

THE CAT

and the

CUSTARD



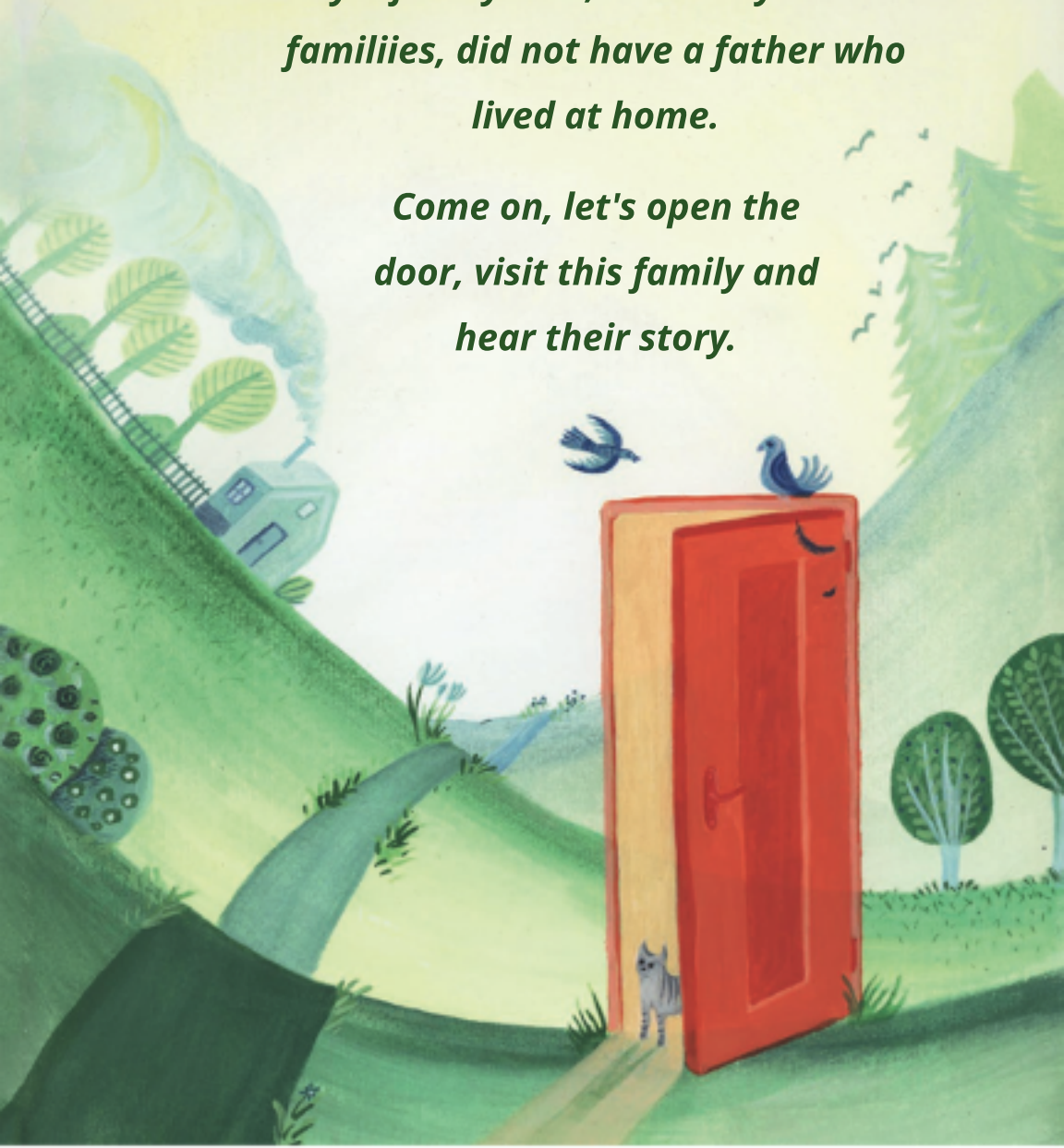


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*There is a story behind every door.
Behind this door is a special story,
the story of a mother, her daughter
and a cat named Shandor. It was told
by a family that, like many other
families, did not have a father who
lived at home.*

