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Steps

Ellin Carter

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STEPS

There was Jenny, on the fortieth floor, a speck in a maze of gray walls and corridors, chasing her cat through the smoke. People were screaming in the stairwells—and far below in the streets as well. From the windows as she ran she caught a glimpse of helicopters: they muttered through the darkness.

A man ran past her. "To the roof," he yelled. He left a sign, an orange arrow pointing up. Everyone kept on running down, until no one was left, and silence settled on the walls.

Around the last bend she found her cat, crouched in the corner as if the world were one gigantic mousetrap set to spring. I must be sane for us both, Jenny thought, and follow orders.

From the roof's edge, the city was salmon, crimson, puce. Now no more voices, only the cat purring, yellow flares in the sky, and quakes below. Communication, Jenny reflected: she'd read about it. Cats may purr when dying, but never when they're in a room alone. She held him in her arms and stepped away.