

ANG AKLATANG PUSA

(THE CAT LIBRARY)

Story written by
Eugene Y. Evasco



Artworks created by
Jared C. Yokte

Translated into English by Angelo V. Suarez

Everything began in the dense thicket of Ms. Salvacion's backyard. Because it was always dark in her home, everyone kept dumping garbage on her lot.

Ms. Salvacion is scared of people. She doesn't notice the garbage dumped on her backyard because she hardly ever comes out. She'd rather engage with books.





One midnight, there was a relentless chorus of meowing in her backyard. Ms. Salvacion was forced to come out. She looked for the source of the noise.

A faint rustling. The movement of dried leaves. When she approached, there they were, four kittens in a shoebox.



She had never been a mom, but
out popped her instinct to nurture.
All hearts might melt in the kittens'
imploring gaze.

That the kittens were black
was of no concern to her. It was
a popular superstition that they
brought bad luck. Hurriedly she
took the box and brought it in.





There was where the legend began. News spread that if you needed to get rid of a kitten, just hurl it into the dense backyard in the corner of Pook Palaris. There was a woman there who would take in unwanted pets.

A dark rumor emerged from the incident. Word was Ms. Salvacion peddled *siopao* – soft, delicious steamed buns – in Binondo.

The truth was that Ms. Salvacion had a fondness for the cats. What used to be a bookshelf was now a shelf containing cats. Her closet, her dresser, her cabinet – all became tiny rooms for various kittens. She bought boxes by the bulk when she learned that her pets liked squeezing themselves into them.





Ms. Salvacion was a retired librarian. Because of her knowledge, she thought of a way to arrange her collection of cats. They weren't sorted according to height, like we often do with books.



She grouped them according to age, personality, experience, and distinctive talents. On a page of her catalogue, one could see such notes:

Miming, 3 months, black and affectionate

Bola-Bola, 2 years, painter, dancer

Dusk, 6 (?) years, blind but sharp

Surge, 7 months, always sleepy but not lazy

Orange, 2 weeks, singer

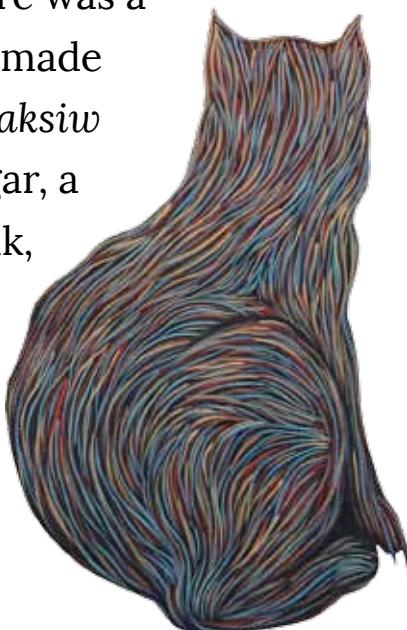
Jinky, 8 months, one leg limp





Not long after, Ms. Salvacion turned her home into a Cat Library. Whoever wanted to borrow a “book” was welcome. Some cats were for “Room Use Only.” These were her secret favorites.

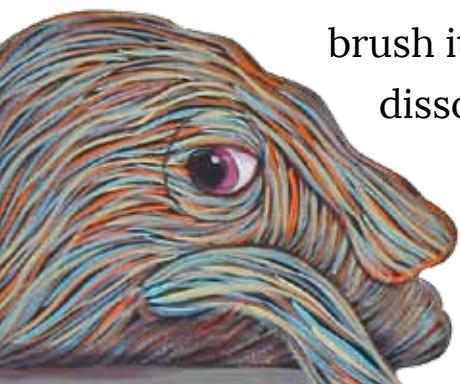
There were cats that could be borrowed for days, weeks, or months, depending on the borrower’s needs. There was a penalty for those who made late returns: a pot of *paksiw* or fish stewed in vinegar, a vaccine, a bottle of milk, a ball of yarn (the sort for knitting), or even scratching posts.



