

## THE CAT.

The cat had fallen out of the window. How can a cat be that stupid? It was in the middle of the night, and I had just gone to bed. The sound of the paws slipping from the tin of the windowsill made me jump up instantly and run to the window. Far down on the sidewalk I could see the irritated faces of a couple who had just been passing by, and what I thought to be the body of the cat. It looked like it had fallen almost right onto their heads.

Running down the staircase barefoot in my pyjamas I was sure I would find it dead. Instead I found the street empty. The cat as well as the passers-by had disappeared. But then I heard their voices from around the corner, and followed them, who had followed the cat. Apparently it was still able to move, and had tried to get away. Accompanied by the slightly shocked and commiserative remarks of the couple, I pulled the cat from underneath a bush behind the house. I tried to lift it carefully, in order not to hurt it more, and carried it back up to the flat. Adrenaline was keeping me from panicking, but I had no idea what to do.

When carrying it up, the cat knew there was no chance to get away, and just clawed with all its power right through my thin pyjama-shirt into my shoulder and chest. Back in the flat I carefully put it down to the floor, and it instantly tried to flee. It was an image of pity, its eyes desperately searching for a secure place to hide and to strive for, pulling itself forward with its front legs, while its back-legs refused to function correctly and kept collapsing to the side. "The poor little guy!" my flatmate said while helping me to search for an veterinarian emergency phone number from the Yellow Pages.

Despite the late hour, the vet's voice was calm and friendly. Unless there was blood, the vet said, it would be enough to bring the cat in the early morning.

Had there been any blood except a little from the scratches I received? The cat stared at us from behind the oven; it had managed to escape to the small corridor between oven and kitchen wall, for now out of our reach. I felt an urge to hold it and gently stroke its fur to comfort it and calm it down, but when we came closer it only hissed at us. It was impossible to check for blood, and I had almost decided to go to bed and hope for the best, when my flatmate found the stains on the floor. It was not a lot of blood, but the worst would be to find the cat dead in the morning. So the task was to get it into the carrier cage. From neither side of the oven were we able to reach it, so we were forced to start a violent hunt. She was pushing and driving the cat from one side with a broom, while I was trying to grab it from the other. It resisted with force, hitting my reaching hands with the claws, biting and scratching. When I finally got a hold of one front leg and was pulling it towards me, I realized something fundamental about our relationship. Years of feeding and stroking fur did not and could never make the cat my friend. It was merely able to trust me and tolerate me coming close as long as it knew about its potential ability to escape, if necessary. Even if I had no intentions to ever take any advantage of my position of power, this would not be able to undo the fact that I was in the position of power. The cat and I were not and could never be equal.

It was a close call because of the inner bleeding. The cat had to stay at the vet for more than a week and surgery had to be performed. When I picked it up from there it had lost at least half of its weight, and its belly with the stitches was now shaved and colored bright orange by the iodine. While the wounds and fractures were slowly healing, the cat had to be locked into a small, empty storage room, because it was not allowed to move too much.

In there the cat remained alert and suspicious. It touched its food only after we left it on the floor and took a few steps back. Most of the time it was curled up underneath a small stool that gave at least a slight illusion of a hiding-place. Recovery took its time, but after less than a month the cat was almost back to normal. It was still a bit skinnier than before and the orange belly stayed for a long time as a reminder, but it soon had its usual appetite. In the familiar arrogant demeanor it jumped onto my lap when I was trying to read the newspaper, requested some

petting and purred with pleasure, as if nothing ever happened.

The brazen tone in its meowing made me happy, so I played along. This cat would live a long, fulfilling cat-life, and afterwards I would never have a pet again.