

THIS CAT STILL GETS AROUND

By LEON HALE

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On sunny afternoons I sometimes spend my coffee break out in the back yard, watching the cat try to catch a jaybird.

This cat is a small brindled article, still young by the calendar of her species, but she has been round and about more than her appearance suggests.

She had a riotous youth, which came to an abrupt close about a year ago at the skilled hands of the veterinary surgeon, who operated on her to cure a shameful habit of producing a hatful of dependents in the garage closet every eight weeks and four days.

A female cat, thus deprived of her role in nature's drama, often becomes a dedicated hunter. She'll spend all her days and most of her warm nights slinking through tall grass or lying motionless on some branch, as I suppose her forebears did a million years ago, hoping to sink claw and fang into some creature vulnerable to the attack of a small spayed cat.

And when the hunt bears fresh meat, she'll lug it around the yard for a quarter of an hour, producing weird cat-cries in a minor key, getting such volume as you wouldn't imagine a small animal could achieve with jaws clamped tight on the victim.

Then when the recital is ended, she places the corpus delicti behind the thickest shrub on the premises and lets it lie, for she is fed out of the supermarket like people and is seldom hungry. So her victim ripens there under the shrubbery, until one day somebody comes out the back door and says, "Whew! Something's dead around here."

Now there, folks, is a useful kind of a pet.

She hasn't even been able to catch a jaybird, an entire flock of which hung around the back yard all winter, robbing the bicycle basket in the oak tree which is intended to serve as a feeder for birds that need subsidizing in bad weather.

The jaybird, as I may have hinted here before, is not my favorite bundle of feathers. I sometimes stand at the back window and root for the cat as she inches out the limb where the bicycle basket hangs, and where the jaybird sits and stuffs himself.

And when he flies away at the last second, as he always does, the hunter stares after him with the awfulest dejected expression, as if she has seen creation's last square meal escape her, as if she will now wither away and die for want of meat, as if the kitchen cupboard didn't contain half a case of canned cat food in three tempting flavors.

Agitated in this way by the escape of the jaybird, the cat descends the tree dashes under the shrubbery, and lies in wait for the dog.

The dog is a spotted pointer that visits us a lot. He is a pet and couldn't point a courthouse.

The cat has him 100 per cent buffaloed. She has never considered that he could snap her neck in one chomp. Neither has he.