

Tuumba 5

CAT ALLEY
(a long short novel)

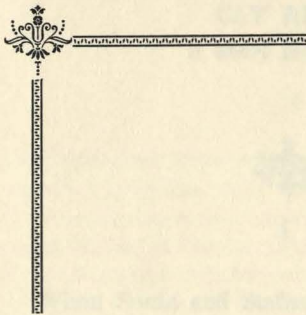
by Dick Higgins



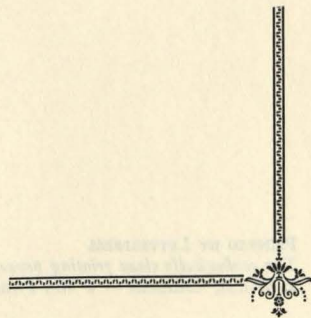
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When Sonia and Stefan came back to Cat Alley, they found it was just as they had left it. The little warning signals that had flashed in Stefan's mind when he saw Chickery the first time, and when he hired her to take care of the shop in his absence, they flashed like crazy.

But he was beyond all that.
No matter.

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Sonia knew this and Sonia knew that and Sonia knew just about everything. Lord save us, you never saw such charm, graciousness, such a generous spirit. Always as if one was a mirror, to reflect herself in.

And with men, it was something special, they felt. Stefan didn't mind.

He was beyond all that.

No matter.



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Suddenly one day something strange happened.

It was at the shop. Chickery (one didn't rightly know her real name—or anything over her image name) was wearing low-slung slacks, as usual. As she bent over, so the upper part of her fanny showed. A warm flash shot through Stefan. He wanted to touch her. Natural enough. An infatuation. For an instant the Stephen in him broke through.

But of course Stefan didn't mind.

He was beyond all that.

No matter.



No, maybe he wasn't beyond all that.

Or maybe he was.

He enjoyed the ambiguity.

But one night he woke up in a hot sweat, dreaming he was Stephen and calling out for Chickery to come quick, he was dying. Sonia pushed him and asked him about it. He said he seemed to have a little infatuation at the moment.

Naturally Sonia didn't mind.

She was beyond all that.

No matter.



Stefan was quite fat.

And he kept wanting to be Stephen.

He told himself that it wasn't healthy to be fat. So he lost a lot of weight. He had the idea that Stephen was thin. And he wanted to be Stephen. So what better way was there than to steal away Stefan's body, so Stefan's soul would have no home.

Sonia liked him to be thin and didn't mind.

She was beyond all that.

No matter.



Chickery had a boyfriend from Venezuela.

He had trouble, paper trouble, coming to the land of Cat Alley as an imigrant. As a visitor he liked to show Chickery off. He took her around in a topless dress once.

But now there was trouble and he couldn't get back. He was desperate. He needed Chickery's help. She sent him some phono records and tried to go through the motions of filling in the necessary forms. But not too hard.

It didn't really involve her somehow it seemed.
She was beyond all that.
No matter.



Stephen had a problem Stefan never faced.

He lived in emotional Hi-Fi. Everything he felt was overgrown. He felt he was quite frightening, really. He should hide, somewhere. And he did—inside what was left of Stefan.

He tried to understand that Sonia was Stefan's wife, not his, not Stephen's. In all his bathetic comedy he tried to articulate his predicament, of living with another man's wife, how it really wasn't real to him. Sonia listened graciously.

But actually Sonia didn't mind.
She was beyond all that.
No matter.



Chickery had many admirers. By now craving her was Stephen's chief emotion, for desire can become a real emotion, quite distinct from love or envy or jealousy or the other colors that usually tint it. He felt only the desire for her, as yet. Nothing else. But he wondered, always, what was she really like? What did she want? He felt meant to love her.

He asked about her boyfriend in Venezuela.

She said she wouldn't wait, she didn't believe in it. There was something there, of course, but she wouldn't wait.

Not enough, he thought, to drive anyone else out of her mind. Not enough was there, she'd said. Then what was the source of her radiance? How must that boyfriend feel?

