



# Those Who Lived under the Wishing Tree

Written and illustrated by  
Mina-Elisabeth Sandvik

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Leo and Mota are wild cats.

They walk together  
and play together  
and eat together  
and sleep together






and when they see the tail or the snout of another wild creature, they crowd together; make themselves pebble-mouse-small and fire-dragon-big at the same time, and HISS - because they are wild cats, alone but together, in the vast, wild jungle.

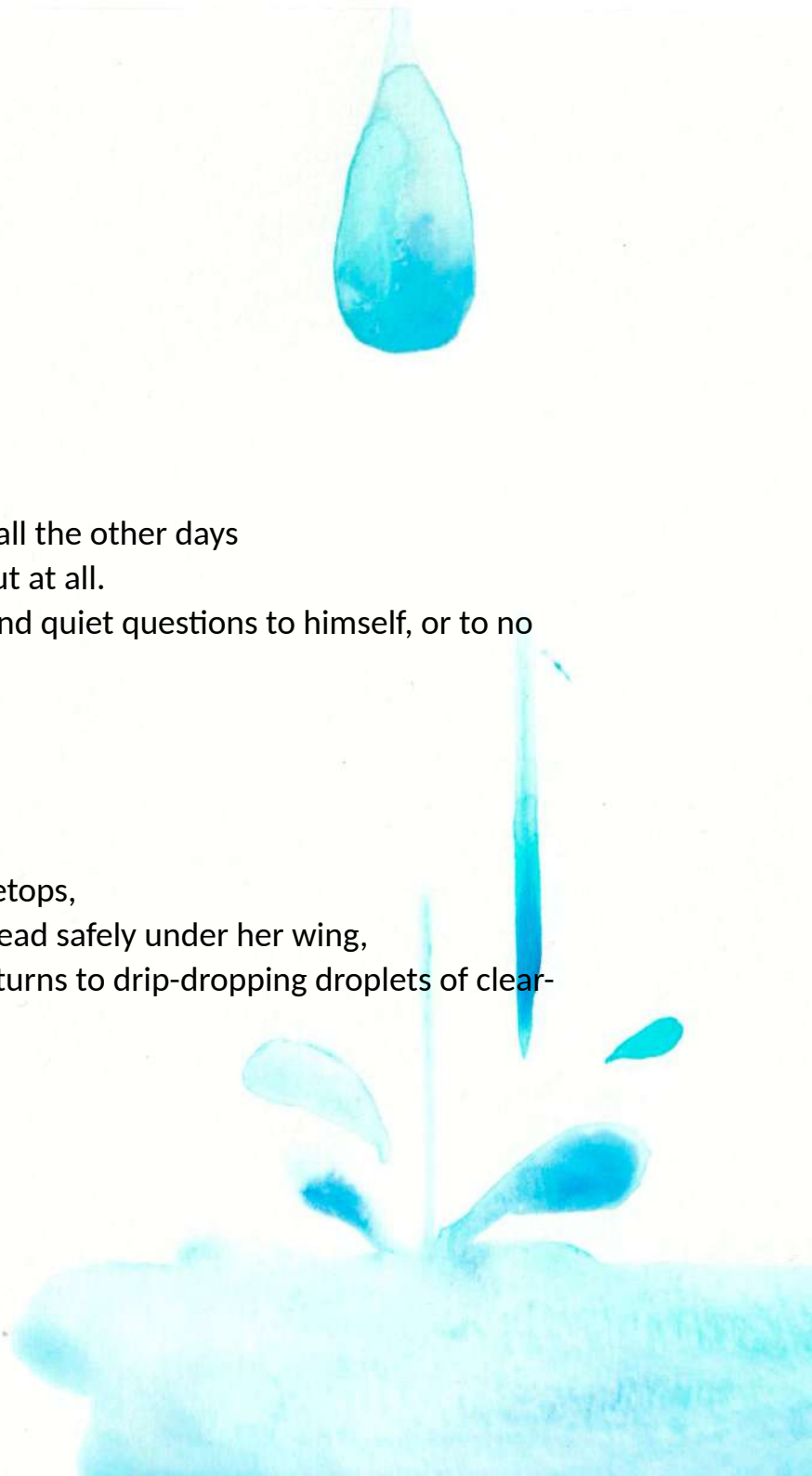


On a night when the moon is very round and bright, both in the faraway sky and the ink-black sea below the Wishing Tree, Mota lies awake, eyes big and yellow in the darkness of the trunk.

