

THE GROUND UPON WHICH SHE WALKED

Mr. Morgan P. McCarthy

His little grocery basket had two items in it so far, and he was well-pleased with what he had in it right now in his shopping. It was two cans of tart red cherries, that which he had come to call, “my grocery store food of grocery store foods.” As with cream of potato soup, so with tart red cherries—both alike were good enough to always buy two cans instead of just one can. He knew all about such cans of tart red cherries. They were his favorite fruit. Though the can said that the cherries were packed in water, he knew that this water tasted just like cherry juice. It was his tradition to sip from such a can and take in this “juice” as he ate therefrom. He again looked upon the disclaimer that he knew was on this can and read to himself the warning, “may contain occasional pits or pit fragments.” That was on the can just so they could protect themselves from opportunistic customers who might sue over a pit that broke their teeth. Having been his favorite fruit to him now for some years, red tart cherries tasted even better than steak to him. He was a born-again Christian living by himself. And this store was a little family grocery store that he had discovered in town today. And he wondered upon his second favorite fruit—Colorado peaches. Were they in season yet? He went looking for the produce department to find out. And he found the produce department.

And he found a girl! She was a young woman about his age—almost forty—whose face was spellbinding with splendor. Her brown hair was much upon her beautiful head. Her brown bangs were the most irresistible bangs he had ever seen upon a real woman. And she stood at best about five feet tall. And instantly his heart “did worship the ground upon which she walked.” He thought secret thoughts of mirthful romance to himself, “It’s all I can do not to kiss her.” And he thought secret thoughts of teasing back to himself in reply, “Try to restrain yourself.” And he smiled upon these silly thoughts. She was dressed in a long-sleeved green smock and a long-sleeved white shirt and black denim pants and black and white sneakers. A name badge was pinned to her smock that read, “Bitsy. Produce Manager.” Why, she worked here. He had to come up to her and talk to her. She was beautiful, and he didn’t get to talk to pretty girls very much. He could ask her if peaches were in

season yet. She would know. And, with his little plastic basket in his hands, he dared to come up to this entrancing young woman, and he asked her, “Miss, do you have peaches in at this time of year?”

She shook her head and said, “No, sir. It is not quite peach season yet.”

“They’re so juicy when they come from Colorado.”

She took one look at his canned tart red cherries, and she said, “Oh, but we did have come in from Door County some fresh tart red cherries, if you like fresh ones.”

“Fresh red tart cherries, Miss?”

“Uh huh.”

“I never thought to look for fresh ones before.”

“They’re even better than the canned ones that you have in your basket right now.”

“Can I see them?”

“Follow me, sir.”

And she led him to a wooden table in the center of the produce aisle. And there they were—the beautiful bright red tart cherries that were always better than the deep purple Bing cherries that everyone else always bought. They were all together there upon a small portion of this table top, sold in sizable open containers, made of the same type of paper as egg cartons, these containers about six inches wide by six inches long by four inches high.

“How much does each container hold?”

“Each one holds a quart.”

“I see three left for now.”

“I will have more coming tomorrow if you want a bigger selection.”

“I think that I will buy all three now before they get away from me.”

And right away he took the three quarts of red tart cherries and put them into his little basket.

“Sir, I can tell that you really like tart cherries.”

And in a moment of spontaneity with this most fetching woman he found himself saying to her, “These are almost as beautiful as you, miss.”

She cocked her head to the side at him and gave him a wink.

And he quickly apologized, “Excuse me. I got carried away just now.”

But she sang out an affectionate, “I like what you said.” Then she said in approval, “A woman like myself does not get to hear herself called ‘beautiful’ by just any customer.”

“I am not just any customer?” he asked, enchanted by this compliment from this girl.

“I love tart red cherries, too, myself.” Then she said, “And you’re kind of cute for a guy.”

And they chatted for a while and got to know each other’s full names. Her full name was “Bitsy Bangs.” That was a perfect last name for a woman with magical bangs like hers. His full name was “Flanders Nickels.” They found out that each other was a born-again believer. And they set up a date together for the next day. Their first date was going to be at her pets’ stable, where she would show him her five beloved pets out back behind her house.

The day came. He found her house in the countryside, and he knocked on her door, and she opened it and said, “Great to see you again, Flanders.”

“It’s great to see you again, too, Bitsy.”

“Have you come to see my animals?” she asked, knowing.

“I have indeed.”

“My ministry for the Lord is to take care of his animals. I am called of God to be His shepherd for my five pets. It is written in Proverbs 12:10, ‘A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast:...’”

“In your case, Bitsy, ‘A righteous woman regardeth the life of her beast.’”

“Yeah. I love all animals. And I love my five animals the most of all of animals.”

“Shall we go and see them now?”

“Follow me out back to my stable, Flanders.”

And she led him up to a small plain red barn. She put both hands to the side of a sliding barn door that rested upon pulleys, and she pushed it open laterally. And at once a raucous discord came from within. Flanders followed his new girlfriend inside. Here was a big room full of loose hay and many hay bales lying around for bedding. There were many windows letting in the yellow sunlight. And there were rafters way up in the ceiling above. And herein were five sundry and diverse animals—one, a great big dog; one, a black cat; one, a guinea pig; one, a cockatiel; and one, a slithering snake.

In wonder, Flanders said, “Such pets you have, Bitsy, all so different one from another.”

“God gave me them,” she said. “And I take care of them for God.”

“You are a great mistress for the Lord.”

“Let me show you first of all Denmark, my Great Dane.”

“Let me see Denmark.”

“He just loves to jump up on people. He loves everybody. And he’s sure to love you, Flanders.” Then she called out, “Come here, Denmark. I’ve got a boyfriend to introduce to you this time.”

