apartment, went back to school, and even began work on an album of folk songs. It was good.

Then it all went to hell. Then I pulled in behind Flora's black Mercedes. I pulled in behind a goddamn hearse.

I pat the ground with the shovel. Johnny Thunders is down there. Phoebe comes up behind and, still sobbing, wraps her arms around me. I don't want her touching me, but I let her. Then she runs over to hug her mother. Flora doesn't care. We've been outside for what seems like hours, and it's still hot hot hot.

Part of me wants to believe that Johnny committed suicide. I'd like to think that having to deal with Phoebe and her mother for so long was just too much for him. I know it sounds silly, but that's the only comfort I have.

So I kneel. If my body were not balancing itself against the shovel, surely I would tip over entirely and possibly never get back up.

Johnny, for my money, was the coolest effing cat on this entire crap-dishing planet.

"Well," says Flora, "shall we call it a day? Are we through yet?"

"I dunno," I tell her, tears stinging the cheeks of my sweaty, sun-burnt face. "I don't think the hole is big enough."

Then I catch Flora roll her eyes and I think:

Yes. Yes, Flora, I've decided. The hole I dug is just too damn small.

For Jacob Crown