



Lessons in Kittenhood

I adopted a kitten last week. A tiny tabby hiding in a cage at the shelter. Head so heavy with hopelessness he could barely tip his ears to the sound of our voices. And when the vet tech slipped him into the cat carrier, I heard a watery sneeze.

"Has he been ill?" I asked. The tech's response—a shoulder shrug and a glance through some papers. Finally she read, "No URI noted." Hmmm. I seem to be noting something. URI (upper respiratory infection) is a dangerous side effect of shelter living and can be life-threatening for kittens. I hoped this was just a random sneeze.

By the time we got home there had been over 27 "random" sneezes, and when I pulled Smokey from the carrier there were tell-tale watery eyes and drips from the nose. A second later his little body exploded again and my entire face was showered with kitty snot. Great.

I'm not good with germs. Not at the caliber of Howard Hughes, but I'm definitely inclined to nausea when showered with mucus. I quickly planted Smokey on the floor and fumbled for an antibacterial wet-wipe. Would I catch a kitty disease? Doubtfully. But I sure needed a bath.

Smokey hid behind the stereo for most of the night, and we took him to the vet early the next morning. Two hours and \$110 later, we had antibiotics, eye cream and flea meds. As pathetic a nurse as I was, I was determined to save this listless kitten.

That evening after the kids were in bed, I administered Smokey's second dose of antibiotics. He didn't appreciate the bubble gum flavor, but I think I got at least 4 of the 5 ml. down his gullet. After he swallowed, I wiped the left-over residue from his chin and put him on the floor. I figured he would walk away, and I would get up and wash dishes, or fold laundry or do something productive. But he didn't walk away.

There I was, sitting cross-legged on the hardwood floor, when that 2.7-pound ball of

fluff locked eyes with me. I froze. I'm not naturally a pet lover, but this little guy had me convinced he knew something. Knew he was hopeless without me. Knew I was his source of life and health. Knew I was *Mommy*.

Instead of running back to hide behind the subwoofer, he took a step forward. A soft little paw with tufts of soot-colored fur rested gently on my leg. Then came the other. He moved a step closer. I held my breath. One paw on my chest. Then another. Before I could exhale, he had climbed up my shirt and was burying his tiny head underneath my chin. My hands moved up to support his hind legs, and he melted into me.

Then I felt the wet spots on my cheeks and realized I was crying. And at that moment all the snot and mucus and sneezes in the world wouldn't have made me let go. I had rescued this precious little package, and he knew it. He needed me...and he knew it.

At just that moment I tasted a glimmer of how our Father feels when we recognize our helplessness and crawl into his lap. Not as self-censuring, self-deprecating, self-recriminating rejects, but in dependent innocence to claim the love of the One who rescued us. To know that he is committed to restore us to full health. To know that it was his pleasure to rescue us and that when he adopted us he asked us to call him *Abba*—*Daddy*, Father.

Smokey is all better now. He has more energy than he knows what to do with and spends his days tearing around the house trying to catch bugs or sunlight. He hasn't climbed up in my lap since he finished his antibiotics. I'm sure he still loves me, but I miss the feeling of his absolute dependence on me. I miss the times he snuggled in as tight as he could to fend off the pain of the world.

I imagine my *Abba* misses me too sometimes. Maybe I'll crawl in his lap today and rest my chin on his chest to let him know I haven't forgotten that once I was lost and now I'm found—rescued and redeemed. □

—Susan Reedy

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