

## My Cat

**Barbara Peer Lutz**

**Dennis G. Lutz, Illustrator**

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Kids love stories about pets. But there are so many children's books involving pets, it can be difficult to find untrodden ground. Barbara Peer Lutz and Dennis G. Lutz have differentiated their enjoyable book, *My Cat*, by making the domesticated feline in question snow white—and the size of a jaguar.

Barbara Peer Lutz has taught reading at all learning levels, and her husband, Dennis, taught art for twenty years. Their combined skills mostly mesh well, but there are some hiccups along the way. *My Cat* is written in rhyme, a choice that works nicely with the whimsical subject matter. But for a book of twenty-three pages and only about six words per page, the lines sometimes lack concision and clarity.

For example, Barbara Lutz writes, "I have a big white cat / Who's as nice as she can be / She never has any trouble / When she plays with me." It's not clear why the cat would ever be expected to have any trouble—cats aren't known for being depressed about their problems, and if it's not that kind of trouble, perhaps it's trouble due to the cat's unusual size. But the words and pictures are unclear and unspecific. The verses rhyme, but once read, nothing has actually been revealed about the cat.

Next, Lutz writes, "I am very careful / When I play with her, / So she will not be mad / If I mess up her fur." The rhyming words seem to have been given priority, with the other words present mainly as their escorts. Being careful not to mess up a large cat's fur would make sense, but as written and drawn, with each stanza a separate page, we're shown everything as independent and unrelated: a drawing of the cat's owner being *careful* not to step on its tail; the girl hugging her pet; the cat *mad* and using a tree as a scratching post; and finally, the girl scratching the cat's sides, messing its fur—to the cat's apparent delight.

To be fair, the slightly-less-than-perfect quality of the poetry is explained in the back cover biography of Barbara Peer Lutz, where it is revealed that she wrote the poem "My Cat" while she was in elementary school. Despite its flaws, the rest of the book reads well; the pictures are solid throughout, and occasionally delightful. Strong and memorable images abound: the girl standing on a ladder to let a long rope hang and serve as the cat's toy; the aforementioned tree as scratching post; the cat on a tree branch, her weight bending the sapling to the ground; a sky with a cat-shaped cloud.

The Lutzes have made a commendable first effort with *My Cat*. One hopes they can use this experience and their combined professional expertise to continue producing children's books with a slightly more polished result.

PETER DABBENE (September 13, 2012)

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