Upon the opening of the Cat Library, Ms. Salvacion let anyone find the cat that suited them. She had faith that each cat had a human match.

Among the first to visit the Cat Library was Mr. Hernandez, owner of By The Sea Seafood Restaurant. He thought of borrowing seven (because it was a lucky number) cats to repel rats and to invite good luck.

By afternoon's end, he borrowed eleven multicolored cats. "They're a cure for whoever has a fish bone stuck in their throat," Ms. Salvacion advised. "Just take their foot and brush it against your neck to dissolve the fish bone."





The following week, a family came to the Cat Library for a visit. They were looking for a new family member. After a few hours, they picked Wolfie. She was in a corner, moving only to yawn or stretch.

“Why would we borrow a cat nearing the end of its life?” wondered the child.

Ms. Salvacion was hurt by what she heard. Is one really so worthless when you’re past a certain age?

The parent scolded the child. “She needs us even more so she can be with a family in the twilight of her life.” The child thought it curious, but her mind was enlightened all the same.

One afternoon, in came a painter.
Bearing his tools, he went to the
Cat Library, looking for inspiration.
“I will create a masterpiece,” he
promised himself.

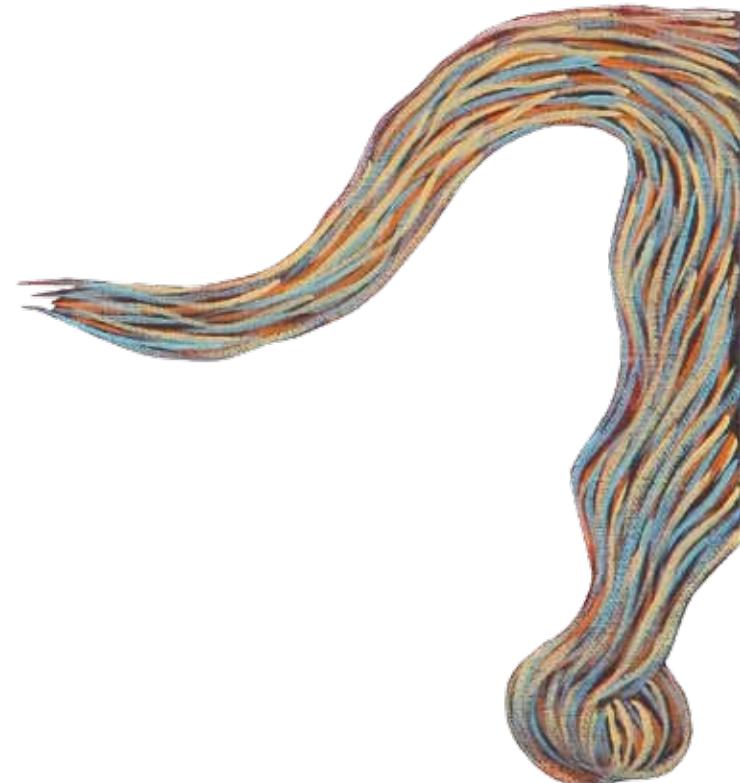
Upon laying his things down,
a rowdy feline dipped itself in his
cans of paint, danced ballet on the
canvas, and marked its signature
with its claws.

He was surprised by what he had
witnessed. The pictures made were
dirty, slapdash, disorderly – but
they possessed a beauty. “Ah, art!”
he shouted, like he discovered an
expensive gem.





