

Crown Joel
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Can you be jealous of your cat?

Welcome to my life. I'm a 35-year-old "unemployed" writer, living in the outskirts of the city with my darling wife and...

A cat. Of whom I'm immensely jealous.

As I write this, trying to concentrate on regaining my momentum (I haven't written in a while), I'm starting to wonder if I'm losing my zest to live. Or maybe I'm being a little too dramatic. Perspective. But that's not really the point of this...let's call it a memoir. I haven't published anything ever; no matter how much my wife nags that I try, make an effort. *You're good*, she says. *You need to take the plunge*. But I would just ignore her (not to her face, though; I'd just say *Yeah, yeah*...and then not chase it anymore). All my writings are saved in a folder, uncreatively titled "Writings," on my laptop. There must be fifty pieces in there—short stories, limericks, poetry, etc.—but none have seen the light of day.

I was perhaps okay with not being ambitious enough to want to get published. Until the cat arrived.

Yes. The cat—I'm not supposed to call her "animal," not unless I'm ready to hear an earful from the missus—has somehow turned me from a contended, okay-if-I'm-never-published writer into an envious nag.

We named the cat Joel. Why? That's an interesting story. And, mind you, it elicited a laugh from my wife when she first heard it; so it carries with it her endorsement.

Here it is: Billee (in Hindi, because I'm from India), means cat. So...Billy...Joel.

Get it?

Oh, boo hoo. It's a good name. It got a stamp of approval from the woman who, people say, has a critical eye. I should know that.

All the three-month-old Joel does all day is sleep, eat, and play with tiny plastic caps used to seal cough syrup bottles. The transparent ones? Yeah, she loves them. Pushes it around the floor, using her limbs as hockey sticks and the cap as the puck. It skates along the marble floor, and, though she doesn't smile (contrary to what the Cheshire Cat may have had me believe), the excitement she exudes tells you she's enjoying. And seeing *that*—the fact that she's having fun—is what makes me envious.

(As I write this, Joel steps outside of her litter tray and scampers across the room to...I don't know, wherever she pleases. On her way, she makes an abrupt turn; and—hello!—here she is, just under my chair. Looking at me. Intently. As if she knows what I'm writing. *That's right*, I can hear her thoughts. *Make sure you write well about me*.)

Whatever you say, sire, I find myself thinking.

Oh, what a life I live.)

And does she care that I am judging her for getting excited over something as ordinary as a plastic cap? Absolutely not. I may be sitting here, watching her kick the cap, chasing it as it skates across the floor. She would even crash her head into the chair leg she was too excited to notice (do they see stars when they bang their head on something? Tom did, but how can you tell cartoons are different from real life?) but just shake her head, and resume. After she's done playing, which is when she's hungry, sleepy or insanely bored, she will turn and set those still, unmoving, *frightening* eyes on me. If I'd dared feel the cat was being silly before, chasing a cap which doesn't cost a hundredth of those atrociously expensive toys my wife bought for her, I would find myself changing my opinion.

I am stupid, I say as she intimidates me. I try not to show it. I don't want her to know I'm scared witless, but I'm sure she knows. That *I-know-what-you're-thinking-and-I-won't-say-I-like-it* stare says it all. And, subsequently, off she trots away in her orange catty bed for a siesta.

Because a game of cap-kicking has drained her.

All this while, I'm sitting on the sofa, my laptop propped in front of me, the chapter I had promised myself to complete yesterday still unfinished. It's been two weeks, and I've written two pages. My head hurts because I just *can't* write (and have no concrete reason to say why), my back is starting to ache because I've been slouched in the same position all day (I have to remind myself I'm not twenty anymore), and my anxiety—*This is it, I will never be able to write anymore* – off the roof.

And here she is, the Crown Joel, stretching, yawning in that adorable manner you never associate with yawns, finding that sweet spot. And, just like that, she's asleep. You can even hear her snoring.

I detest that sound. Not because it's loud—not pointing any fingers, but I've had my share of sleeping beside someone who snores loud enough to bring the roof down (I'm exaggerating, or maybe I'm not?)—but because she looks so...peaceful. And I...

Have to write.

Why?

So I can get published.

Why?

So I can earn money.

Why?

So my wife and I can feed the ball of fur who's sleeping without a care. *Yes, kitty*, I say, soft enough to not wake the queen, *so you can be fed. While your peasants slave for you.*

I try to be soft, but my thoughts are loud. And—it happens unexpectedly, because I see my wife, who’s been slaving on her laptop in the next room, open the door and poke her head out, her eyes wide, her face contorted, and I know from my twelve-year-old marriage that she’s mad—I realize I had inadvertently verbalized my thoughts...

A little too loudly. Waking the cat up.

And she’s looking at me with those merciless, dreadful, *scary* eyes.

And I fear for my life.

Shaurya authored his debut novella, *End of the Rope*, in 2019. He likes sports (cricket, mostly), eating out, and watching reruns of *The Office* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*. His social media handles include @shauryaticks (Twitter) and @main.hoon.ek.sharara (Instagram)