*Come on, let's open the
door, visit this family and
hear their story.*

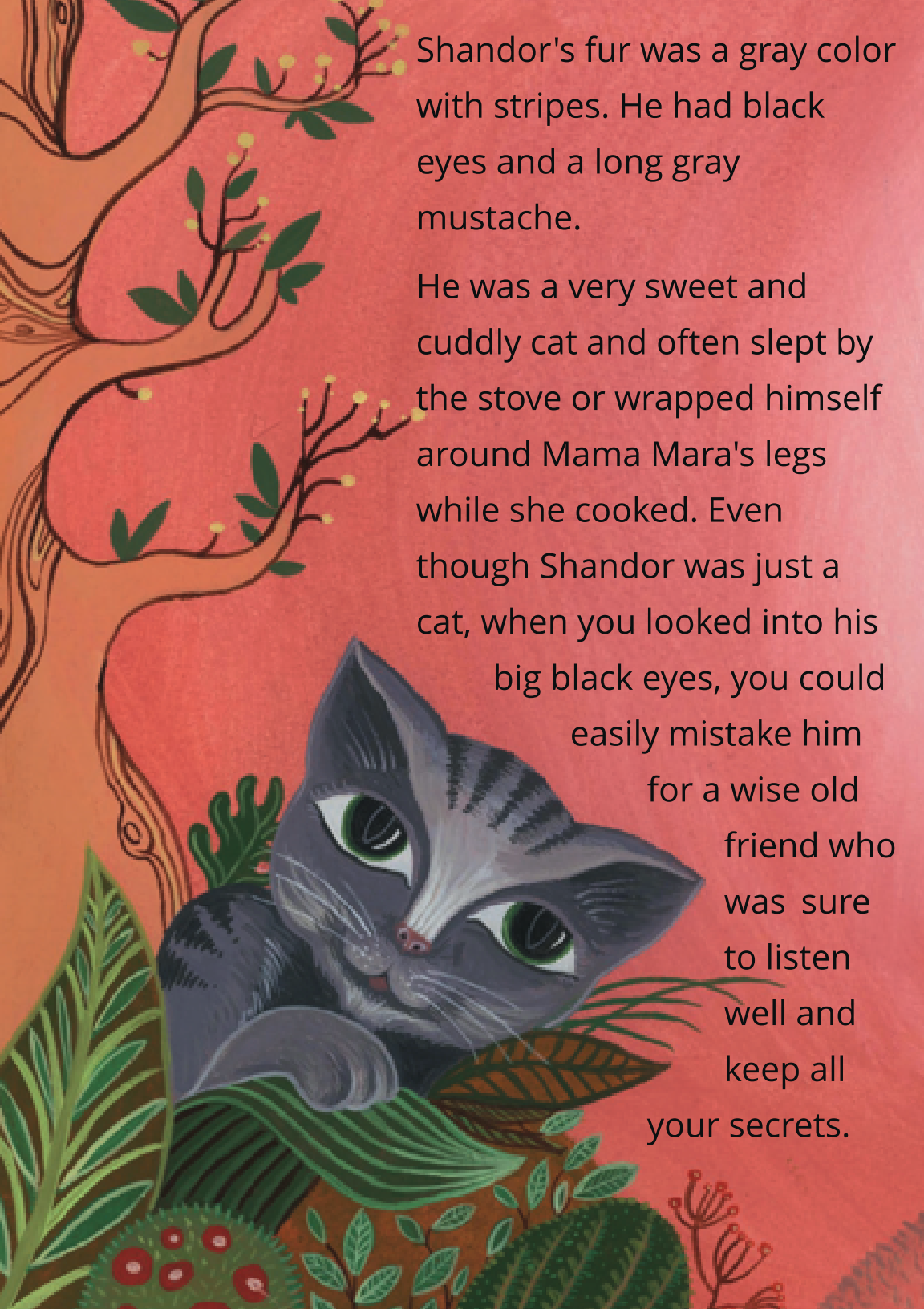


The mother of this family was a kind and beautiful woman. Mama Mara was tall, dark-skinned, and had long brown hair that looked like gold as the sun's rays illuminated it. Love and warmth glowed from her green eyes as she often comforted her daughter Anna who was very unhappy with her own appearance.