He whispers, quietly, so that the wind won't catch his words and blow them away to where he can't find them:  
"I wonder... Oh, sometimes I wonder... Were we always wild cats; were we always big and small and alone together, and did I have another name before you found me and I found you?"

But Leo has already fallen asleep, purring softly under the covers.  
"It feels warm and cozy to have someone who is next to you, always,"  
dreams Leo.





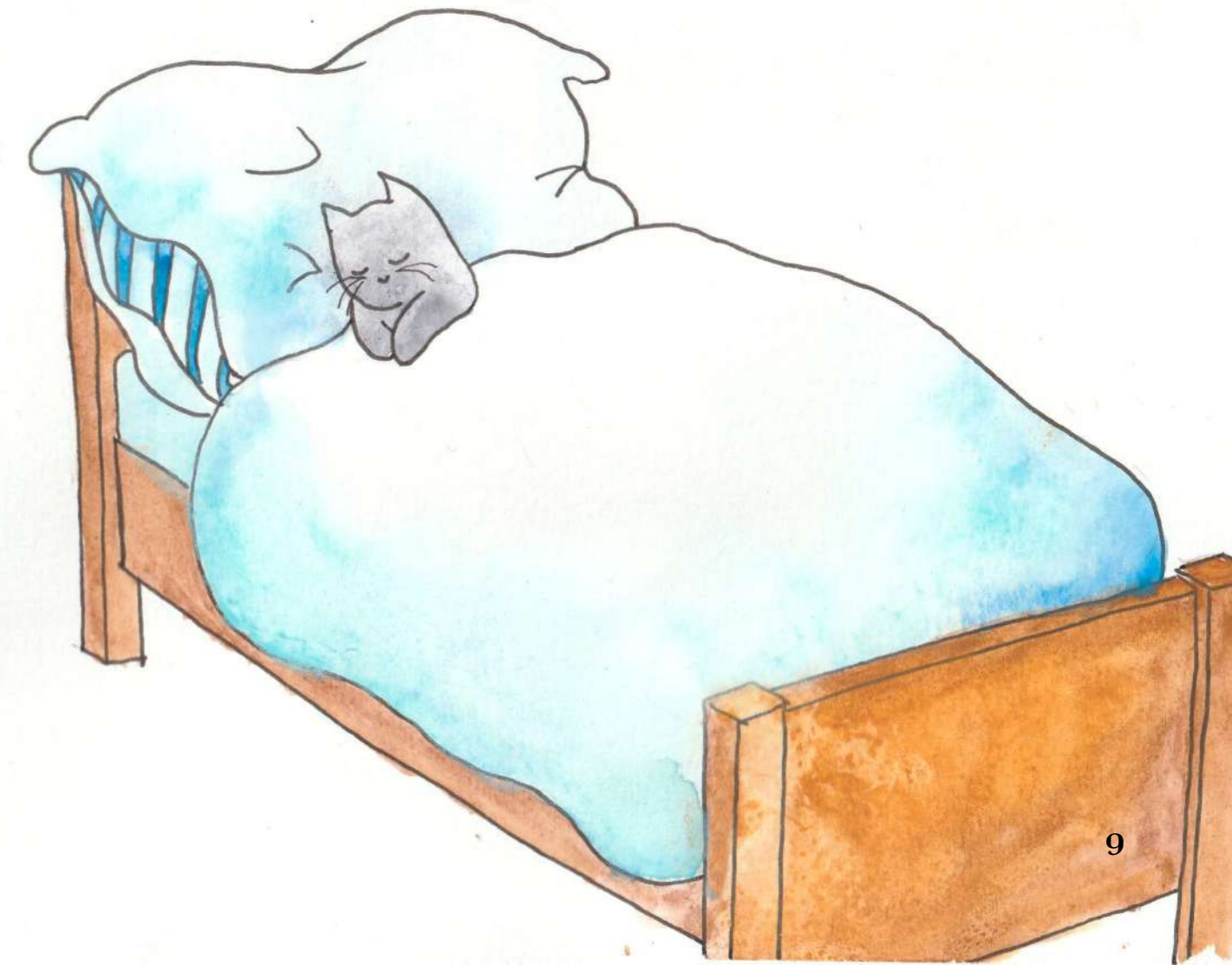
**And so,**  
they walk and play and eat and sleep  
through Mondays and Wednesdays and Saturdays and all the other days  
which have names that wild cats don't think much about at all.

