

Adult Essay

Hed: Fostering Love

By Dian Seidel

“Fear not, Min,” I say in a hush as I brush Minerva’s black fur. “We’ll take care of you.” Her eyes, fixed on mine, say, “I’m not so sure.” She stretches, steps across the sofa and curls into Steve’s lap. Minnie knows where to find the love.

In five weeks, we depart for Thailand. Teaching English abroad is the retirement adventure I’ve wanted for years—and that I’ve persuaded Steve he wants, too. We’ve bought our tickets, scheduled our vaccinations and started studying Thai. But a foster family for Minerva remains topmost on our to-do list.

Despite months of effort and some downright embarrassing arm-twisting, we’ve struck out with relatives, friends and neighbors. Our daughter, the obvious choice, is now allergic to the kitty she adored as a child; her eyes swell shut when she visits. Even the community Listserve, usually a font of solutions, comes up dry.

Is this Steve’s secret plan? Feign enthusiasm for Thailand, then use Minerva as an excuse to stay home, reading in his rocker, Minnie in his lap?

I’m not so easily deterred. My last hope is my book club friend Tracy, whose 14-year-old, Zeenie, has been begging for a cat. Tracy knows Minerva, who nestles on Tracy’s shoes when I host meetings. Furry socks don’t bother Tracy. Her house is full of critters—a dog, guinea pigs and turtles.

Today, Zeenie meets Minnie. I’m praying that they hit it off, that Zeenie’s eyelids don’t puff up, and that another mouth to feed won’t overwhelm Tracy.

Tracy and Zeenie arrive with a dozen eggs from their new henhouse. Four different colors, from four different layers.

“How lovely,” I say. But have those hens beaten Minerva to the family’s last ounce of affection?

Minerva scoots upstairs. Zeenie, not so easily deterred, finds her in a patch of sunshine.

At the kitchen table, Steve and I talk with Tracy over blueberry cobbler. We play up Minnie’s sweet disposition and tidy habits. We admit she’s a picky eater, though we don’t mention the salmon Steve grills for her dinners. As it happens, Zeenie is fussy, too. She eats only white foods.

When Minerva pads downstairs, Zeenie is close behind. She declines the cobbler with its offensively blue berries, but she isn't hungry, anyway. She's enthralled.

Zeenie speaks the magic words. "Can we take her? Please?"

Tracy regards Minerva, sprawled on a kitchen chair, then her daughter. "How could I say no to that sweet face? Or this one?"

I exhale my gratitude for Tracy, Zeenie and all things bright and beautiful. Steve exhales his ambivalence.

Minnie stretches, jumps down and rubs her flank against Zeenie's leg. She knows where to find the love.

Steve looks at Tracy, who is smiling as she looks at Zeenie, who is smiling as she strokes Minerva's head. Then he looks at me. I'm smiling, too. Under the table, I find his hand. He can't muster a smile yet. I squeeze his fingers, to remind him where to find the love.