# Snow Cat

“Snow Cat” is an animated short film directed by Sheldon Cohen. It’s an adaptation of Dayal Kaur Khalsa’s eponymous story. Khalsa is a well-recognized Canadian children’s book author of American descent. This story in particular has two levels to it. On the first level, we see a grandma and her granddaughter sitting next to a fireplace on a snowy winter evening. The girl is in her little tent and her grandma is in an armchair knitting a sweater. A girl says she’s bored, to which grandma responds that she should try and catch a fish for them using some of the grandmother’s yarn. The girl tells her that she would rather catch a seal and keep it as her pet. Her grandmother then proceeds to tell her a story about the Snow cat after comparing the girl to Elsie - the main character of the story. The story itself, narrated by the grandmother, is the second level to this film.

On the second level lies a nordic-folklore-style story about a girl named Elsie, who lives alone in her house on an edge of a forest. To relieve her loneliness, “North wind” sends her the Snow cat - a human-sized and cat-shaped creature made out of snow and ice that becomes Elsie’s pet and best friend. The North wind, however, warns Elsie that under no circumstance should she let her pet inside her house. Elsie agrees, but later breaks this rule. She wakes up to the Snow cat having become a puddle on her floor, that later finds its way outside to form a frozen pond in the shape of a cat. The pond attracts a flock of geese travelling south. After a short rest, they set off once again leaving behind an injured baby goose. Elsie notices the baby goose and brings him home. The goose becomes her new pet and best friend. When spring arrives, the same flock of geese is now flying back north. They stop for a rest at the pond. The baby goose gets reunited with its flock and together they head north. This is when the grandma announces the moral of the story: “Wild things have their own ways”, she says. In the following years the baby goose makes sure to visit Elsie every time it travels over her little house.

I can’t overlook the artistic choice of the animation style for this film. While the first (outer) level of the story is depicted in a childish, cartoonish manner using vibrant colours and relatively detailed backgrounds, the second (inner) layer is drawn using finger paint technique with fluorescent paint on a pitch-black background. The paint ranges in color from orange to blue and color helps communicate the temperature of objects, just like a thermal camera. Things are mostly orange inside Elsie’s house and blue colors are used to paint everything on the outside. When spring arrives, the outside becomes greenish in reference to trees growing leaves and the grass finding its way to the sun after a long winter. The background, however, remains black even during the summer. The story takes place in the far north, where the sun never rises, as the grandma mentions in the beginning. This might be a reference to the “polar night” phenomenon - the reason settlements located north of the arctic circle get little-to-no sunlight throughout the winter despite the sun never setting for them in the summertime. These clever artistic choices help us differentiate between the levels of the story as well as carrying additional information about the environment in which the story takes place, increasing the immersion and creating the necessary emotion. A cleverly-designed soundtrack also happens to support the story quite well, amplifying the atmosphere.

The moral of this story, in my opinion, is condensed in the grandma’s phrase “Wild things have their own ways”. When she said this, she referred to the baby goose that Elsie wanted to domesticate and keep as her pet. She didn’t want it to join its flock and fly away from her. What happened to the snow cat before was due to the same reason. She failed to recognize the boundaries of their friendship and care for the cat. The Wind warned her she should never let the snow cat inside, but instead of carrying about her friend, Elsie was only thinking about her own wellbeing. She didn’t want to spend even a single night alone and selfishly took the snow cat inside. This ended up killing the snow cat. For selfishly wanting to spend just one night with the snow cat she was punished by not being able to spare even a single moment with her friend ever again. This story, however, taught her a valuable lesson. Friendship, just like any other relationship, has to remain balanced. Without one friend carrying for the other, friendships are quick to fall apart, and, sometimes, can even end tragically, like Elsies friendship with the snow cat did. This is why it is important to treasure your friends while they are beside you. Knowing that, Elsie released the baby goose and let it go. She didn’t repeat the mistake she made with the snow cat. This shows that she’s learned her lesson.

There is no doubt Elsie regrets what she did to the snow cat. The question is, if she can be forgiven for it. The North Wind was annoyed when he found out that Elsie didn’t listen to him. Still, I think he forgave her shortly after. When she brought the injured baby goose home to warm it up, the North Wind blew into her chimney making the fire greater and warmer. The North Wind helped her, so I would assume he had forgiven her at that point. A more important question is if Elsie forgave herself. I think she did, because she learnt her lesson and was able to move on. Without this part the story wouldn’t be complete and would lack depth.

If I had a child I would probably show them this short film. Not only is it entertaining, it also teaches children to treasure their friends and respect their boundaries. And the film’s artistic style, which I find quite tasteful myself, would help develop the child’s own taste. Children don’t have the necessary experience required to tell apart good and bad stories. Children often take what is said to them quite literally and can understand only some simple metaphors, if any at all. This is why children's stories don’t normally have the “gray-morale” and ambiguous characters that are commonly found in literature in general. It’s the reason it’s so important to curate children's media consumption. I’d find this story appropriate for my own children.

The short story reminded me of the time I met some of my own friends. Being an avid tourist that I am, I travel a lot, often alone. A while ago I went to Spain alone, there I made friends with a guy named Josh. When I was in Barcelona and looking for a place to eat I pulled out Google Maps and found a restaurant with good reviews nearby. I wanted to try a local dish called “paella” - a frying pan with fried rice and seafood. According to reviews, that was one of the best places in town to have paella, so I headed there. When I arrived, I found out that it was a very popular venue and, unless I made a reservation in advance, which I did not, I had to wait in the line outside to get a table. The smallest table they had could fit two people, and, since I was alone, I could share a table with someone else who also came to eat alone. This way both of us would get in quicker and, perhaps, have a good conversation. I quickly found a single guy my age waiting in the line and offered to share a table. He agreed. Soon enough a waiter came out to announce that a table for two was available now, so we went inside. At the table we made our orders and had a quick chat while waiting for our food to arrive. Josh told me he grew up in Seoul, Korea and at the age of 18 his family sent him to the United States to get his education. He was studying there to become an organist. In the US he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His church offered him to participate in an exchange program and come to Spain to meet other members of the church. I told him I was from Russia and he was surprised to learn that, since he had never met a person from Russia before in his entire life. Then we had a great dinner. I enjoyed the paella a lot. After the dinner we went walking in the old city center. We exchanged phone numbers and to this day sometimes chat about updates in our lives online. When we were leaving the restaurant we asked a waiter to take a picture for us. I keep it as a reminder of the day I made a new friend.