Mota sometimes lies awake, whispering soft words and quiet questions to himself, or to no one in particular.

The days pass by,  
one at a time.

But one morning...  
One teeny tiny morning,  
as the first rays of sunlight make their way over the treetops,  
as the night owl hoots a final hoot before tucking her head safely under her wing,  
as the last of the snow on the Wishing Tree's branches turns to drip-dropping droplets of clear-blue water,

Leo wakes up and Mota is gone.



## A Very Sad Cat

"Mota," Leo meows. "Mota."

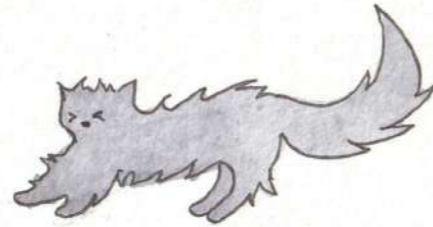
He stands up, forepaws first, and stretches his furry back. He licks his furry legs. He smooths down the fur on his head, which sticks out like a porcupine's prickly pins. He yawns so big that all his teeth show.

"Moooooota," he yells. "I'm hungry!"

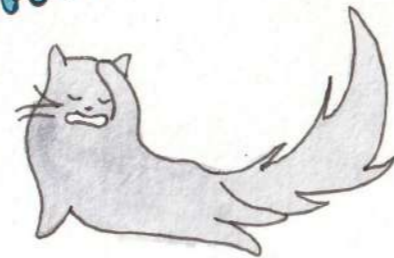
Something crunches as he sits down on it. The sound reminds Leo of stepping on a crisp, orange leaf in October.

On Motas' pillow lies a handwritten note, (because yes, unlike house cats, wild cats can write).

The note is signed with a paw print, just an ant's length wider than Leo's own.

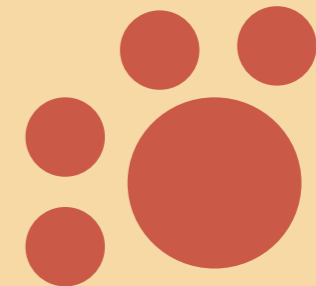


YAWN



I think that because we are Leo and Mota,  
because we walk together and play together and eat  
together and sleep together  
and are wild cats alone together in the wild jungle;  
and because we hiss at those who are not us  
and make ourselves pebble-mouse-small and fire-dragon-big  
at the same time -  
I need to go away for some time and see what it's like  
to just be a someone.

I will come back.



