



Two Cat Tales

by **Zoya Master**

Illustrations by **K. Shakirova**

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✉ info@mgraphics-publishing.com

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*To my wonderful girls
Julie, Kate, Olivia, and Elliana
—with love*





ZOYA MASTER—writer and journalist. She is the author of *The Music Teacher*, a book of short stories, and *Meetings in Time and Space*, a book of interviews with influential and honored Russian celebrities. Her stories and interviews have been published in numerous prominent international journals and newspapers.

Two Cat Tales is her first book for children. These stories exemplify the ability to overcome fears common to children and even adults, and the way that love and

care for animals allows us all the opportunity to grow as human beings.

Zoya currently lives in Denver, Colorado.

<http://www.zoyamaster.com>

KADRIYA SHAKIROVA—is an artist and designer who was born in Russia. She graduated with honors from the State Art School, and Nizhny Novgorod State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering (Master of Science in Architecture). Since 2009, she lives in Denver, Colorado with her daughter.

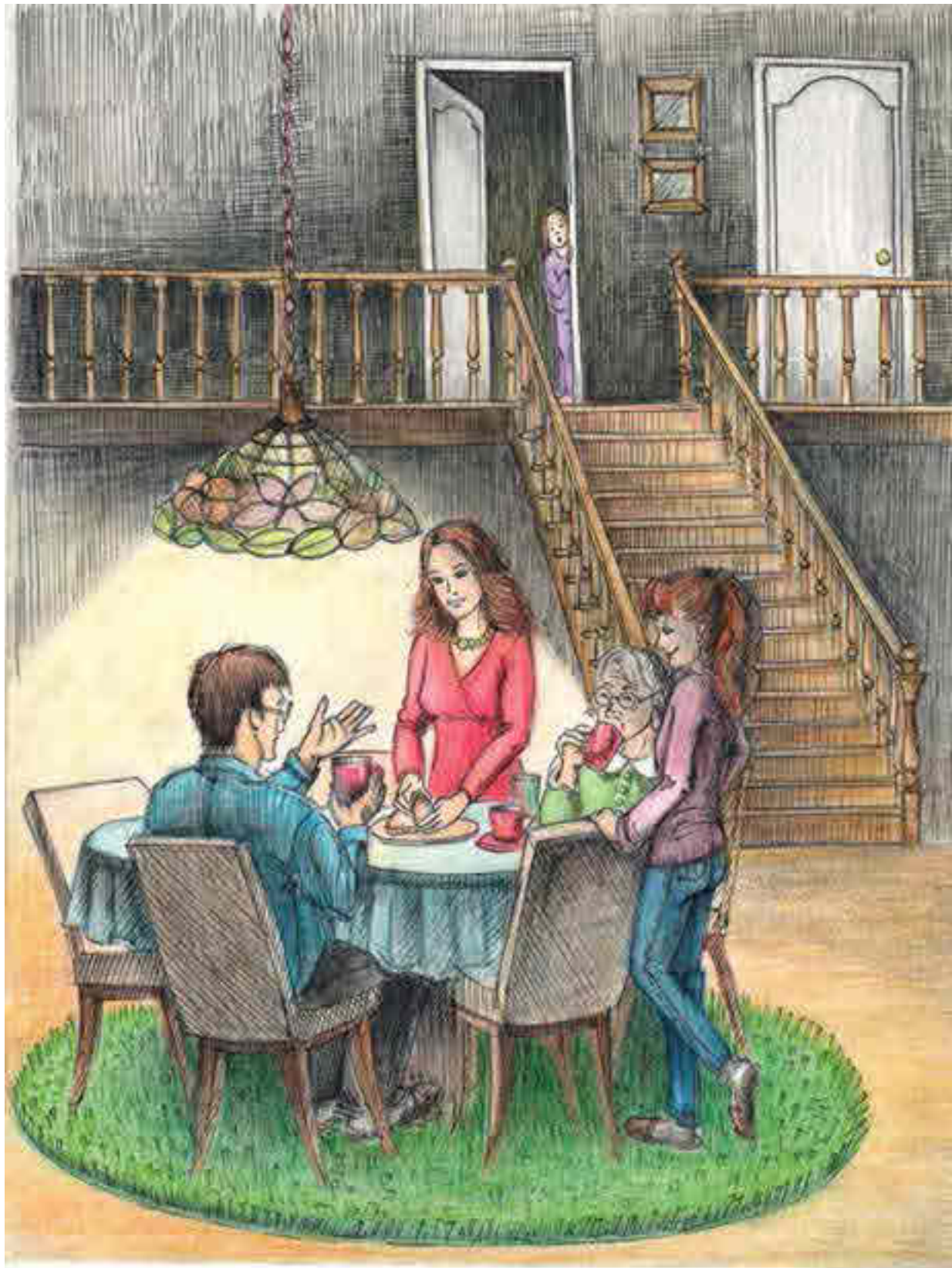
Kadriya works as an art teacher and is also the owner of “Venus Artistry Design” company.

