

## Housecat

Lily the Cat lives on 5 Watermill Court with her owners Myrtle and Arthur Robinson and their two children Leo and Lea, when they're home. Lily has black fur mottled with patches of brown and orange, for she is a tortoise shell cat. She has deep green eyes like stones and a guarded, shy mien. An aging cat, she was born in 2006. She lived peacefully for a time until her owners brought home a pug, Charybdis, who chases her around the house.

One day late in the year 2018 Lea Robinson, Lily's best friend, went back to college. Lily mewed all throughout the night. She lingered in Lea's bedroom and slept at the foot of the bed. Everyone who saw Lily remarked that she was not herself.

—Did you hear the news? Lea texted Leo Robinson in the morning.

—? he replied.

—Lily misses me, she wrote.

—I'm very sorry to hear it... Then he wrote:

—Poor Lily

—Misses Lea.

Satisfied with his poem Leo Robinson returned to work. He pulled open the screen of his computer and began to type proposals.

Lea was dismayed. She sat on her bed in her dorm room staring at the indentations in the cement ceiling. A queasiness rushed over her as she pictured Lily, alone, sitting at the bottom of her bed waiting for her to come home. Panic rose in Lea's heart but she remembered that she had class in fifteen minutes. She slid off the bed and picked her backpack up off of the floor.

—Bi Faith, she said. I'm going to class.

Poor girl misses her cat, thought Arthur Robinson as he swung shut his truck door and proceeded across the lot to his shop. He typed in the code and the sheet metal door slowly rose. He stepped under the raising door to darkness. Then Arthur Robinson unlocked the door to his shop and flicked on the lights. Panels of glass rested along the perimeter of the room, in the center of which stood a green felt table on which pieces of glass were measured, cut, and discarded. Arthur Robinson went into his office, unlocking the door, turning on the lights.

The sun arced towards the zenith. It burned like a piece of magnesium. Rays crossed the void and entered the haze of earth's atmosphere, then penetrated the cities to the streets below.

Leo Robinson's fingers ran up and down the keyboard knocking out letters. One by one the letters coalesced and formed sentences. The sentences had the semblance of an

argument. The semblance. But he hit send because he knew that the words got his point across. Now his fingernails jetted into the soft flesh at the base of his chin. They dug around until they felt a thin black hair, then they pinched the base and pulled. He looked a moment in disgust at the piece of hair on his fingertip, then flicked it onto the rug and changed tabs on his computer screen.

Myrtle Robinson had had enough of Lily the Cat's mewing.

—Lily! Shush! snapped Myrtle from her bed in the direction of Lea's room.

This cat's inconsolable.

Charybdis, groggy, creaked open her eyes and looked about the room. Then she sunk her chin back into her body and returned to snoring.

These animals I'm telling you.

Myrtle Robinson closed her eyes and tried to fall back asleep. But the thoughts of the day had already roused her. She remembered Art the night before returning home late from his visit with Clint, who had cheated on his wife then moved to a new apartment. A shade of regret passed over Myrtle as she remembered her and Art's honey moon together; and how he used to ask her questions. Now when he comes back home he has barely a word to say or he buries his head between the pages of a book while she banter on to him about her day. Myrtle Robinson pulled off the covers and began to prepare for the day.

Lily changed rooms. Her tail erect, she turned the corners cautiously. She listened for the sound of Charybdis' nails clicking against the tiles of the kitchen floor; but the dog was nowhere to be found. Lily trotted across the kitchen to the sunny spot near the double doors leading to the deck. She sprang off of her hind legs to a chair and thence to the granite counter. Dry food lay in one of her bowls, water in the other.

—Come on, somebody, said Lea Robinson's Professor of Religious Studies.

—Who did the reading last night, raise your hands.

Lea raised her hand with embarrassment.

—All of you, very good... Well I'll discuss it myself if I have to.

Lily's teeth crunched the terracotta food. Pieces broke across her teeth in chalky salty snaps. She swallowed and the fragments slid down her throat and into her belly, which swung like a pouch at the base of her body. Finished, her tongue shoveled water from the bowl.

Leo Robinson had just finished his first translation of Han Shan of the morning:

A house under a green cliff  
 Dwells amidst unmowed weeds  
 Vines tangle with the eaves

And the sheer cliff rises behind it.  
 Farmers pick fruit of the mountain: kiwi,  
 And white herons fish the pools;  
 I turn the pages of my holy book  
 Under a tree, mumbling.

This poem was for a collection for a contest. Right now he had 30–37 translated poems. He would have to delete some, edit most, leave unchanged one, two. Leo Robinson had not left the house in a week save to go on a walk and to retrieve his grandmother's mail. He felt a sinking hook of frustration dig into his brain. On another piece of paper he wrote:

—Why does it feel as if nothing is changing for me?  
 —Who am I?  
 —What do I hope to achieve today?

He looked over the questions he had written with content and, on the bottom of the page, wrote 'answer tomorrow' in fine black letters. He was excited to see how his thoughts would mature one day later.

On the desk in Leo's office lay many things—a small tower of folders and notebooks, modem and router, sheets of blank paper, a sharpener, a stapler, and a crystal glass full of iced coffee. He palmed the cool base, the icecubes rattled against the glass. Milk mixed with the bitter taste of coffee on his lips.

—Hey brother!  
 —Art, what's going on with you?  
 —Where's my son's car Mr. Mario?  
 —Few more days on that Art, had to order a part or two.  
 —Mario! Super Guinea!  
 —You're in an awfully good mood this morning Art.  
 —Is that right?

Mario looked Art squarely in the eye.

—Yea that's right.

Arthur Robinson reached into his pocket as his phone began to buzz.

—Getting a call Mario, I'll talk to you later.

Now that Myrtle Robinson had risen so had Charybdis. She trotted eagerly behind Myrtle's legs as they shuffled towards the kitchen.

—Egg? You want an egg Charybdis? Myrtle Robinson cooed to Charybdis.

Charybdis put her head at an incline and nodded back and forth.

—I'll get you egg... Aww that's a good dog.

Myrtle Robinson reached into the fridge and took out one of the eggs. She turned the dial of the stove and a circle of blue flame-petals burst out. She put a touch of olive oil in the pan and, cracking the egg on its side, let the egg white and yolk fall in.

—Scrambled egg for you Cribby!

If I know that I cannot know what I will become then why do I worry? It is a senseless position. And if I will become what I will become then why do I worry? And why am I always analyzing each one of my actions in terms of my progress? Why can't I lose myself for once?

Answer these questions later tonight.

Lily skid out of the kitchen with Charybdis chasing. They came to the ottoman on which Lily had leapt. Below, Charybdis groveled and whimpered, stretching out her front paws repentantly. Lily's tail puffed like a boa, she showed Charybdis her fangs and hissed like a snake. Charybdis looked up with sad marble eyes.

Lea walked out of Root Hall to the path. She cut past CJ and walked onto Martin's Way, heading back to her dormitory. One after another a rush of ideas crashed in her brain. She could feel her thoughts realigning and shifting like the earth's plates. And she had a vision of an eagle soaring across the face of the sun, the wingspan for a moment blackening. Lea stopped, stepped off the side of the path and wrote in her notebook.

I would like to live in a world  
Where time is slower  
So I can focus on all this Spirit.

She closed her book and returned it to her pocket. She thought of her and Lily cuddled in bed together. Sometimes Lily would curl up by her head. Lea walked.

Ahhh.

THE END