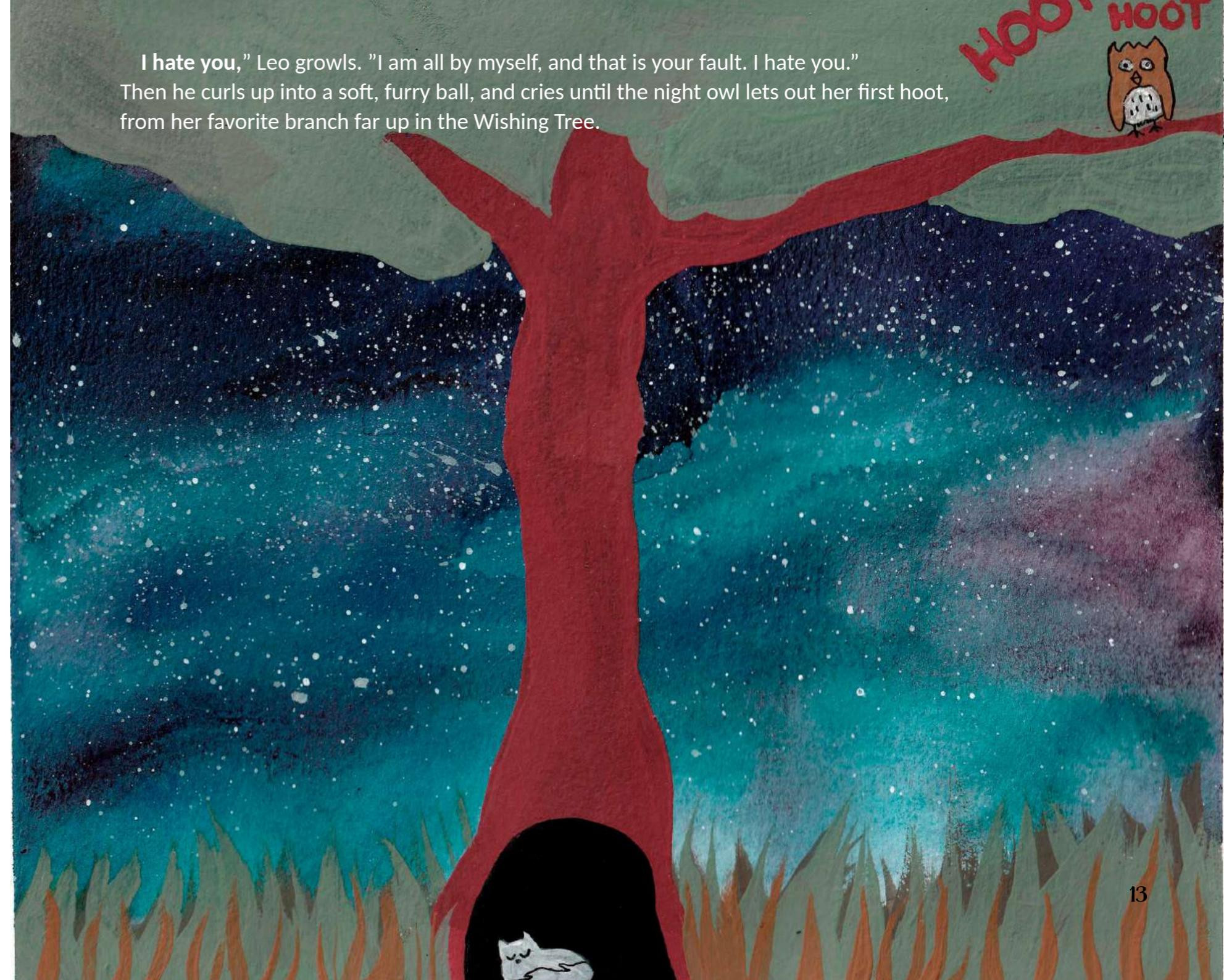


**Leo screams.**

He shrieks. He shakes and shivers. He shouts at the top of his lungs:  
"Come back! Don't leave me here alone - really alone, all by myself!"

But Mota doesn't come back. The morning is cold-blue and too-bright, and the jungle suddenly seems very large and frightening. Only the drip-dropping droplets of water can be heard, as they hit the earthy ground below.

"I hate you," Leo growls. "I am all by myself, and that is your fault. I hate you."  
Then he curls up into a soft, furry ball, and cries until the night owl lets out her first hoot,  
from her favorite branch far up in the Wishing Tree.



The next day is much the same,  
and the one after that.

Leo is a soft, furry, angry ball of sadness.

He hides under the covers of his small bed, hugging his own tail, and pretends that if he peeks out into the room, Mota will have been there all along.

"Are you hungry?"

Mota will ask with a grin.

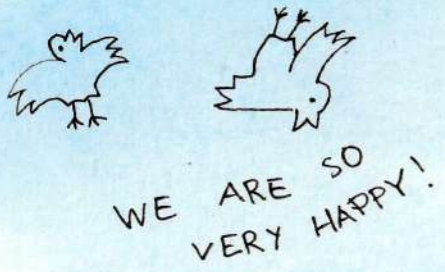
"I've caught you something delicious - with a tail!"

Or the other cat will have made himself very small, and tearfully proclaim:

"Leo, I'm sorry. From now on I will always be by your side. I had such a horrible time being away from you."

But Leo knows that Mota isn't there, and so he doesn't peek out, not even a tiny glance. He stays curled up into himself, and cries and cusses and doesn't feel like a wild cat anymore, but like a pebble-mouse with feelings too large for his small body. "I hate you," Leo whispers into the dark. "Please come back."





WE ARE SO  
VERY HAPPY!

## Ships in the sky

On the third day, Leo's stomach growls so loudly he almost forgets the fact that he feels very sorry for himself.