Even though she was just a little bit chubby, Anna was a very beautiful girl. Everyone who saw her admired her appearance. But, whenever Anna stopped and look in the mirror she saw only an ugly and fat girl. Anna imagined that she was very fat and that everyone at school looked at her very strangely because of it. Although everyone accepted her very well, Anna would often come home angry and dissatisfied with her friends. She thought her only friend was the cat Shandor.



Shandor's fur was a gray color with stripes. He had black eyes and a long gray mustache.

He was a very sweet and cuddly cat and often slept by the stove or wrapped himself around Mama Mara's legs while she cooked. Even though Shandor was just a cat, when you looked into his

big black eyes, you could easily mistake him

for a wise old

friend who

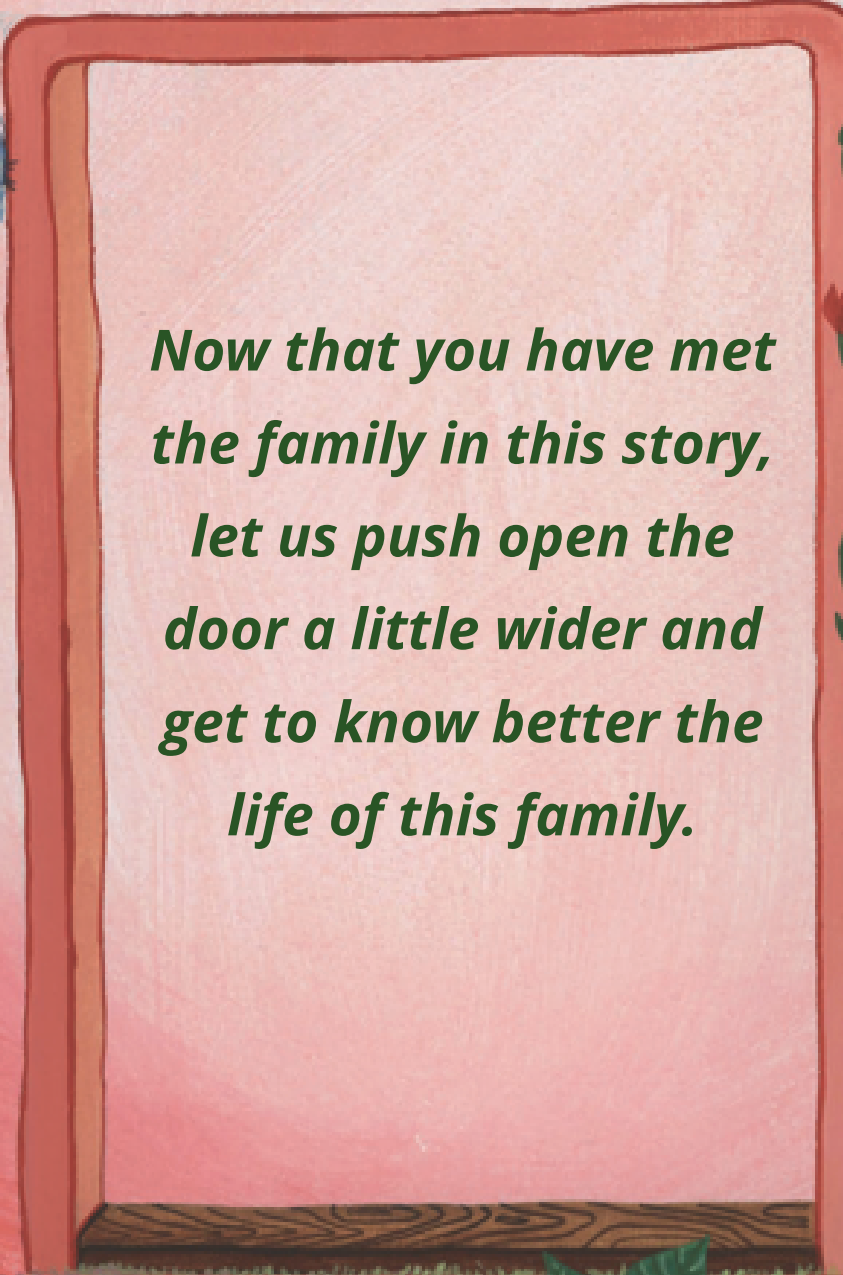
was sure

