

**On being  
a farm wife  
- And other  
hazards  
Joyce Bupp**



around the porch perimeters, or perched just millimeters from entrances to the farmhouse.

A one-cat day is one on which a lone gray and white nose suddenly looms outside the kitchen window, pressing a furry face close to the glass with a silent plea. Part-time housecat, part-time romantic Don Juan of the feline harem, Gray can be counted on to show up wanting inside anytime the temperature drops below 70.

Anything above that, and he'll want in because it's cooler in the house.

At the other extreme is a four-cat day, like those celebrated earlier this week. Four-cat days may be camouflaged in sunshine, but bite with razor-teethed wind that steals the rug off the front porch and deposits it under the pines. Again.

First real sign of a four-cat day is a set of beady eyes buried in an appealing little feminine cat face

There are few things sneakier- or more persistent - than a chilly cat. This, I've decided, is especially true in the case of barn cats, brainwashed as cuddly kittens into a belief that life was meant to be lived, not among feed bags and hay

bales, but on braided rugs and living room sofas.

Indeed, we have little need of a thermometer or barometer to determine the status of the weather. All that's necessary is the counting of furry noses hanging

of tiger gray and black stripes, pleading beseechingly. These eyes appear through the storm door window, half-way up, where the four-legged acrobat clings to the decorative metal crosspiece. Her aerial display will soon halt, even on the worst day March can offer, since the striped belly is growing alarmingly fat and round, and acrobatics will soon be replaced by motherhood.

Two picketers pace the basement porch, one occasionally spying from the top of the woodpile, the other stretching out to soak up sunshine on the picnic table protected by an old stone wall.

Carbon copy of his mother - the storm door hanger - Rambler perhaps figures the wood pile will blend with his colorations. I see him lurking there, regardless.

His partner in crime is Fred, a pussycat in the truest sense of the word, and a limp, nonchalant mop of black fluff. Fighting over the harem, Fred became wounded, and developed a large abscess on his furry neck. Although nicely healed, the hairless spot leaves him somewhat crooked looking. He

could care less, and approaches the sneak attack on the house with the same easygoing attitude that marks his general character.

Still, this rag-tag group of individualists form a feline A-team as I head for the house, waiting, watching, suddenly materializing in a well-rehearsed maneuver that would do justice to any military battalion.

At the first movement of the wheelbarrow, they spring into action, surrounding the door, just waiting for it to ease open from the weight of the full load of firewood I pilot inside toward the woodstove.

With lightning speed, the four streak through the opening crack of the door, utterly confident in their learned experience that I can in no way move a loaded wheelbarrow and snag four speeding cats at once.

After retrieving furry bodies from various hiding spots in the house, I play out the last part of the scenario as I return them to the outdoors then go off in search of a sweater or sweatshirt. I know it'll be chilly in the house. It always is on a four-cat day.

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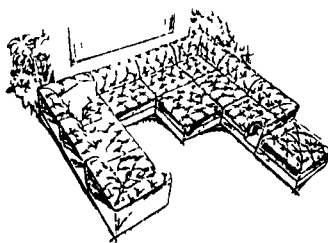
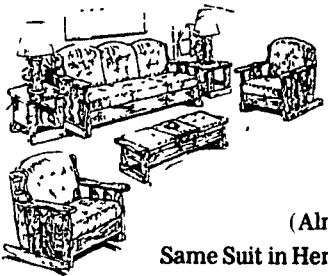
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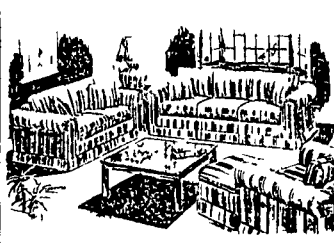
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