

## **The Therapy Cat**

Each person has a secret.

They all tell me before they journey to the stars.

They can trust me. I can sense when they are ready for their journey ahead.

I look up at the starry sky. Each bright light shows someone I've helped. A pulling sensation begins. Someone is ready.

I fly along the corridor. I have to get there soon. Room 10, 11, 12, 13, 14...

Room 235.

I nudge the door open with my paw. I meow and leap up onto the bed. An old man.

He has pale green eyes and a fluffy white moustache. What a horrid shame. I love him very much. He glances up and sees me. A smile lights up his wrinkled old face. "Hallo, White-boots! Never felt happier to see you."

I purr as he scratches my black cheek. I gently lick my paws. He strokes my sleek black body to the white tip on my tail. This is very relaxing.

"You know what, White-boots? I've never told anyone this before but," He stares into the distance seeing something I can not see. "I've had a hard time. Life has been difficult, with the war and losing my brothers, sisters, cousins, parents, wife and all of them; it's been hard on my own. But the world gives me things, like joy. And that is what makes me happy."

I look at him. He just smiles and says, "I love the world even though I've not seemed to get along with it. Well, I'm exhausted." He yawns. "Goodnight White-boots, I love you too."

His eyes close and he begins to breath slowly. He is ready. I purr gently as he rubs my fur.

I listen to his gentle breathing. Then I climb onto his chest and lie there. I can feel the steady beating of his ancient heart, the steady breathing of his ancient lungs and as I listen they slowly grow fainter and fainter. His heart comes to a stop, like a train, worn out by bad weather and hectic journeys. Then his breathing dies away like when you walk away from the sea.

His hand lies on my back. I crawl out from under his hand and leap off the bed.

As I go through the door, I look back.

I take a moment to remember him, and leave the room my heart filling up with an ocean of sadness. At least he will see his friends and family. I smile. A peaceful parting.

By Chloe Oulahan

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<https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/blog/2024/september/the-martha-mills-young-writers-prize-2024-the-winners>