Pottery

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Poor Leora. Anytime she went to do some gardening, there was that cat — hiss, hiss, hiss — and there was that girl upon the fence — yap, yap, yap.

“Leora,” Winnie would say, “you ever give Hissy milk?” And I’d hear about it.

“Leora, why don’t you ever smile at Hissy?” And I’d hear about it.

“Leora, who teaches pets store cats to be nice? You suppose people teach ‘em, or do mother cats?”

“Leora, do cats go to Heaven?”

Leora told Winnie that Hissy was sure to go to hell “Cats are like people,” she said. “Some good, some bad. The wheat and the chaff. That’s how God made it.”

“So you think God made Hissy a bad cat?”

“Winnie was sassing her — I say so, too. “I leave it to Him” was all Leora said before she stomped inside to call me.

I listened to the whole story, then settled Leora down — again. But this time I told her everyone saw the situation for what it really was. Here was this no-good cat, every day pitching a hissy-fit, and there was Leora patiently caring for it even though it didn’t deserve none. I told her all that hissing only highlighted the kind of woman she was, and not to let it get her down. I swear I could feel fire burning in Leora’s heart.

She marched right up to the girl, who spun around, but not before Leora had an old-fashioned hold of her ear. “Move,” she barked. “Course, Hissy was long gone.

“Let go!” The child squirmed, but Leora had a firm perch. Ear dragging is all in the elbow. You have to hold your elbow just right. And Leora did that — through the gate and right on up to the Fletcher’s front door.

I stayed on the sidewalk, figured this was Leora’s battle, but I didn’t miss nothing. You know those Fletchers don’t tolerate a dangerous stray.

Winnie’s head popped out from behind her mother’s back. “Hissy’s not dangerous to me!”

Winnie was trespassing, Leora said, and Mrs. Fletcher put the baby back down. “I caught her handling the right thing.”

Winnie was hoisted onto her hip, “My daughter does have an affection for animals.”

Leora straightened, said boldly and real loud (which I figured was for my benefit), “It seemed as if Winnie’s had an affection for cats stuck out her tongue before carrying the baby down the hall.

“I’m very sorry Winnie troubled you,” Mrs. Fletcher said, “but I have to tell you I’ve been concerned about this cat. Is it true you’re feeding some wild thing you found under your shed?”

Leora, back straight, said boldly and real loud (which I figured was for my benefit), “It seemed the right thing.”

I took about four steps and came up beside her, so she wouldn’t think she had to work so hard for me to hear. I tipped my head at Mrs. Fletcher, but she ignored me. Kept on talking.

“But the kitten hasn’t had any shots.”

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“Wait, Win,” the mother called “Take Bubba.”

“She could get hurt,” Leora said as Winnie stomped back in.

“Leora,” Mrs. Fletcher said, all sweet, as Winnie hoisted the baby onto her hip, “My daughter does have an affection for animals.”

Leora told me later that the little darling with an affection for cats stuck out her tongue before carrying the baby down the hall. I’m very sorry Winnie troubled you, Mrs. Fletcher said, “but I have to tell you I’ve been concerned about this cat. Is it true you’re feeding some wild thing you found under your shed?”

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