

Jessica and the Cat who wanted to be Friends
by
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It was Jessica's job to put seed on the ground and in the bird feeder.

Because her neighbor, Mrs. Hunter, had eight cats, Jessica often chased away cats that had stopped to stalk an unwary bird or young squirrel. So she wasn't surprised when a young cat walked towards the seed circle or when the birds and squirrels called, "Cat! Cat! Beware the Cat!" and fled.

She was surprised when the cat walked into the middle of the seed circle and sat down. Intrigued, Jessica went into the porch to watch. She noticed the youngest squirrel watching from a low branch.

The cat sat, all day.

The next morning, just as the squirrels began to eat an early breakfast, the cat returned. The squirrels ran up the tree. Again, the youngest stayed behind to watch.

Four mourning doves conferenced.

"This is the best feeder in the neighborhood," said gray-gray dove. "We can't give it up for a second day!"

"I suggest," said black-gray dove, "that we just go in and see what happens. We can handle any cat. This one's small."

"OK," said brown-gray dove, "Light Woman, you be the look-out. We three will go in and see what this cat means to do. But friends, cautiously, always cautiously."

The doves flew, landed, turned their backs, and began to eat.

The cat sat.

Next, a cardinal couple considered the problem.

"Dear, I'm going to risk it," said the female. "You know I'm faster than any cat. Besides, this is a young cat and clearly well fed."

"Well, dear," answered her mate, "I suggest landing pattern twelve, the isosceles triangle."

"Fine, dear. Ready, set, go!"

The cat sat. The youngest squirrel ran up the tree to her nest.

"Mama," she said, "I think that cat wants to be friends."

"Don't be foolish," said her mother. "That cat's got a plan. She'll sit there quiet as anything. Along comes a little squirrel who wants to be friends. Snap! That cat's got herself a tasty treat. No, you'll stay right here or go over the trees to the next yard and find your brothers."

"Mother," said the twins as they ran in, "why's that cat still sitting in our seed circle? We're hungry."

"Just be patient," said their mother. "Cats are bad, but they always move on."

"Please, come look, Mama," said the youngest squirrel. "See, three doves, two cardinals, and now a finch at the feeder. She does want to be friends."

"Well.....now, you keep your eyes and ears open," said their mother, "all twelve of them! And you two, no fooling around!"

The squirrels ran up, over two trees, down onto the porch, across the roof, down the corner post, and paused in the ivy.

Out they walked, tails chattering.

The cat sat.

By Friday, birds and squirrels came, went, ate, talked, and the cat sat.

On Saturday, about lunch time, the cat stood up and stretched.

Everybody fled, except the youngest squirrel.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," the cat said, "my name's Grace."

"Hi! My name's Sarah. The two up there are my twin brothers, Josh and Joel."

"Hi! Hi!"

"Want to play?"

"Sure!" said Grace.

"Tag!" said Sarah, "you're it!"

And the four found themselves running, jumping, tumbling, and tagging.

By Sunday evening, Grace was chatting with the doves, doing geometry with the cardinals, and giving rides to the small birds.

A week later, seven cats stalked across the lawn.

"Cats, Cats, Beware the Cats!" shouted the birds and squirrels as they shot away.

The cats surrounded Grace and walked her back to Mrs. Hunter's garage.

Jessica ran out of the porch, across the lawn, and up to Mrs. Hunter's front door where she rang the bell.

"Why, hello."

"Hello, Mrs. Hunter. It's Jessica from next door."

"Why, hello, dear, nothing wrong at home, I hope?"

"No, we're all fine. But I think one of your cats is in trouble."

"Why did one of them tangle with a big bird?"

"No. The youngest..."

"Why, you must mean Grace. I just got a call about her. We had been thinking of keeping her ourselves. Her brothers and sisters found homes long ago, but not Grace. She's such a sweet cat."

"Mrs. Hunter, what was the call about?"

"Why a Mr. Farmer, funny name for a farmer. Well, he needs a cat to catch mice in his barn. He's picking Grace up tomorrow."

"Oh, no, that's wrong! Grace wants to be friends."

"Why he sounded very nice. He has four children. I'm sure they'll all be friends."

"Could I take Grace back with me, just until dinner time?"

"Why certainly, dear."

Jessica found Grace, picked her up, and carried her back to the bird feeder.

"Mama, please come out on the porch with me."

"Dear, I'm busy getting dinner."

"Please, just for a few minutes."

"Yes, here I am."

"Quietly, Mama."

"You got me out here to look at some cat? I wish Mrs. Hunter would keep her cats out of our yard."

"Oh, no, Mama, please just sit quietly with me, just for a few minutes. You did

the scaring, not the cat."

"Nonsense...."

"Ssssh."

As they sat, Sarah came down her tree and sat beside Grace. The birds and squirrels returned. The cat and squirrel looked at the people.

"Jessica, is this possible?"

"Oh, yes. Grace, the squirrels, the birds, we're all friends. Mrs. Hunter wants to send Grace to a farm where she'll have to kill mice in order to live. Mama, Grace needs us and we need Grace."

"Yes, I see. Yes, you're right. Come on, let's go talk with Mrs. Hunter."

"Oh, thank you, Mama!"

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