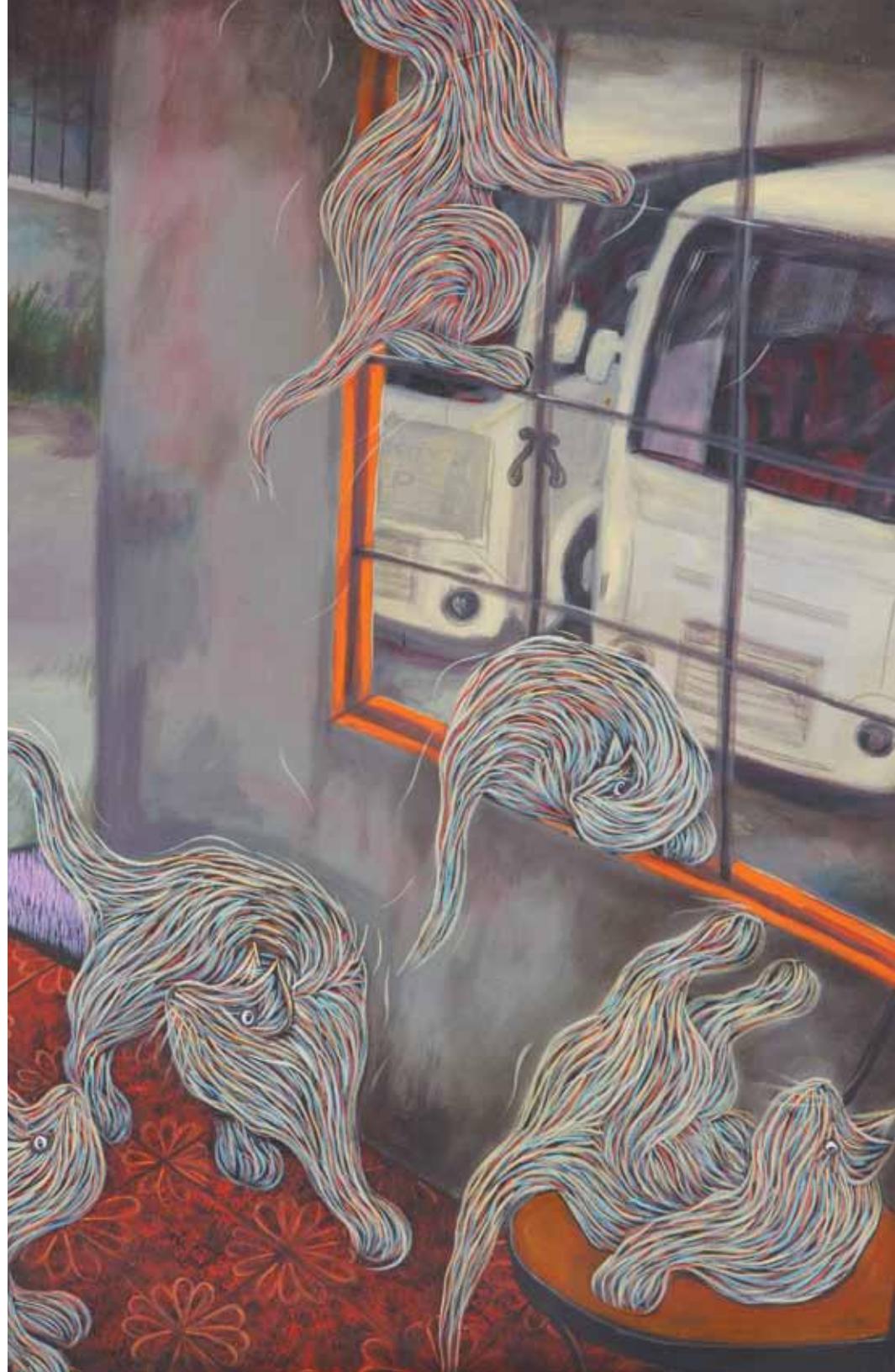
The painter borrowed Bola-Bola, the cat. Ms. Salvacion knew the cat would never be brought back. In all her decades of being a librarian, she knew well the faces of those who never returned what they had borrowed.



The Cat Library's reputation spread in Pook Palaris and nearby areas. There was even a day when two busloads of students came over to learn the value of saving *pusakals* – shorthand for “*pusang kalye*” or street cats.