Slowly, slowly, the cat slides out from his hiding place under the covers. When he lets out a small breath, a white cloud appears in front of his mouth. *The world is so cold*, he thinks.

But outside the Wishing Tree, as Leo sneaks warily through the small opening in the trunk, the sun is out and the grass feels warm and pleasant under his soft paws. Some small singing-birds have returned from their yearly vacation, and they fly in loops and circles over the tree tops, chirping joyous sounds.

"Hmph," Leo says. "I should just eat you up."



Despite himself, he stretches out on his back, feeling the wind tickle his whiskers. Clouds drift past him like tall ships up in the sky, before they disappear out of sight.

"Where are you all going?

Can I come with you?

And would you carry me, or would I have to learn how to swim?"

Leo asks, and then laughs at his own silly thoughts.

How would he ever get up there?

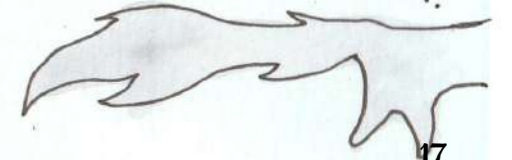
His stomach answers with a ROARING GROWL.

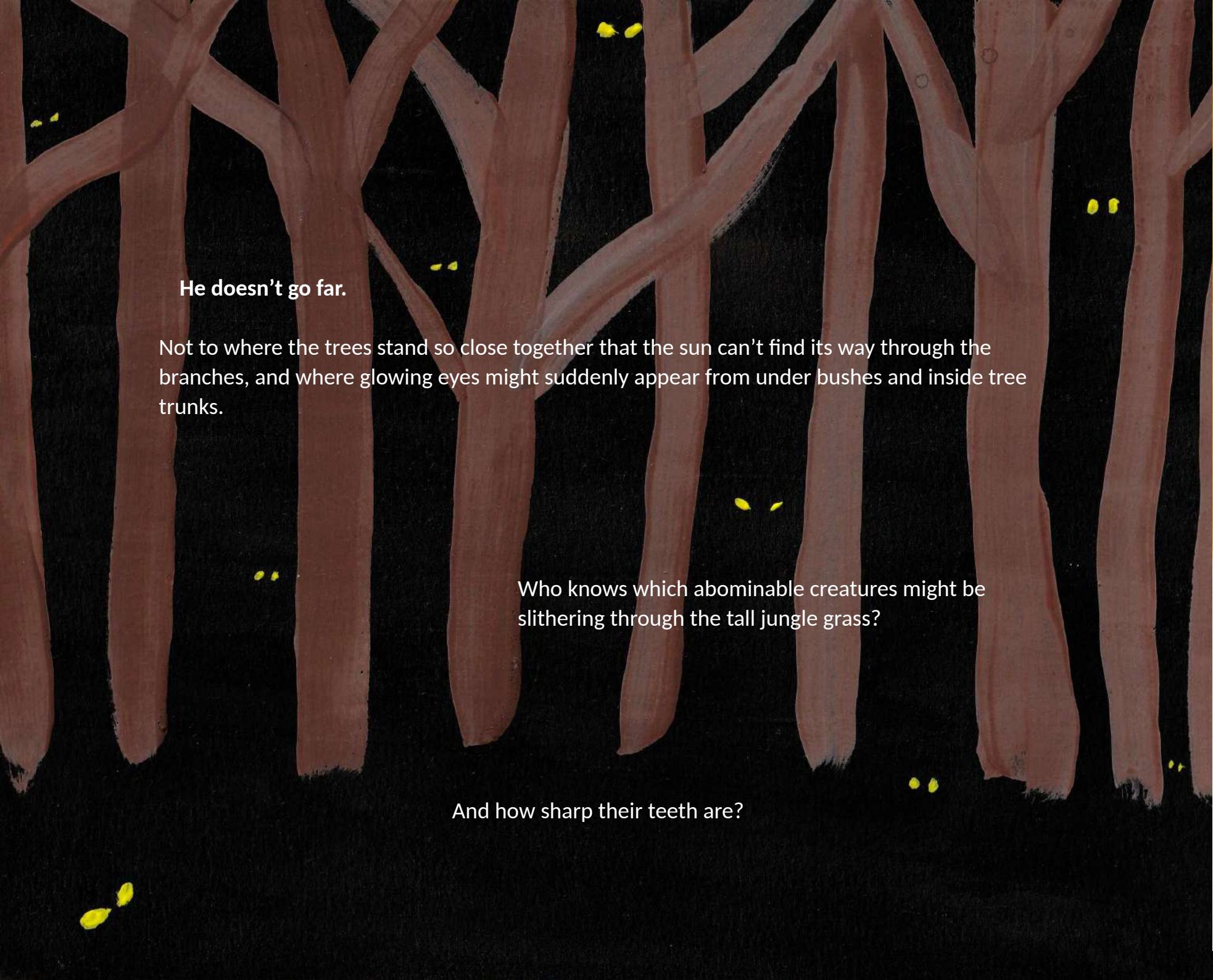
"HMPH," Leo says again, as he wanders into the jungle, away from his home in the Wishing Tree.

