



Katje the Windmill Cat

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Illustrated by Nicola Bayley

A True Story

More than 500 years ago, a violent storm blew into the Netherlands from the sea. It broke through dikes and flooded a small village in the south of the country. The story you will read next, *Katje the Windmill Cat*, is based on the true story of this terrible flood.



Katje the Windmill Cat



Katje had an easy life. She lived with Nico the miller in a Dutch village by the sea. While Nico ground grain in his windmill, Katje chased mice. Up and down the ladders she prowled, searching behind sacks of grain and along beams dusty with flour. "Every miller needs a cat like Katje," Nico told the villagers who came to buy his flour.

At night Katje slept on a soft pillow beside Nico in the house by the mill. On Sundays they walked along the dike that protected the village from the sea. Katje chased seagulls. Nico watched for storms.



One day everything changed. Nico married a young woman called Lena, and that night when Katje jumped into bed, she found Lena lying on her pillow.

The next day Lena began to sweep. She swept the house. She swept the path to the mill. She even swept flour dust from Nico when he came home at night.



Katje wouldn't let Lena sweep her. But she left a trail of white paw-prints and Lena saw them. "Shoo, Katje," she cried. "You're too dusty." Life wasn't easy any more.



One day Katje woke to the sound of sawing. "I'm making a cradle," Nico said. Lena laid a soft quilt inside. That night Katje jumped into the cradle and curled up on the quilt.



Soon a baby called Anneke was born in the little house next to the windmill. She was small and pink, and she slept in the cradle. Katje didn't mind. There was room enough for both of them. But Lena said, "Shoo, Katje. You'll make Anneke sneeze."

Katje played with Anneke when Lena wasn't looking. Katje patted the ribbons on the cradle. Anneke waved her arms. Katje wriggled under the quilt. Anneke kicked her legs. Katje jumped from side to side and set the cradle rocking. Anneke giggled and Katje meowed. This was more fun than chasing mice.



But when Lena heard them, she said, "Shoo, Katje. You'll tip over the cradle!"

Katje walked across the room and stopped by the door. Lena didn't call her back. So Katje left the house and moved into the windmill.



At night she curled up on empty flour sacks and dreamed of soft quilts. Nico brought her a bowl of milk every evening. "Come home, Katje. We miss you."

Katje wouldn't go home with Nico. But sometimes, when everyone was sleeping, she crept back home and gently rocked the cradle while Anneke slept.



One afternoon dark clouds gathered overhead. The wind howled and rain pounded against the windmill. "We've been through many storms, haven't we?" Nico said, scratching Katje's head. Katje purred. The windmill sails whirled and the great millstones turned.

"I won't have a minute's rest till the wind dies down," Nico said. He had to keep grinding the grain between the millstones. If the stones rubbed together, the sparks could start a fire.

Katje rubbed against Nico's leg. She would work for as long as he did. Nico pulled up heavy bags of grain to the top of the mill and watched the grain pour down to the millstones. Katje ran up and down the ladder, and round and round the mill. She looked for mice who might sneak in from the storm.





All night long the wind roared, the windmill shook and the millstones groaned. When morning finally came, the door flew open and Lena came into the mill with a basket of bread and herring for Nico's breakfast. Katje dashed over to the house to see Anneke.



Suddenly, a crowd of villagers ran down the road. "The dike has broken! The sea is flooding the village!" Church bells clanged. Water rushed into the house. Katje jumped on Anneke's cradle.

Lena and Nico hurried out of the mill as the cradle swept out of the house. "Anneke!" cried Lena. "I'll get the boat!" yelled Nico.





Katje and Anneke sped through the flooded streets in the cradle. Furniture, wagons and even houses swirled by. Some villagers stood on rooftops. Others climbed up the dike.

“There’s a cradle!”

“I hope there’s no baby in it!”

“It’s sure to tip over!”

A wagon wheel whirled past and sent the cradle spinning.

“Look, there’s Katje!”

“It’s Anneke’s cradle!”

The cradle tipped back and forth. But Katje jumped from side to side and kept Anneke safe.



Finally the cradle bumped against the dike. The boat bumped next to it.

“Dear Anneke!” cried Nico as he took her from the cradle.

“Darling Katje!” cried Lena, hugging her tightly.

“Meow,” said Katje.



Anneke soon grew too big for her cradle, so Katje slept there on a soft quilt that Lena made just for her. Katje had a busy life. She played with Anneke and chased mice in the windmill. And when she came home at night, she always remembered to lick her paws before she stepped into the house.



After the Storm

After the storm the villagers built a bigger, stronger dike to hold back the sea. They named the new dike the Kinderdijk – which means ‘Children’s Dike’ in Dutch. This was to remember the baby who was saved by the brave cat.





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