There was also that time when an office asked for 21 cats to entertain their bored and restless employees. They perked up when the cats surprised them with play and affection.

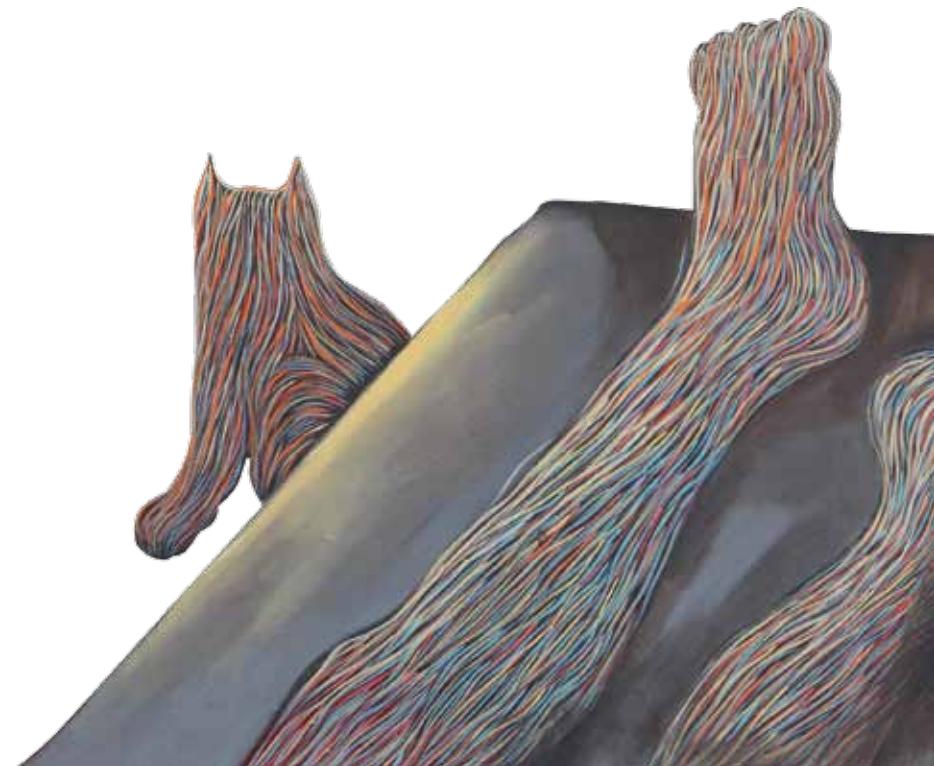
The students of Cruz Na Daan Elementary School developed a fondness for books because they kept reading stories to the Library cats.





The recovery of the sick at Santa Elena Municipal Hospital was sped up when a nurse argued that a cat could help their patients.

One could hear the calm prrrrrrrrrr of a cat hugging various people in recovery.



But the best thing to ever occur at the Cat Library was when the Lumad child Ugjab, from a community indigenous to Mindanao, met the ferocious cat named Surge. They had both been vagrants in the streets. Fellow orphans, they were no strangers to cruelty and violence. Now they've found a new home, a new family to care for them. Now they've found each other.

Surge's ferocity gradually diminished with the child's every caress. They spoke with each other for hours, like they've been buddies for so long.

"She's been waiting for you for a long time," whispered Ms. Salvacion to Ugjab.





Ms. Salvacion's backyard was no longer a dump. Neither was it a giant bin for discarded kittens. Many borrowed cats may not have been returned, but our beloved librarian was happy nonetheless.

In whatever scratch of fate, she knew that the cats she had saved, in turn, would save whoever was also in need.



