

Translated excerpt

Ingrid Bachér / Rotraut Susanne Berner (Illustration)
Das Kind und die Katze

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The Child and the Cat

Translated by Lisa Rainwater



“Come here,” the child said to the cat. “I’m still up.” And the cat opened the door a bit wider and entered the dark room. A tiny evening glow followed her in from the hallway, where the windows had no blinds. The balcony door in the child’s bedroom had shutters, allowing only the narrowest strips of light through. Suddenly, as thunderclouds shimmied across the moon, the windowpanes went black.



“Come here,” the child whispered, and the cat came to the foot of the bed. “I should really go to sleep, but I’d like to talk with you. The house is so big. We’re the smallest, and we’re all alone.” The cat stretched, looking like a long, black shadow, then she turned toward the balcony door as if wanting to say: Don’t you hear it? A storm is coming.

“It’s still far off,” the child replied, trying to comfort herself. “Come closer. Sit on the blanket. I’m not allowed to let you under the covers. Not even when we’re alone together.” The child lay still and drew the cat a bit closer. They listened to the wind and looked around the room and then at each other. The child petted the cat.

“You could say something, you know.” But she didn’t want to wait for an answer and kept on going: “It’s not really necessary though. It’s fine.” I shouldn’t be so afraid, the child thought. The house seemed deserted and empty, even though she and the cat were inside. “Why did my parents go out anyway? They didn’t seem too happy and yet they went out together.” The cat began to purr. It was a familiar sound but wasn’t very comforting. “Should we turn a light on?” But the cat just kept on purring.



“I’m afraid to get up,” the child said. The dark corners of the room grew even darker and the child thought: I’d really like to go home, but I’m already here. And that frightened her. I should be a cat, she thought, then we’d be perfect together. She nuzzled her hair into the cat’s black fur. She hugged the cat, wanting to love it enough so that she could change into the cat or the animal could change into her. The storm began to spread across the city. The child called on her inner strength. But as much as she tried to draw on her courage, her hands fought to pull up the bedspread. She was afraid to get up and close the door to shut out the flashing lightning running down the hall every few seconds, brightening the room.

The cat sat up and placed her front paws on the child’s tummy. The child barely noticed. The cat was tender and light. The child eavesdropped on the thunder. Agitated, she barely dared to say aloud: “I would like to be strong, Cat! Or you have to be. I don’t want to be afraid anymore.”

Hoping to escape from her fear, she needed to start somewhere. So, because she was too big to hide in the black fur of a cat, she cried out: “I want to turn you into a lion, into a huge, fully-grown lion!”

