

Dearest Mother,

I forgot to mention Polar. Polar is a bob-tailed cat with green eyes. She moves with poise and grace and never appears harried. I see her stretched out or curled in a patch of sun on the graveled grounds.

More often she can be found in a clearing of piney woods. Polar is beyond kittenish—no longer full of curiosity or whimsy. She doesn't entangle herself in a ball of yarn or hunt an imaginary prey.

She lives within herself. She springs atop a pink wall and unerringly lands on the narrow perch. There are no Feline Olympics but the jump is remarkable. She has known injury. It isn't clear how she lost her tail.

Polar is preternaturally aware. I cannot know what her thoughts are. Sometimes the author is barred entry to the psyche of her characters. Polar is opaque.

Polar sees me. Her gaze is intent. It's as though the image enters her eyes and plummets into a depth of being I cannot fathom. She is without fear. She does not run. She looks.

In mid-crouch her body unwinds and she sits. I want to say she poses but it is part of Polar's beauty that she is unaware of it. She will endure a photograph. What Polar does is not so much pose as *repose*—a reconfiguring of limbs into a marble statue. I imagine she could sit in sun and shadow, rain and snow, night and day, for eons.

Our conversation consists entirely of unasked questions.

What is the shape of love? thinks Polar.

Can one be free and committed? I think.

Why does the world go round?

What is the terminus of desire?

How do you translate cat-speech?

Where is another star?

Does the philosopher know propositions about life are not life?

What is the will to power?

When do you withhold mystery?

And so forth. Usually Polar is silent but on occasion she is wildly voluble. I suspect it's to do with the heat because into her voice comes a mewling quality one has not heard before. And it melts my heart like a glacier calving. Polar is beginning to warm.

If this is love, it comes from a distance. Polar lives in that distance. Every image mirrored in her eye comes faraway. Looking into her eye is to fall into a depthless pool.

Your loving child,

Dearest Child,

I don't know whether this will reach you as I am still in the lowlands of this coastal city. The negotiations of existence become daily more difficult. I see everything through the rain-slickened glass of transport—bus, train—and move with slothlike languor. The city is unreal.

Bottled water is a necessity. There are rumors that merchants are selling rotten meat, triggering a riot yesterday. Public toilets have been shut down. A brownout stranded passengers in the metro for an hour. It was too dark to read a book. We return to a preliterate age.

I am a child of futurists who predicted global warming, growing inequalities, regional wars, tribal nationalisms, disease, famine and mass migration. I live in a city that is failing for all but its billionaire inhabitants who see the bonfires by the river where the homeless men warm their hands through blacked-out windows of a limousine that cruises noiselessly through the imperium.

These are the stations I must travel, hardknock tricks of experience that necessitate a fluid, improvisational self—or selves. Nothing is definitive. All is flux. These days you may encounter a saint or murderer on the road. It's hard to tell. So much of my day is passed in transit. The regulars at the diner are refugees from a rain-lashed typhoon. They are clothed in yellow slickers and bent hats. Their faces are creased and bent as if living on a last nerve.

As their waitress I am a harbor who brings coffee and smalltalk and solace to a moment as a gadget only induces distraction and anxiety.

How are you, honey. How's your day going. Who's going to stop this rain.

The dialogue isn't written by Chekhov, no, but these men have suffered the loss of a world and need consolation. I can offer that. That is part of the unwritten prerequisite of the job description. She thinks she's in a play, she is anyway.

I miss you dearly.

Your loving mother,

Dear Mother,

I forgot to mention that Polar is dead. Even in the country there are hazards. The cat, with her agility and multiple lives, did not escape. Perhaps she did. The machine is everywhere now. It is a tool of murder.

As was her wont Polar was lounging on the road in the sun. Normally it is untrafficked except for the occasional visitor or delivery person.

The green roadster diagrammed the curves like a Grand Prix, the driver's goggled eyes stony and pinned, face granite with an intention of speed, foot fluttering the pedal. He sees nothing but the road to hell.

What makes a killer, Mother? It is the stone within, the incapacity to feel, a resolve to not-feel.

There was, then, the long approach to the school, its sharp pins and turns but the driver was expert, grafted to his vehicle. The engine was humless, almost soundless. It drove itself. The racer attained an image of absolute control. In him was a cold place. His eyes were bullet points.

Polar did not hear the car then she did, rolling onto her paws, springing into a crouch. By then the wheels of the roadster were upon her. She was crushed beneath them. Then the car was gone to plunder the countryside, the rainforest, the icecaps, the coral reefs.

The school did what it does. It held an assembly. There were speeches by the head, masters, prefects. Hymns were sung.

The red stain on the road would not turn grey or disappear for weeks. Polar had immense clarity. She is reborn as a butterfly with blue transparent wings.

Your sorrowing child,