Well, of course, Chickery didn't mind.

She was beyond all that.

No matter.



Sloppy Stefan was going away.

And Stephen was becoming stylish as only a man in love can become stylish. When Chickery came late to work, Stephen was anxious, then overjoyed to see her. She knew how he felt.

She seemed to sense the difficulty, if he came to see her sometimes, with which he, sensing her disdain, picked up a brush to brush her hair. Nothing more would happen, of course. Love and desire are different from infatuation of the will and self. If we want to share a cooky, it loses its joy when we conspire to seize our fullest enjoyment of it, It must come to us and be savored. She seemed to want a seizure, a wild route which would give her an excuse for contempt for him and would leave him emptier than before.

He decided not to play the man game and smash it all at once.

But oh well, she didn't much seem to mind.

She was beyond all that.

No matter.



Chickery had cats. Lovely cats that loved her and each other. One had kittens and they were Chickery's. And all but one were dead, as they came from the body.

This was a terrible thing, to lose those kittens, for Chickery and all who knew her and loved her.

But the mother cat didn't seem to mind.

She was beyond all that.

No matter.



Love isn't always kind in a world of cipher-people, but then, was it ever?

On the one hand Stephen saw her, with his strange new empathy, climbing up a shipping rack (which he'd have been glad to do for her) and he felt just how it must be on her bare feet. Or he would sense at night when she was having sex and feel a strange convulsive-ness, curious for a man. Or see her dreaming of, in his dream, standing in the door of an old building and crying. He had some sense of some man doing some cruel thing to her, and that she would never love a man again unless she could also despise him—and herself—and hurt him as she had been hurt.

And all that he would hear from her was Sonia, Sonia, Sonia.

But then, he didn't seem obviously to mind.

He was beyond all that.

No matter.



Very strange, Stephen thought to himself, and strange, he felt, she too was thinking, that he would not play the man game with her. Well, the world is full of idiots, he thought, that make such muchness of sex, which is always beautiful even when we don't want it much. As if it were made of glass and might shatter. Or an expensive batch of rare dough that mustn't get contaminated!

As she spoke on about Sonia.

But we *are* what we do and what we don't do. Gone is gone.. Sonia went away for a bit and the ensuing seduction scene was pathetic. Stephen cleaned his apartment, cooked a nine-course dinner, played Chickery her favorite records, turned the lights low, and very shortly wound up alone—and—serene of all things. The answer was a gentle but firm "NO" with a headshake, followed by the usual remarks how he mustn't mistrust Sonia or be in any way unkind.

If he had been more witty and more worldly, he might have experienced the privilege of Chickery's favorable disdain, for hers is not the community or the accepting, but the feminine reality of unshared demands. Communities and accepters seem to work together more.

Between men and women alone, love is very difficult.

It seldom maketh them lie down in green pastures—she's sure to get a back-ache.

But the Good Book says, *He* surely doesn't mind.

He's far beyond all that.

No matter.



Stefan's dead. Disappeared last Fall.

Sonia's still in love with him also. Enough for elegance.

We're not sure but we think there's some connection between Stephen and some Stephanie that sometimes runs amock in certain gay bars and is banned from many of them.

Chickery is still the Mad Lass of Cat Alley for anyone who doesn't love her too much. Still has her old job. Destructive.

But we look at the world. It doesn't mind.

It's far beyond all that.