to listen

well and

keep all

your secrets.



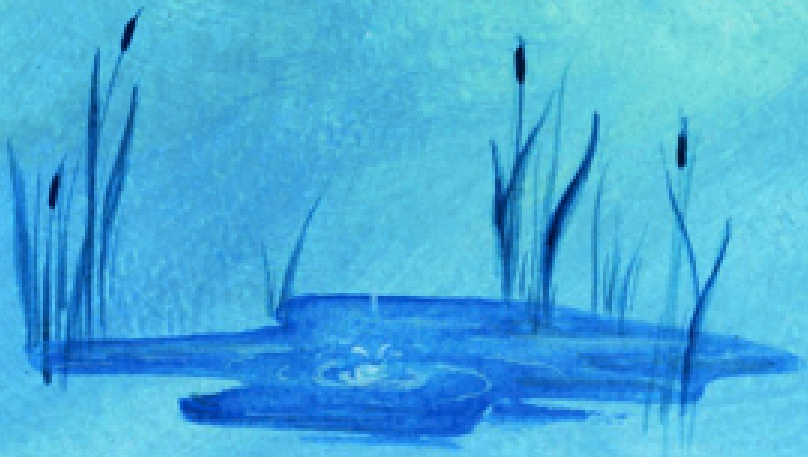
*Now that you have met
the family in this story,
let us push open the
door a little wider and
get to know better the
life of this family.*



A **NNA** reluctantly got up every morning at six o'clock. She was so self conscious about her appearance she needed to get up way too early to get ready for school. Always running late, she would need to grab her bag and jacket and run hurriedly to the bus for which she was often too late. When she missed the bus, Anna would stay in the park near the bus station and lie to her mother about going to school. Mama would be very angry if she found out that Anna was late for the bus and, of course, Anna did not want to anger her mama.



The truth is that Anna did not have a father and because of it there was a great big emptiness in her heart.