HMMM



GROWL!  
HMPH!





He doesn't go far.

Not to where the trees stand so close together that the sun can't find its way through the branches, and where glowing eyes might suddenly appear from under bushes and inside tree trunks.

Who knows which abominable creatures might be slithering through the tall jungle grass?

And how sharp their teeth are?



**An unfortunate fieldmouse** ends up on his dinner menu, and he chews silently, having lit just one candle in in his tree-trunk kitchen. He's still sad, and he's still mad, and he misses Mota's chit-chatty chatter and the calming sound of his paws against the solid floor. But every once in awhile his thoughts drift to ships, and adventure, and how it would feel like to go on a long journey himself.

**That night he dreams** of clouds shaped like pebble-mice and fire-dragons - and wouldn't you know, they're all playing nicely together!

Leo purrs in his sleep, with his paws stretched out toward the starry sky above...

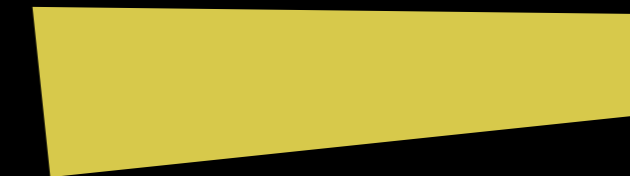
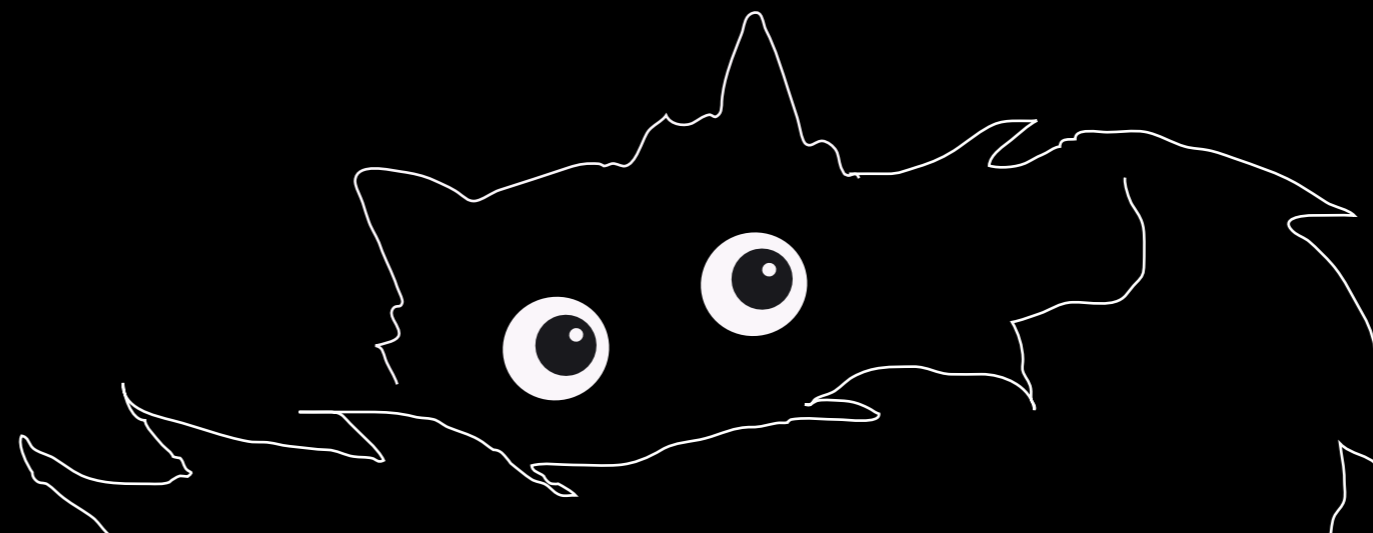


**"Hey!**

You there in the

**Wish-Washing Tree!**

**Little Wild Cat!"**



Meow

Meow

Meow



The next morning  
Leo wakes with a start, and jumps out of bed,  
only to leap right back in under the covers.

