The cat does not know she is going to die.

When I first encounter that statement in my reading, I look at the cat with amazement. The cat does not know she ever was not.

She knows enough past to be familiar with every inch of this apartment within her reach, and to know me, and any person she meets frequently enough. She knows enough future to hide when she hears the footsteps of the person who brings the dreaded vacuum cleaner every second Tuesday, and to be upset when I come home late.

She lies on the windowsill with her paws tucked against her chest. She meditates upon sunshine, wind, and the quick movements of squirrels or birds. She meditates upon food and drink and the texture of afghans, upholstery, and pillows. She does not meditate upon last things.

The cat does not know she is going to die. To know that is my work, like knowing I will die. Even the decision turns out to be mine about the time and place and manner of her last heartbeat.
Because I am the one
with self-consciousness. I open and close
the doors in her life—the door to a room,
or the apartment, or the cat carrier. I decide.

The cat does not know she is going to die.
She draws her last breath, and I think,

*Does she know now? Or does this come like sleep?*

She lived and does not. She did not
philosophize

—and I who do
can only speculate on the nature of what and how
she knew

and did not know.