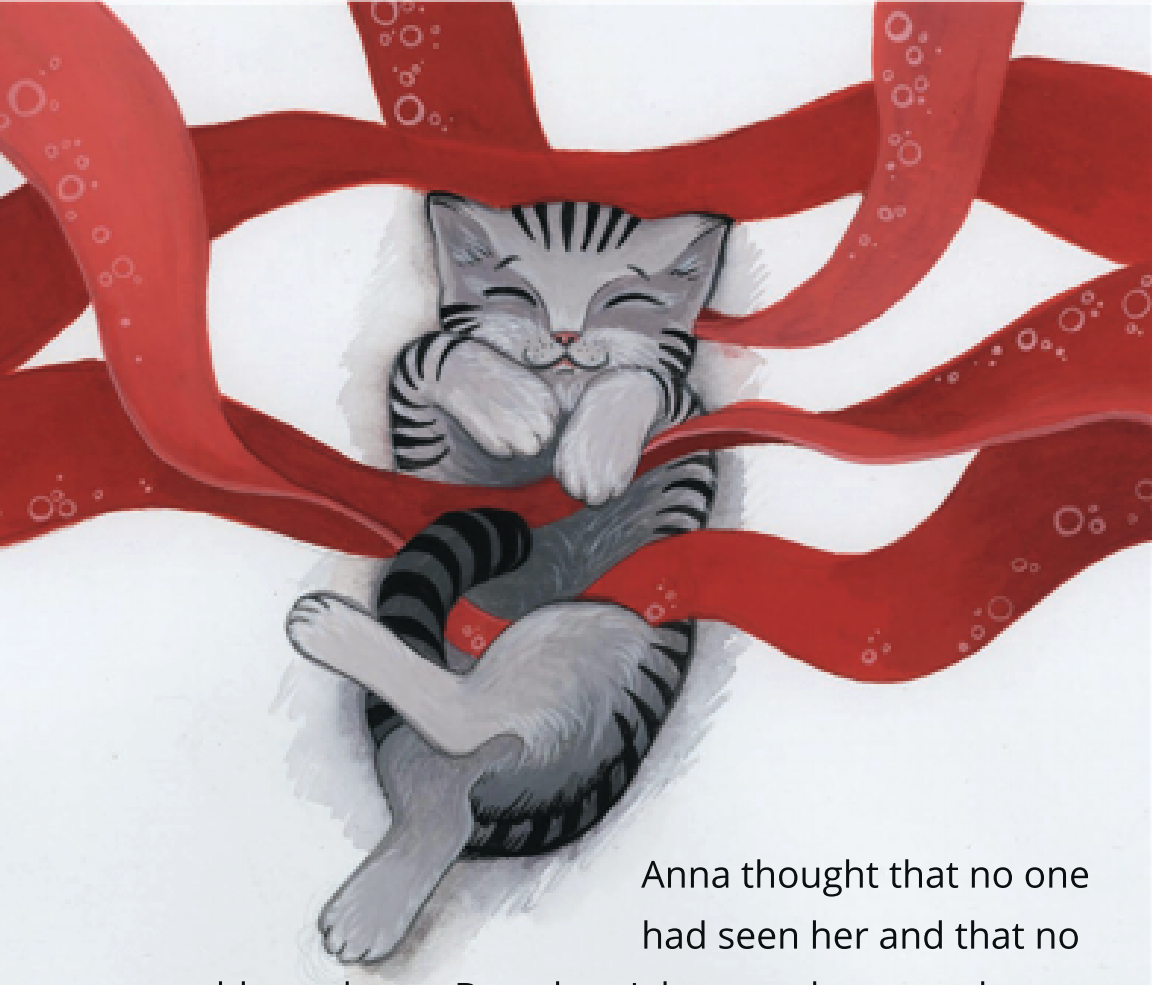
In fact, Anna didn't like going to school because she didn't have many friends. She was very jealous of her friends. She thought everyone looked better than her and everyone always had better things than her, even a father she couldn't have. Anna would often borrow their things without asking. This made her friends very angry and they did not want to hang out with her, except her friend Jelena. Jelena was a very poor girl and she loved Anna very much.

One day Jelena came to school very happy because she had received a beautiful red hair bow as a gift from her auntie. She immediately bragged to Anna that she would wear a hair bow from now on. Anna just looked coldly and said that she has many more beautiful bows, which was true, and that her gray cat Shandor also had a more beautiful bow than that. But Anna's words could not spoil Jelena's joy or threaten to hurt their friendship.



