

THE WINTER CAT



Story and Pictures by Howard Knotts

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FIRST EDITION

FOR ILSE



Down through smoke the first flakes fall.
“Hello snow!” the children shout.
“Now it’s going to be winter!”



A wild gray cat shivers in the bushes
and listens to the children.



The cat looks at the white flakes falling.
WHAT IS WINTER? wonders the cat.
He was born in the fields in summer.



Later the children go in for their supper.
Alone, the cat wonders WHAT WILL HAPPEN NOW?
He watches as the flakes fall faster.



Snow covers the fields.
It covers the hills.
It covers the house where the children live.
Inside an old shed the gray cat watches
as half the world disappears in snow.





The world is white when morning comes.
The air is cold. The gray cat crouches.
“Hello winter!” the children shout.
Then one child calls, “Look at that!”



“Look at what?”

“That wild gray cat.”

The cat runs away when the children come closer.

“Oh, you can’t catch a wild cat ever.”

And yet the cat follows the children to the brook
where they look at the cold black winter water.
The children shout and roll in the snow
and the cat keeps close to the sound of their voices.
“There’s that cat.”
“Come here cat.”
The cat likes when the children call.
He runs away when they try to move closer.



The cat looks out at the snowy land.
Except for the firs in dark green patches,
the hilly woods are soft as smoke.
Will they blow away if a big wind comes?
Summer seems a long time ago.
Now all the days get shorter.
Now the gray cat knows it's winter.





The children call out in the early dark.

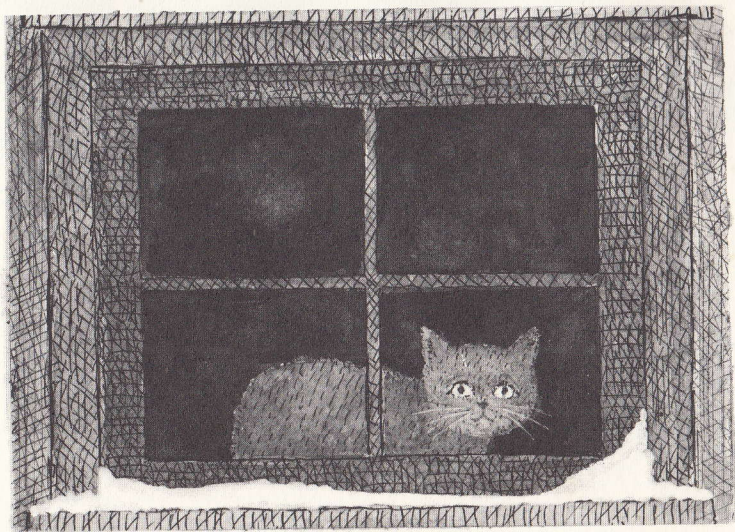
“Hello cat.”

“Come here cat.”

“Come here you old gray winter cat.”