*Someone, or something,* is standing right outside the hole in the trunk!  
And they are being terribly loud.

**And then.**

Maybe it's because he's so sleepy,  
or because this is a highly unusual thing to happen to him,  
or because Mota is usually the one who handles such unwelcome happenings;  
or maybe he thinks this is just a very strange dream...

But as Leo peers out through the small opening,  
he forgets to make himself as small as a pebble-mouse and as big as a fire-dragon,  
he doesn't even hiss!

He simply says:

"You are being terribly loud. Can't you be that somewhere else?"

Then someone, or something,  
steps out of the shadow of a large root,  
and Leo backs away.

Why didn't he just continue hiding under the covers?

Oh, how he wishes that he had yelled back at the stranger:

*"Go away! I am currently visiting an elderly relative, and am therefore not at home. Please  
come back in a year or two!"*

The other one eyes him curiously.



## A strange visitor

**He is also** a wild cat – or at least a cat – but he’s tall and terrible; his red fur coat is long and matted, and his eyes twinkle against Leo in a peculiar combination of icy blue and cool brown. A scar shaped like a lopsided X marks the cat’s forehead. The stranger carries what looks to be a heavy backpack, and while all of this is extremely strange and unusual, there is still the funniest thing of all:

The cat stands only on his two hind legs.

“Greetings,” the horrible red being purrs, as he trots right past Leo into the trunk of the Wishing Tree.

“I’m in need of some assistance, but first I thought we’d have breakfast.”



Tall and Terrible

### **Leo is mad!**

Oh, now he is mad –  
after everything that has happened, this invasion into his own home, it's dreadful –  
he will not allow it!

He raises his back, and shoots out his claws, and opens his mouth –  
but the BIG SCARY ROAR seems to have gotten lost on its way out.  
"Meow," Leo says meekly, his eyes big as dinner plates.

The uninvited guest is already working away in the kitchen,  
humming merrily to himself.

"Meow,"  
Leo repeats, barely hearing his own voice.

**They sit at opposite** sides of the table.

Whereas Mota always used to sit on the chair next to him, Leo is very happy that the stranger chose to place himself as far away as possible.

Leo's claws are still out, and his paws are twitching nervously. They clank twice against the porcelaine tea cups, which the other cat dug out from Aunt Josephine's old cupboard. Despite the situation, Leo feels like he has to excuse his bad manners.

"Oh, never mind," the stranger says, with a small wave of his enormous paw.

"And by the way, I'm Lewis. The sailor, not the famous acrobat. I should probably apologize for my straightforward behavior myself – but I was extremely hungry!  
And I thought to myself: Hey, that wild one might have a cozy kitchen down in his tree-wishing-house. Oh, and..."

The stranger – or Lewis – looks up in the air with a puzzled look on his face – like he wonders if he really has acted in a bad manner, and if he should maybe be a bit ashamed of himself. But only a second later, he grins and proclaims:

"This fish is probably the fattest I've gotten all year! Must be fate."



**Leo has to agree.**

The fish is indeed fat and tasty, and the normalness of sitting at the table and eating a full meal makes him feel almost calm. He still doesn't know what to think about this whole ruckus, but is surprised to find himself asking (in an almost-steady voice):

"So, you said you needed my help?"

A very small part of him lights up when Lewis flashes him an even wider grin, and says:

"Yes! Are you done eating?"

It's easier if I just show you."

The branches of the Wishing Tree sway happily from one side to the other, as Leo and Lewis exit the tree trunk together, and make their way down toward the sea.

And who knows what will happen next?



Leo and Mota are best friends.  
They live together in the Wishing Tree,  
in the large, dangerous jungle.  
But what happens when one day, Mota wants to go on an  
adventure...

without Leo?



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