

## **I Am The Kitten**

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It took two scientists to come up with the plan: when the mother cat's litter tumbled out at last, they would seize one of the moist balls of fur, find its face, and, before it had a chance to turn its vision onto the world, tape one of its eyes shut. After six months they would reopen the eyelid. For half a year the kitten wore the bandage the scientists fashioned for it; student assistants, on the work-study payroll between classes and clubs, called it Patch. It was allowed to roam the laboratory, posing no threat to the lab mice on their high shelves; its depth perception impaired, it wasn't much for leaping. When they gathered around to remove the dressing, the semester was long over, the summer fully blazing, a new, younger set of assistants standing by to take notes. *We found the animal was almost completely blind in that eye*, their report said. *We conclude that even though the visual system is wired up from birth, it is, in fact, experience that affects the development of synapses in the brain.* The scientists would win a Nobel for their research. I would go home with one of the summertime interns, keeping his mother company when he went off to college that fall. I liked the elaborate patterns in her Persian carpets, the high grass in her back yard; I never did learn to leap very well. But oh, when I lay on my cat-pillow, and shut my good eye, the one that had been permitted to learn all there was to learn of the world—what treasures my other eye would find in the darkness, what wondrous things it knew. Impossible things. Things my good, good eye would never understand.