

# Evolution

JEANNE GASS

Lora Tiptoed across the bedroom stepping gingerly from one rug to another, avoiding the chilling touch of the hardwood floor. She fumbled in the closet and finally slipped her cold feet into sensible blue leather house-slippers. The heels clicked softly on the hall floor. She raised the window shade in the bathroom, and the half-light of the early morning added cheerless rays to the cold room. Lora gasped at the shock of cold water on her face, and her hands shook as she drew curl-pins from her hair. She combed her hair hurriedly, and its electricity bristled about her shoulders as she drew on a blue flannel robe. It was not until she reached the basement stairs that she remembered.

"I didn't hear the trap click, last night. He probably never came near it. Silly—to *have* to set a trap for a mouse when you have a cat. Guess the cat's too well-fed to want a mouse. I certainly gave him plenty of chance to catch it. Hate to set a trap, for anything," she thought. She put off inspecting the trap and busied herself with coaxing the few still-glowing coals to give crackling life to the fuel she shoveled briskly into the furnace. Satisfied with her efforts at last, she stopped to wash her hands again at the basement faucet, then turned to the second basement room. "Hate to catch anything in a trap. Oh well, he probably never came near it."

Resolutely she approached the spot where the trap had been left. It was not there. Her eyes searched the gray cement floor. Then she saw.

Over near the corner sat Lora's big, gray tom-cat. He sat, unheeding his mistress's presence, absorbed in licking and cleaning his paws, his plushy white breast,

his long, stiff whiskers. Before him was the trap, dragged from the middle of the floor. With horror Lora saw the meaty remains of the trapped mouse clinging to it. Tail, thin legs, head partly devoured. For a moment she stood, dumbly. Then the complaisant cruelty, the complete falseness to the laws of nature, siezed and agonized her mind. The cat looked up, his eyes wide, innocent, and smug.

Revulsion swept over Lora's cold body with a fierce, hot trembling, and pulled and twisted at her stomach. It expressed itself aloud in a low inhuman half-growl in the woman's throat. The cat cowed, instinctively. Lora raised her hand, as if to strike. "Get out," she whispered hoarsely. A streak of gray fur flashed across the room and the cat sprang noiselessly up the stairs to retreat into some corner of the house. Lora's hand fell to her side, aimlessly. "Well," she thought, "The mouse had to be got rid of. Even a well-fed cat is an animal, with instincts. But—"

She turned her head. Her husband was stirring upstairs. She would leave the trap, and pay a neighbor boy to clean it up.

But as soon as she got upstairs, she washed her hands again, as if something unclean had touched them.

In a few minutes she had bacon and eggs sizzling on the stove, and toast in the oven. The spicy aroma of coffee spread comfortably over the kitchen and mingled with the increasing, soothing warmth of the room. Lora shook dry cereal into dishes, opened a can of tomato juice and emptied it into glasses. When she brought the morning paper from the porch, her husband was sitting, freshly-shaven and

waiting, at the breakfast table.

"Thank you," he mumbled absently as he unfolded the print-fresh pages. He shook and creased them, complaisantly. Lora poured coffee into cream-colored cups. The sleepy routine of breakfast flowed along uninterrupted. Juice, cereal, eggs, bacon, toast, the folding and unfolding of her husband's newspaper punctuated evenly the passing of time. The man sipped from the coffee cup, and broke the silence of the meal, reading to Lora in a loud, annunciative voice:

"Nearly a thousand German soldiers, boys and men, were slaughtered in the

latest siege outside Stalingrad." He paused, to read on silently, more rapidly, greedily savoring each detail.

Lora felt the physical shock in her body. She stared at her husband. She watched him drain his coffee-cup, pat the ends of his trim mustache with his napkin. She saw the lines of smugness etch firmly in his face. She stared, and did not speak. In a moment she felt his customary good-bye kiss, and vaguely knew he left the room.

As he pulled the front door shut behind him, she turned to the kitchen faucet, to wash her hands.

## Conversion

JACK DEVINE

Mary Anna opened the door and saw her man. Her man was a hobo, looking for a bite to eat and possibly a pie which had been set on some ledge to cool.

Rambling Joe looked at the little girl and in his most polite manner, doffed his hat and said, "Little girl, I wonder if you would ask your ma if she could spare a man a bite to eat."

"My mother isn't here," Mary Anna replied, and puffing up with importance said, "if you will come in, maybe I can find something."

Mary Anna had just come back from a revival meeting at her church. She had decided that her career was to be a missionary and here was a poor lonesome,

"Sit down here, please, and I'll make you some coffee. Daddy says I make very good coffee and Mother likes it, too. And Tom, he's my brother, says it ain't—" she

hastily corrected herself, "isn't much good. But you know boys."

Taking his manners out and dusting them off a bit, Joe said, "I'm sure it will be fine."

"Oh — ah — what church do you belong to?" Mary Anna asked hesitantly.

"Well, I ain't been much of a church man. I've been so busy, you see."

"The reason I asked you is that we have been having a revival at our church and I've been thinking about being a missionary. Oh, the coffee is done now! You sit over here and I'll get a cup for you. Would you like some rolls? Mother has some sweet rolls here. They have jelly inside of them and when you bite down into them—um-m, raspberry jelly. I'll get you a couple." She placed the coffee and rolls before the man, then hurried over and sat opposite him. She sat very primly with her hands in her lap and very