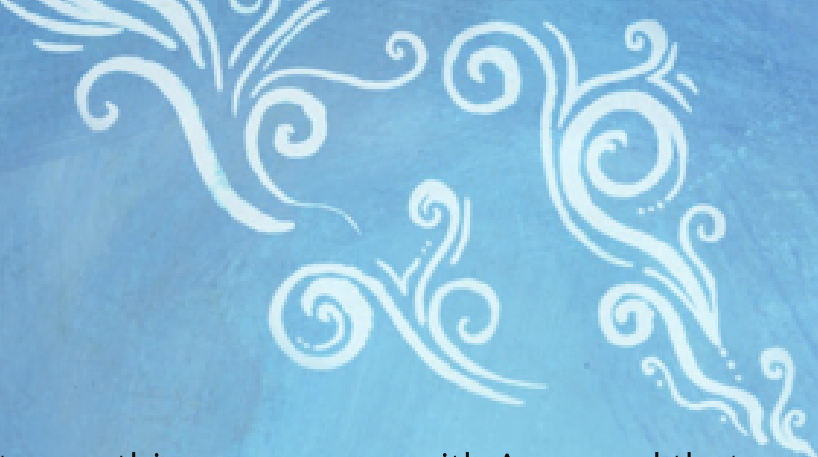
The school bell rang and all the class went out for recess break. Anna again decided to remain inside. As she always did, she rummaged around inspecting her classmates' belongings. She reached into Jelena's desk, slowly opened her bookbag, and pulled out her new red hair bow. She thought of all her own hair bows that were in all colours but red. She held Jelena's bow in her hands while looking through the other things in the bookbag and paying close attention so that no one would walk in and notice her. Suddenly, the school bell rang. She was very startled and quickly placed the hair bow in her own bookbag.






Anna thought that no one had seen her and that no one would ever know. But when Jelena got home and realized that the bow, which she had taken out of her hair and put into her bookbag for safekeeping, was missing she knew exactly what had happened.

Anna, as always, came home, threw her bookbag down and did not mention anything to her mother. She took aside her cat to whom she told everything because she was sure that he could not tell anyone and that her mother would not find out. She knew it would hurt her mother badly. From that day on, Anna had now lost all of her friends except Shandor.



Mama saw that something was wrong with Anna and that she was getting more sad every day after school. She sat down next to Anna, hugged her gently, and asked Anna in a low voice, "What is the problem?" Anna told her mother that no one wants to hang out with her because she is fat. Mama told Anna that she was beautiful and that she looked very pretty and that was certainly not the reason. Anna immediately moved away from her mother and said, "Okay, now I have to go to bed because I have to get up early tomorrow to go to church."



Anna was afraid that her mother would continue to question her, and she wanted to avoid that conversation.

Mama Mara kissed her, smiled and said, "Okay, good night, Anna, and don't forget to pray before bed." Anna went to her room, immediately went to bed and fell asleep.





Early in the morning, while the gray cat Sandor was still asleep, suddenly a shout was heard "Oh no!".

Mama Mara immediately ran to her daughter Anna's room. "What's the matter, Anna?" "This dress is too tight for me." Mom was trying to calm Anna down. "It's okay, try this red dress. It will look nice with your red bow shoes. Hurry, we need to get to the church. " Although she was still angry because she again had gained a little more weight, Anna obeyed her mother.

She put on a red dress and red shoes with bows. She stood in front of the mirror to comb her long, black hair. She thought she just needed the red hair bow she had stolen from Jelena. Mama shouted, "Hurry up, Anna, let's go." Anna ran to her school bag, took something and said "Here I am mom, I'm coming!"

The only thing Mama noticed about the rush was the fear in Anna's black, big eyes. They got in the car and drove to the church where a woman met them at the door.



"God bless you girls, you look beautiful. Maro you have such a lovely brown dress that goes great with your long brown hair. And you, little one, have a beautiful red bow in your hair." Mom just looked at Anna having no time to ask her anything about the unknown bow.





Let's take another look behind the door to see something new about Anna and her family.

All the people in the church sang songs as they always did. The pastor stood up. He looked around the room and for some reason Anna felt very uncomfortable and didn't want to look him in the eye. The pastor said in a strong voice, "Satan never tempts us with something ugly, but always tempts us with something that looks beautiful." Anna reached out and touched the red bow at the top of her head. The pastor continued to say, "It is very easy to learn sin, but it is very difficult to get out of it." Anna felt her face begin to redden and she was sure the pastor was speaking directly to her.

He continued, "No matter how hard you try to hide your sin, it will always be revealed in the end."



After the service, the neighbor asked Mara if she could take them home. "Of course," Mara replied, and Anna immediately agreed. She knew that her mother would not ask her anything in front of the neighbor, and maybe she would forget about the bow to the house, Anna thought. When they got home, Mama took her black shoes off her feet and placed

her Bible into her black bag. She hurried to the kitchen, put on a white apron, tied her hair, and began to finish the lunch.