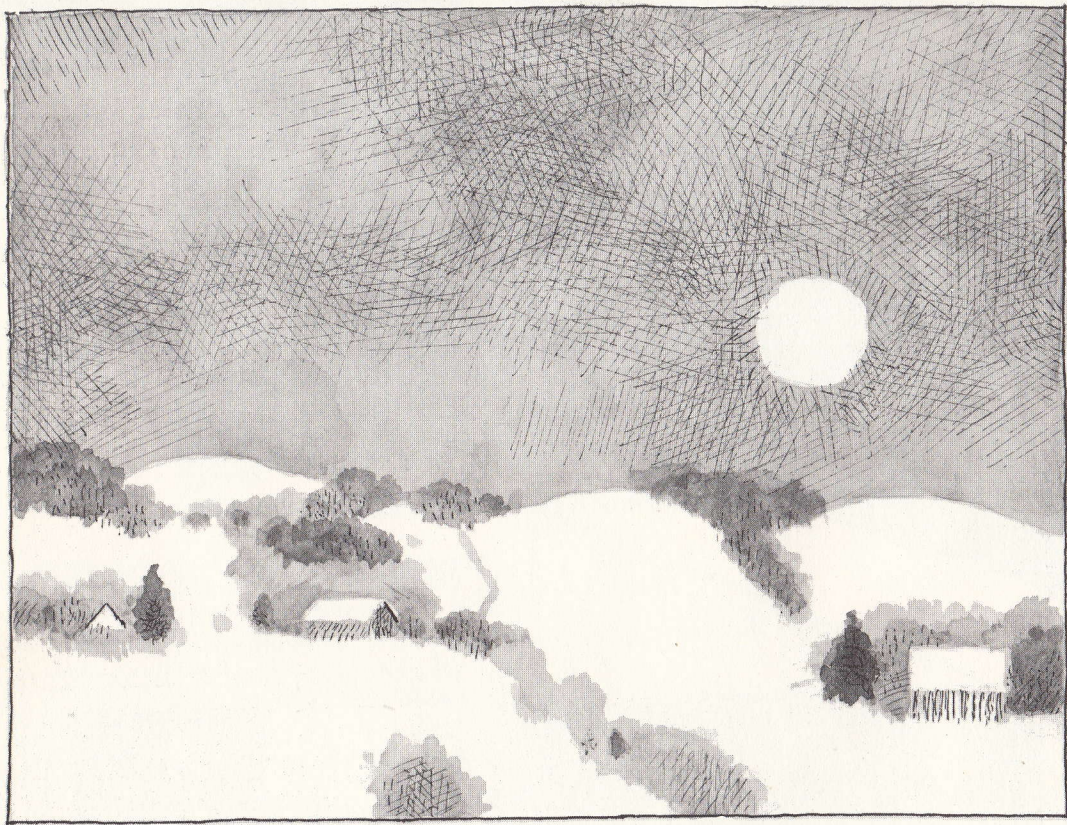


“It’s cold tonight. Better put out scraps.”
Scraps are left in a dish by the porch.
Scraps taste good to the winter cat.

