**Description**  
Emily Ilett reads from her children’s book The Girl who Lost her Shadow which follows a girl called Gail as she tries to find her missing sister’s (Kay) shadow. This extract describes the moment when Gail meets a Scottish wildcat in the forest and sees herself reflected in its eyes. I chose this moment because I’ve found solace in the ordinary magic of the natural world during this year and I hope this moment captures that feeling.

**Transcript**

Hello, my name is Emily Ilett. I am a children’s writer and I also work at Glasgow Women’s Library as a project and admin worker. I am going to read a short extract from my debut children’s book which is called “The Girl who Lost her Shadow.” It is about sisterhood and bravery and asking for help when you most need it. It follows a girl called Gail as she is searching across a Scottish island for her sister’s missing shadow. Now the extract that I’m going to read comes about a third of the way through the story. Gail is in the middle of a forest, she’s been looking for her sister’s shadow and her own shadow has also gone missing. And what Gail discovers is that without a shadow, other shadows, loose shadows, can grab hold of you. And when they grab hold of you, they start to make you feel as if you’re becoming more like them. For example, if a rock shadow grabs onto her, grabs onto her feet, she starts to feel really rocky, and still and solid. And at this point, a tree’s shadow has grabbed onto her and she’s starting to feel like she has leaves coming out of her ears. Now Gail is an aspiring marine biologist so there’s lots of discussion about sea creatures in this book and I wanted to read this extract because she meets a creature that I really enjoyed writing about. So I’m just going to dive straight into it – she’s stuck in a tree’s shadow in the middle of a forest.

“A crow burst upwards, startled into flight: something was moving in the forest. Gail froze. She could smell animal: damp fur and hunger. Every part of her body tensed. She squeezed her eyes shut, frantically racing through all the defences she knew: the octopus’s spray of ink, the eel’s organ regurgitation, the slime of the hagfish. She thought of the leafy sea dragon’s camouflage and the jellyfish’s sting. And then she thought of Kay and the way she stared everyone down without any other kind of weapon at all. So Gail opened her eyes.

The eyes staring back at her were full of wilderness. Of hunts and hiding. Of exile and territory. They were full of night secrets and independence. They were coral-proud and luminous. They shone.

Gail’s mouth opened and closed like a stranded fish. The cat was only an arm’s length away. It stared at Gail, its thick, black-tipped tail twitching.

Once upon a time, Rin said that Miss said that someone famous once said that to see yourself in the reflection of an animal’s eye is to see yourself properly for the first time. Gail and Kay had spent that evening circling the goldfish bowl where Spot and Spots deftly avoided their eyes. They’d prodded the hamster awake and squinted and squashed their faces next to his, but his round black eyes showed nothing but shiny indifference. They’d used binoculars to stare at Mr Chopra’s yellow-eyed cat, but it showed them its tail instead. And so they’d given up, deciding that Rin and Miss and the famous someone knew nothing about it at all.

But here in the forest, a tree’s shadow curled around her feet and sunlight trickling through the leaves, Gail could see herself in the cat’s eyes. She could see Kay in the shape of her own jaw and the curl of her hair but Gail’s nose was smaller than Kay’s, and her eyebrows were straighter and her cheeks twitched in different ways. She looked small and lost but distinctly like herself. Her seal-brown eyes stared back at her and her uncertain mouth straightened.

And as she stared at her own reflection, Gail felt something shift below her. The tree’s shadow was loosening, each root rolling away. Gail’s heartbeat thumped in her ears as the cat slowly blinked her reflection back again. In the cat’s eyes, Gail looked braver than she felt. Her fringe spun above her forehead in dark coils and her nose was clustered with determined freckles.

She wriggled her cramped feet gently and flexed her fingers, while the cat casually yawned and licked a paw. Gail attempted a smile. She felt more solid somehow, like she knew where her edges were. And she knew what she had to do…”