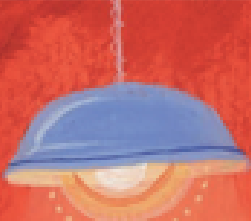
Let's open the door of Anna's room and see what happens to Anna and Shandor now. Ana sat on the bed and looked at Shandor. It seemed as if Shandor knew that Anna was a thief and a liar. She looked into Shandor's big black eyes and wished she could tell him all her problems.

Suddenly she heard Mama's voice calling to her. She walked slowly into the kitchen, Shandor walking behind her. Anna looked at her mom and said, "Mommy I have something on my heart to tell you." She quickly glanced at her mother's face and continued to speak. "Did the pastor know that I lied and stole? "

Mom laughed "Let it go now, come sit here next to me. Yes, I'm telling you a story now. "

Anna looked very hard into her mother's eyes as she began to tell the story.





Mother told Anna, "I'll tell you a story about Melek and Miško." Anna looked at her and said: "Melek and Miško?" and mom continued, "Melek was a little girl like you, and Miško was a little cat like Shandor."

One day, while Melek was playing hide-and-seek with Miško outside, the wonderful smell of pudding was coming from the open window. Melek immediately ran to the kitchen to make sure the smell was really coming from her kitchen. As Melek ran towards the kitchen the smell was getting stronger and she was becoming more and more sure that it was being cooked by her mama.







Melek arrived near the kitchen door and slowly opened it. Mom stood by the stove and cooked. Melek came close to the stove, put her cat down, and stood on her tippy-toes. She watched the

beautiful yellow mixture produce bubbles as it cooked. Miško also circled around the stove and licked his long, gray mustache. They both could hardly wait for the pudding to be done.

"Mama, why are you telling me this story now?" said Anna. Her mom laughed and said, "Just wait and you'll see."

Mother looked at them with a smile because she knew the pudding would cheer up her Melek. The pudding was almost done. Mother suddenly yelled, "Oh no, I forgot to buy whipping cream and because it's Sunday the store will be closing soon!" She quickly put the pudding in the fridge to cool and ran to the store to buy the whipping cream.

As she put the pudding in the fridge she told Melek that she was going to the store to buy whipping cream and that she shouldn't even touch the pudding until she came back.

After Mother left, Melek immediately ran to the fridge. She put her finger in the pudding to try it a bit.

The pudding was very tasty, so tasty she just had to try a little more. There was a hole in the bowl! Melek took a spoon to smooth everything so Mom wouldn't notice. Spoon, by spoon, by spoon and Melek ate almost all the pudding.

She put the spoon in the bowl to take another bite when she suddenly heard the door open. She knew it was Mother coming back. She was very scared. She looked at Miško who was asleep next to the stove. She took the cat, put it in the fridge, and closed the door.



At first glance, when Mother entered the house, nothing could be noticed. Everything looked the same as when she had left. Melek looked at her mother a little bit scared and confused. But, as it was something common with Melek, her mother did not pay attention to her. She went to the kitchen, took a mixer and a bowl, and whipped the whipping cream.

But when she opened the fridge to take out the pudding, suddenly the cat Miško jumped out and onto her with a half-frozen mustache. He was shaking from the cold! Mom put her hand in the fridge to take out the pudding and the bowl was empty. Melek asked, "Did you eat pudding?" "No," she replied quickly. "The cat did it, you saw when you opened the fridge that he escaped."

Mother stood in silence and held the bowl, Melek asked again "Melek did you eat pudding?" Melek replied, "Well, you saw the cat jump out of the fridge." Mom then took a spoon from the bowl, picked it up and said "Did Miško use a spoon to eat pudding?" Anna, Shandor and mama sat quietly in the room.

Her mother told her lovingly but firmly, "Anna, the Bible tells us that no matter how hard we try to hide our sin, our sin will always be revealed."