EUGENE Y. EVASCO is a writer, editor, translator, and scholar of children's books. He currently teaches Creative Writing in the College of Arts and Literature at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. He is the author of award-winning books Ang Nag-iisa at Natatanging si Onyok, Anina ng mga Alon, Ang Sampung Bukitkit, Mga Pilat sa Pilak: Mga Personal na Sanaysay, at May Tiyanak sa Loob ng Aking Bag: Mga Tulang Pembata. He translated E.B. White's Charlotte's Web to Filipino. In 2014, he won at the UP Gawad ng Natatanging Publikasyon sa Filipino (Creative Writing Category). In 2009, he was inducted into the Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for Literature Hall of Fame and he is currently a Fellow of the Likhaan: UP Institute of Creative Writing. In 2016, he became a Research Fellow at the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany.

JARED C. YOKTE is a painter and sculptor with a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Northern Philippines Vigan. He wishes to do further studies in Fine Arts and Design at the Philippine Women's University. He has received several awards including the Luzon Jurors' Choice Award in the Philippine Art Awards 2014 and Grand Winner at ArtPetron 2009. He has also held five solo exhibitions. Yokte currently lives in Tarlac with his beautiful wife and child, and their cat Resi who now has nine kittens.





CANVAS' **1 Million Books for One Million Filipino Children Campaign** aims to inspire in children a love for reading by donating its award-winning books to public schools, hospitals, and disadvantaged communities throughout the country.

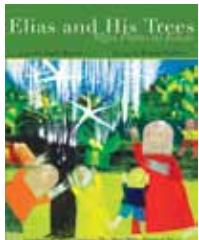
A child that reads is a creative, empowered, and imaginative child who will learn independently, envision a brighter future, and ultimately lead a productive and meaningful life.

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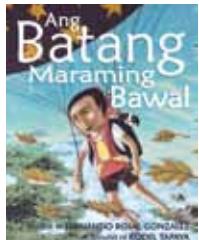
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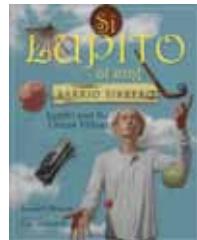
More books from CANVAS



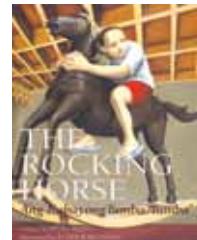
ELIAS AND HIS TREES
Adapted from "The Man Who Planted Trees" by Jean Giono
Adaptation by Augie Rivera
Art by Romeo Forbes



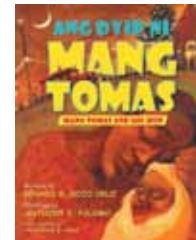
ANG BATANG MARAMING BAWAL
Story by Fernando Rosal Gonzalez
Art by Rodel Tapaya



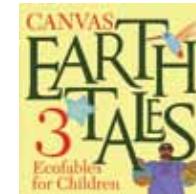
SI LUPITO AT ANG BARRIO SIRKERO
Story by Ronald Almazar
Art by José John Santos III



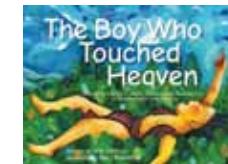
THE ROCKING HORSE
Story by Becky Bravo
Art by Elmer Borlongan



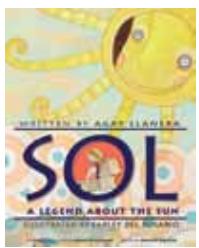
ANG DYIP NI MANG TOMAS
Story by Genaro Gojo Cruz
Art by Anthony Palomo



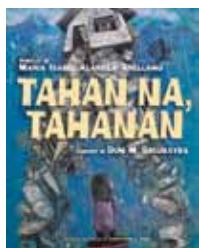
CANVAS EARTH 3 TALES
Ecofables for Children
"The King and the Royal Trees"
by Paul Aird
Art by Ives Olivares-Mellor
"The Hummingbird"
Art by Plet Bolipata
"The Star Thrower"
Art by Liza Flores



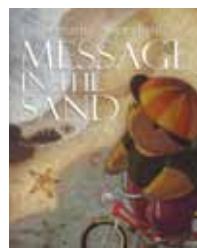
THE BOY WHO TOUCHED HEAVEN
Story by Iris Gem Li
Art by Sergio Bumatay III



