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Kitten

by Sue Hitchcock

Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflection in the voice, at most, an occasional whispered word. My earliest memory was snuggling, snuffling and suckling with my brother and two sisters in my mother's warm fur. My only emotion was hunger – I was small, the smallest of us and my brother would push in to suckle first. The only disturbance was when Big Boots would bring food for my mother. It made me cold, first the draught when the shed door opened, then mother, pushing us off, stretching her back into an arch before feasting on the smelly dish. If she went out, it was never for very long.

One day Big Boots picked up my brother. He wasn't afraid, after all mother didn't seem to mind, but we never saw him again. At first I was glad, I got more of mother's milk, but big sister said we should hide and so we scooted behind the flower pots, when Big Boots came. One day Big Boots must have slipped in very quietly, standing perfectly still and big sister was checking to see if it was all clear, before we came out. The tone of her yowl as she was grabbed, haunts me still. Small sister and I looked at each other, big-eyed, ears flattened. Still it wasn't our turn.

We two lived in fear and when our mother pricked up her ears, we'd run into hiding. Inevitable my sister got taken too. My mother and I grew very close. Though I was very small, she took me out into the garden, only at night at first, till I learned what bushes would hide me. Then she taught me to hunt mice and birds, as her milk started to diminish. Big Boots would never catch me, or so I thought.