Anna just turned angrily and started running down the long dark hallway. Her mother's gentle voice "Anna, Anna" echoed down the hall.

She ran away, ignoring everything. Her voices echoed the voices "I hate, I hate her. It always spoils everything." Her chase and rage was stopped by a small light that peeked out at the end of the hall through the cracked door of the room. And we'll peek through those doors and see what's hiding behind them. What will happen to Anna when she walks through this door? Will we be surprised? Will this door change Ana's life? Let's follow her quickly to see what awaits us there. Anna entered through the door of a room filled with peace that Anna had long



The scent of her dad could still be felt strongly. And if many years have passed in this little room, it is as if time has stopped. A photograph of Anna, Dad and Mom hung on the blue walls. She sat down at her desk, sighed deeply, and bowed her head as tears slowly ran down her face. Mom approached the door, slowly opened it, went inside and sat down next to Anna. After a few minutes, the silence was broken by the quiet voice of her mama, "Anna, you know I love you very much," she said hugging her gently). "But I still want to talk to you. I noticed something strange has been happening to you lately. I'm very worried about your behavior."



"Anna, you lied to me and not only did you lie, you took something that wasn't yours." If we steal something that is not ours without asking for it, that is theft and theft is a sin.

Anna quietly asked her mother, "Does God know I stole?"

"Of course, God is always watching you," Mom replied.

Anna raised her head, looked at her mom with her big black eyes. A confused and frightened look took her breath away as she stammered and said, "Mama, I have to admit to you that I was like Melek too. I took things without asking and hurt my friend as much as Melek hurt her friend Miško."



Maybe that's why you don't have any friends at school. Maybe it is because you stole and not because you're chubby. But it is very important that you confess and repent for it. I am proud of you and I hope you will ask forgiveness of your friends as well. "Of course!" cried Anna.

She ran to her room, took a small black box with white dots, called Jelena and asked her to meet in the park near the school.

"Thank you for coming to meet meet me," said Jelena.

"Come on, tell me." asked Jelena, "Why did you call me here? " Anna handed over the box she held in her hand.

"Please forgive me, I know I behaved very badly."



Jelena opened the box and saw all of Anna's bows, including her red bow. Anna told her, "Please accept this as a sign of my apology." Jelena hugged her and said, "I was mad at you but you are my best friend!" Anna was very happy and asked Jelena,

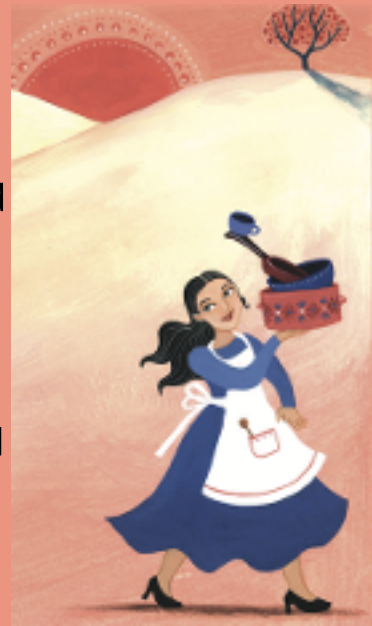
"Shall we sit on the bench, I want to tell you a story, a story about a cat and a pudding ..."



THE CAT and the CUSTARD

Behind every door there is a story, and The Cat and Custard brings us to the story of Anna's broken heart. A little Roma girl whose ruined family and secret sin have destroyed her friendships and left her all alone. Looking in the mirror and into the all-seeing eyes of her friend Shandor the cat, Anna sees a picture of herself that she doesn't like very well and she wonders if the others see it too.

Cat and Pudding is a beautifully illustrated "story within a story" that will open the doors of children's hearts as they learn about God's love, forgiveness, and telling the truth. You will want to read it over and over again.



Biljana Nikolić

Biljana Nikolić is a Roma writer, pastor's wife and mother of four children. Her life background in Roma culture gives her a unique style of communication to the Roma heart and soul.