**Hum**

Bethany Bowman

My son’s friend has about thirty barn cats.

I say “about,” because you never really know,

except that you do if you’re Adam.

One has no eyes, one a festering nick in her ear,

and they all have names. The one with the

half-chewed ear got into a fight and is going to die.

Isn’t there anything you can do? I ask naively.

(Everything I ask this ruddy farm boy is naïve.)

“Purring’s what heals them,” he says quietly.

This cat can’t soothe herself. Her vocal folds

were wrecked in the tiff, and as much as she needs it,

her ventricular cord can no longer vibrate.

We’re in the car, headed to our place in town

where there are no cats, just goldenrod, sweet

autumn clematis, and other wildflowers I’ve let go.

My son is humming. He hums when he’s overwhelmed.

Scared. Sometimes, when he’s deliriously happy.

How many times have I told him to stop?

I smile at him in the rearview. I can’t fix the damn cat,

but can maybe learn a new way of being in the world.

The cicadas know how. They crawl out of the ground, join the chorus.