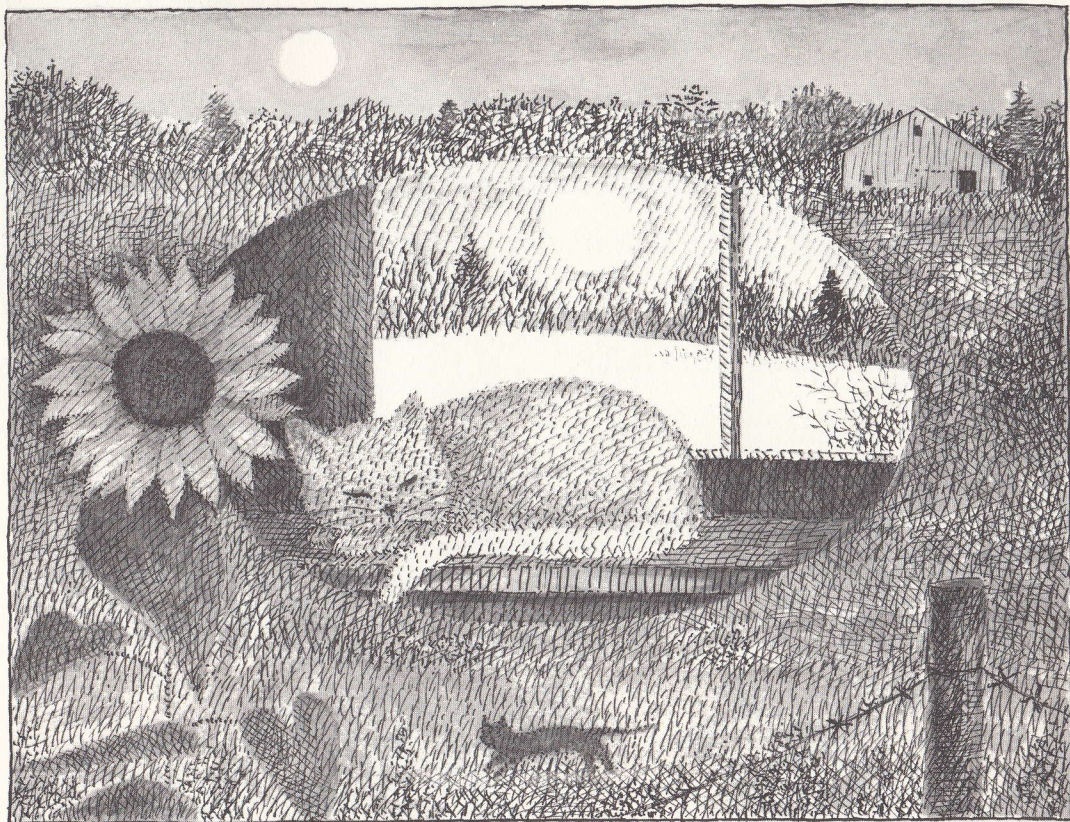


The cat watches the children's house.
At last all the lights in the windows go out.
Except for one window with lights like stars.
Colored stars in a tree.
And over the house the real stars dance
their glittery dance in the black tree branches.
The winter cat watches.





The hills lie white and still
under the winter moon.



But the winter cat sleeps on a shelf in the shed
and dreams of the fields where he ran in the summer.

Every day the children put out scraps.

“Merry Christmas you silly old cat.”

“Would you like a name?”

“Would you like a home?”

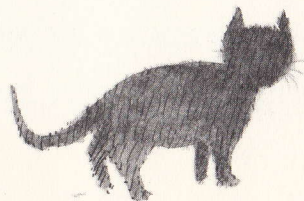
“Let’s call him Harry.”

“Homer is better.

He might come home if we call him Homer.”

“Merry Christmas Homer.”

Every day the cat lets the children come closer.





Every day the winter gets deeper and colder.
Sometimes the winter cat aches with cold.
Then one night the big wind comes.
The hilly woods don't blow away,
but down in the pasture the willow tree breaks.
One great trunk, like a giant's arm,
lies in the snow in the morning sun.
"Look, there's Homer!"
"Hello Homer!"
"Come on home Homer!"
WHAT IS HOME? the winter cat wonders.
"See how his ears move.
He knows his name is Homer."





Every day the cat lets the children come closer.
And a little bit closer.



Until one day it is just too cold
to be a wild cat any longer.



So the winter cat lets himself be touched.
The hands feel good on his fur and he purrs.
“Good old Homer.”



And he lets himself be carried into the house.
“Look, Homer is home.”
And the house is warm and it feels like summer.



Now the cat finds out about home.
He has a box for sleeping in a nice warm corner.
He has his own bowl and plate for supper.
He has a special window down the hall
where he can watch the new snow fall.
“Listen to that noisy old Homer purr.”
“Doesn’t Homer stop purring ever?”



And so
the children and the cat named Homer
wait for the good green days
to come.

THE WINTER CAT

Story and Pictures

by Howard Knotts

“Down through smoke the first flakes fall. The air is cold. The gray cat crouches.” He watches the stars dance in the black tree branches. He watches the children play. “Oh, you can’t catch a wild cat ever.” But as it gets colder and more snow falls, the cat lets the children come a little bit closer, and closer....

This gentle story illustrated in soft black and white paysages describes a little cat’s winter with warmth and sensitivity.

HOWARD KNOTTS was born in Springfield, Illinois, and is an honor graduate of the Chicago Art Institute. His work has been exhibited in leading museums throughout the country. Mr. Knotts lives with his wife and twelve cats in a two-hundred-year-old farmhouse in Bangall, New York. He is the illustrator of *A DAY IN THE COUNTRY* by Willis Barnstone.

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