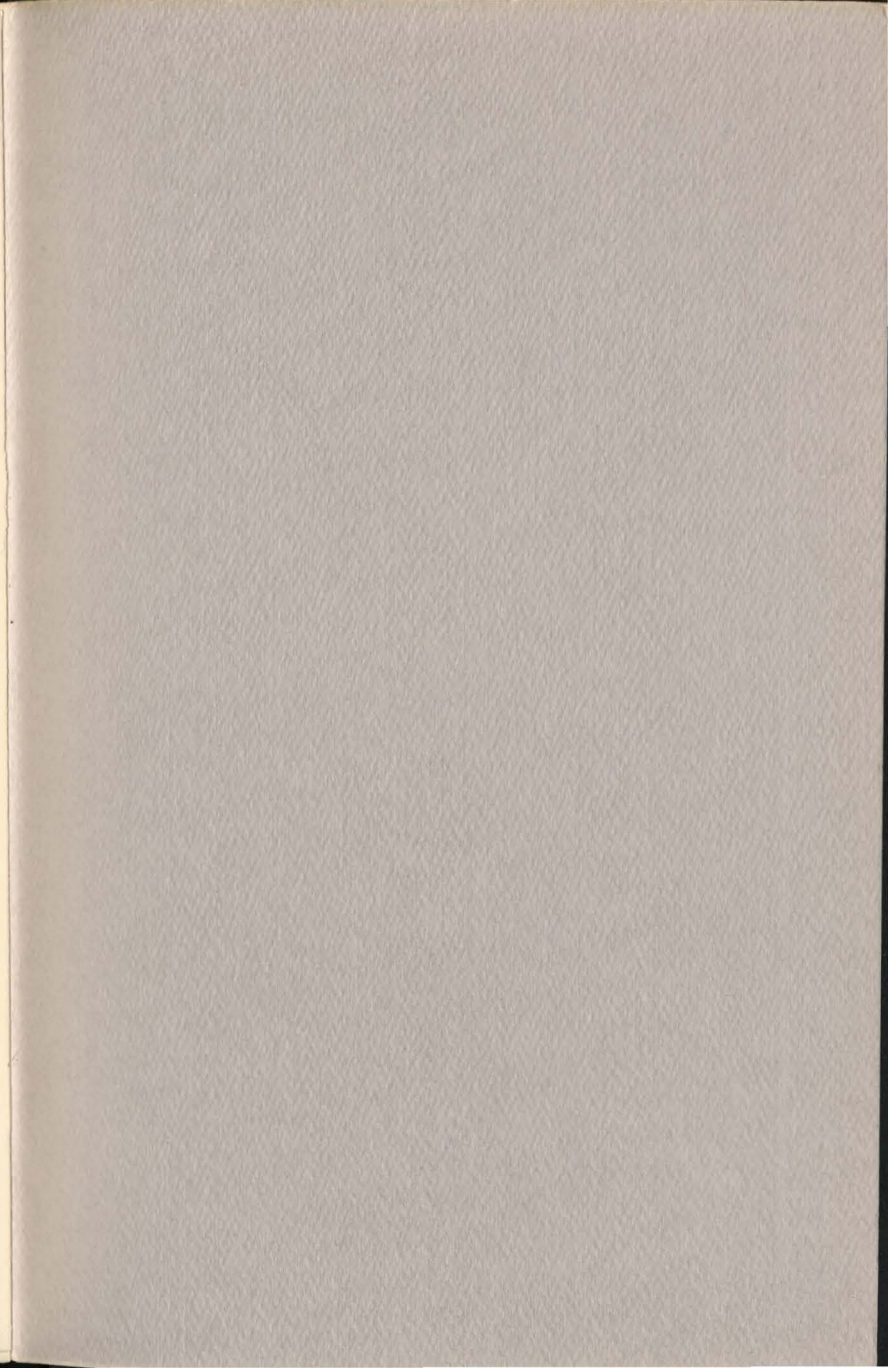
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New York, New York
October 18, 1967



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The progress of the work during the year has been... The work has been carried out in accordance with the... The results of the work are as follows... The work has been carried out in accordance with the... The results of the work are as follows... The work has been carried out in accordance with the... The results of the work are as follows...



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My friends, let us love what we
love. The man who damn well refuses
to love what he loves dooms himself.

— Van Gogh

In the light of certain theories of
history in which man is characterized
by an economical struggle for survival,
the persistence of poetry is a difficult
fact to account for. Poetry is the
history of man's disinterestedness.

— Wallace Fowle

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