This is her first book for children.





*The Girl
who was
Afraid of Cats*



1

Nina was afraid of cats ever since she could remember. Most of her classmates had pets which they told stories about all the time. But Nina just listened quietly and never took part in these conversations.

No one in her family could understand why Nina didn't like pets, especially cats. Not only was she indifferent to pets, she feared them so much it made her sick. She hid her fear deep inside, but even a harmless-looking cat in her vicinity would turn her legs to jelly and make her heart stop.

"This is so strange," Nina's grandma wondered. "All normal kids love animals, and usually beg their parents to get them a puppy or a kitten. There must be a reason for this kind of fear."

"I don't see any problem here", Nina's dad disagreed. "Nina is a kind, smart girl, even if she is really shy... So what? There are more important things in life than pets."

"Dad, you just don't understand," Nina's fourteen-year-old sister Vicky blurted out one evening. "It's not about cats. The thing is that Nina is just such a coward. Today she's afraid of cats, tomorrow, she'll be afraid of something else..."

Sitting on her bed upstairs, Nina listened quietly. It was past her bedtime and she was supposed to already be sleeping, but the

light and voices coming from the dining room kept her awake. Such evening conversations happened quite often, and tonight was no exception.

Nina tried to understand the reason for her fear, but couldn't find one. Some people are afraid of heights, of the dark, or of clowns. She was simply afraid of cats and didn't know how to overcome this sickening fear.

Meanwhile, Vicky complained, "I've always wanted a kitten. Kittens are so cute and so much fun to play with! But because of your Nina, I am never allowed to have anything!"

"There's an idea," Nina heard Grandma's voice, "Why don't you get a cat and then Nina will have no other choice but to get over her fear."

Nina tippy-toed to the staircase, looked down, saw her parents nodding their heads in agreement and froze in horror.

A cat?! In the house?! Nina sat down on her bed and started crying. Her tears were bitter as they slowly dripped down her reddened nose. But no one would see her sadness; no one would come to comfort her. To her mom and dad, grandmother, and especially to Vicky, drinking tea with cookies was more important than everything else.

Nina finally fell asleep, but she continuously sobbed and tossed restlessly all night long.

The next morning, Nina appeared in the kitchen with puffy eyes.

"Nina, you're not getting sick, are you?" her mom asked while anxiously feeling her forehead.

"I'm fine,"—Nina replied gloomily as she poured cereal into her milk.

"She probably has allergies," commented Vicky.

“Yeah, right. I’m allergic to your dumb idea about having a cat in our house,” thought Nina, but said nothing.

“Anyway, don’t forget to take your lunch with you,” reminded her mother, “today is your class field trip.”

“That’s right,” Nina remembered, “we are going to the zoo today, although I’d rather stay home.”

2

Mrs. Spellman was known as a very experienced teacher. Because she started working at Green Hill Elementary so long ago, many of her current 2nd grade students happened to be the children of her former students.

Naturally, after all those years, Mrs. Spellman had changed a lot. Instead of a bushy ponytail, neatly bound by a colorful ribbon, she now wore a curly-short cut, and dyed her graying hair bright orange like a carrot. Her glasses, with thick elongated lenses in a narrow metallic frame, sat tightly on the bridge of her nose, causing her to always look slightly surprised.

Whenever someone in her class made a harebrained joke, Mrs. Spellman looked at the rascal, at first, all perplexed, as if trying to comprehend the reason for such odd behavior. Then she would slightly bend her head and raise her eyebrows while gazing slowly at the entire class as if in disbelief. Finally, she’d return her gaze to the guilty party and with ringing voice would say:

“Someone has clearly forgotten why we come to school. **SOMEONE HAS DECIDED THAT SCHOOL IS A CIRCUS AND THAT HE IS A CLOWN, AND THIS SOMEONE HAS ROBBED US OF**