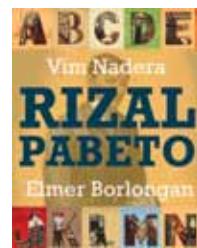
SOL: A LEGEND ABOUT THE SUN
Story by Agay Llanera
Art by Farley del Rosario



TAHAN NA, TAHANAN
Story by María Isabel Alarilla-Arellano
Art by Don M. Salubaya



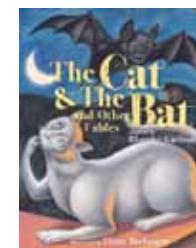
MESSAGE IN THE SAND
Story by Charmaine Aserrappa
Artworks by Roel Obemio



RIZALPABETO
Poems by Vim Nadera
Art by Elmer Borlongan



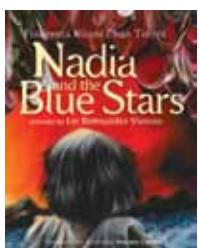
DOLL EYES
Story by Eline Santos
Artworks by Joy Mallari



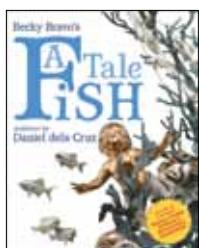
THE CAT & THE BAT AND OTHER FABLES
Adapted by Rhandise Garlitos
Art by Elmer Borlongan



THE TRIANGLE MAN AND THE FLIGHTLESS DIWATA
Story by Kate Osias
Artworks by Dex Fernandez



NADIA AND THE BLUE STARS
Story by Francesca Nicole Chan Torres
Art by Liv Romualdez Vinluan



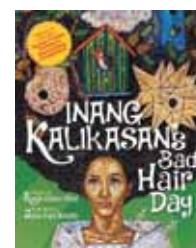
A FISH TALE
Story by Becky Bravo
Art by Daniel dela Cruz



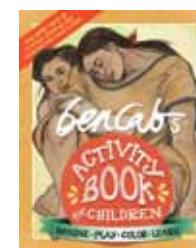
HERE BE DRAGONS
Story by Victor Fernando R. Ocampo
Artworks by Jon Jaylo



MY BIG SISTER CAN SEE DRAGONS
Story by Rocky Sanchez Tirona
Artworks by Liza Flores



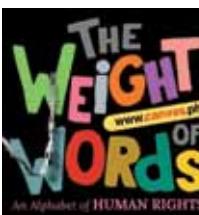
INANG KALIKASAN'S BAD HAIR DAY
Story by Recile Etino Vibol
Artworks by John Paul Antido



BENCAB'S ACTIVITY BOOK FOR CHILDREN
Activities written by Karen Joy Desamparado-Foronda
Art by Benedicto Cabrera



PANYĀAN: THREE TALES OF THE TAGBANUA
Stories by Rhandise Garlitos and Annette Ferrer
Art by Sergio Bumatay III



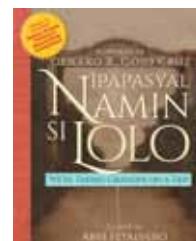
PANYĀAN: THREE TALES OF THE TAGBANUA
Edited by Annette Ferrer
Art by various artists



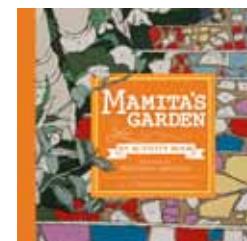
KARAPAT DAPAT
Written by May Tobias-Papa
Art by i.N.K.



RENATO BARJA'S CHILDREN'S STORIES
Stories by Daniel Palma and Gigo Alampay
Art by Renato Barja



IPAPASYAL NAMIN SI LOLO
Story by Genaro Gojo Cruz
Art by Arvi Fetalvero



MAMITA'S GARDEN
Art by Pam Yan-Santos
Text by Nicolas Gabriel Garcia

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of meowing in her backyard.*

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