And this Great Dane, with the legs of a dog new in adulthood and with mischief in his canine eyes and with the mass of a timber wolf, came running up to Flanders. And right away the very large dog jumped up and put his paws upon Flanders’s shoulders, and Flanders fell down underneath him upon his back there upon the stable’s floor.

“Don’t mind him too much, Flanders. He’s telling you that he likes you.” Then she said, “Do get up off of my boyfriend, Denmark. It’s not polite to stand on people.” And the Great Dane stepped off of Flanders.

The wind knocked out of him where he lay, Flanders sat back up and said, “Your dog does play rough, Bitsy.”

“I keep telling him over and over that it is not nice to jump on people, Flanders. But he keeps on doing it.”

Flanders got back to his feet and looked upon Denmark, not without some disfavor. Denmark gave away a canine grin of amity. Then Flanders asked, hoping for better luck this time, “Who’s the next pet that I get to meet, Bitsy?”

“That is my dear black cat. His name is ‘Tomcat.’”

Abruptly he asked her, “He doesn’t jump on people. Does he, Bitsy?”

“Uh uh,” she said. “Tomcat never leaps.” Then she called out to her black cat, “Come here, boy, and let me introduce my new boyfriend to you.”

And the big black cat came up to him. Flanders held out his hand in greeting and said to him, “Hi, Tomcat.”

Instantly Tomcat gave forth a hissing, and he swiped his black paw full of sharp claws across the palm of Flanders’s proffered hand. Flanders cried out, “Ow!” And he drew back his hand in shock. His hand was bleeding with scrapes. “What made him do that?”

“I don’t know. He just goes and gets that way for no reason at all.”

“I’m all cut up,” he said about his hand.

“I keep telling Tomcat that I would really prefer that he stop doing that kind of thing all the time. But he never listens, Flanders.”

“He’s a little devil.”

“Bad Tomcat,” scolded Bitsy. “You did a bad thing just now to my boyfriend.”

The cat stopped hissing and walked away and sat down and looked menacingly up at today’s visitor in the stable. Flanders wrapped his hand in his shirt edges. And the bleeding stopped.

“Flanders, now it is time for you to meet ‘Buddy.’”

And a little guinea pig came ambling up to him and stopped at his feet and put his nose to his leather shoes. “He doesn’t scratch. Does he?”

“Buddy cannot scratch,” she said.

“That’s good to hear. He’s a cute little animal.”

“He loves people. And he is very affectionate. And he is real good with men.”

“Hi, Buddy. Come up upon my shoe and let me pet you.”

“You’ll just fall in love with him.”

And the guinea pig stood up upon Flanders’s shoe, turned around, and dumped a pile of dung upon Flanders’s foot.

“Woe!” said Flanders, shaking off the guinea pig and his excrement from the top of his shoe.

“Bad. You’re a bad boy, Buddy. I told you never to keep doing that to my friends. If you go and do something like that again, I don’t know what I’ll do with you.”

The guinea pig scampered away to the other side of the stable. “I didn’t expect him to have an accident,” said Flanders.

“He just won’t listen to me, Flanders. I guess he knows who the boss is between him and me.”

Next Bitsy raised her hand, and a cockatiel flew up to them and lighted upon her hand.

“This one won’t drop bird do do on me. Will he?”

“He does not do that upon people.”

“I am glad for that.”

“His name is ‘Cocky.’”

“Hi, Cocky,” said Flanders in introduction.

And in acknowledgment, Cocky leaned his head up, opened his beak wide, and launched a profane string of expletives the likes of which shocked the Christian man.

In apology Bitsy said, “Pardon his swear words, Flanders. He used to belong to a sailor.”

“He’s quite cocky,” said Flanders, mortified.

“He doesn’t mean to be. He just doesn’t know any better.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“That was really, really naughty of you, Cocky. God will get you for that.”

“That was the worst thing that happened to me today.”

“I keep telling him, Flanders, that if he doesn’t stop his cursing, that I will give him away to the wildlife sanctuary. But nothing I do keeps him from saying them again next time.”

“Is there one more pet that you have to introduce to me?”

“Yeah. My dear Rattle. Come here and say, ‘Hi’ to Flanders, Rattle.”

And a slithering snake wound his way up to Flanders. He knew that this snake could not use profanity. But as to his bite, he was not so sure. “He’s not poisonous. Is he, Bitsy?”

“No. No. He is a nonvenomous snake.”

“He cannot be too bad then.”

And Rattle at once slithered up Flanders’s pants leg. Flanders panicked and tried to shake this snake from his leg. But to no avail. Then the snake slithered up Flanders’s bare arm, Flanders trying without avail to shake him off. Then the snake came to Flanders’s head, and he did wrap his whole length one time around the man’s head. Flanders panicked and grabbed a hold of this snake and tore him off of his head and threw him away from himself.

And he cried out, “My head! My head!”

“Oh, Rattle won’t hurt you. He’s just playing.”

“That’s not playing for me. Bitsy!”

“There you go again, Rattle, squeezing good people’s heads.”

“Crazy snake!” yelled Flanders.

“There’s really nothing that I can do with him. When he makes up his mind to go and squeeze things, no one can stop him. One time I yelled at him to stop it. And do you know what he did? He came up myself to my head—his own mistress—and he squeezed on my own head. So you see that there’s nothing I can do about Rattle.”

Flanders now had enough to do with Bitsy. And he thought to leave her and her animals behind him forever in his life. She was indeed beautiful enough for a man to worship the ground upon which she walked, but her animals made her companionship not worth the trouble for a guy.

And he said, “I think that I’ve got to go now, Bitsy.”

“You’re leaving, Flanders?”

“I have to get out of this stable before I go mad.” And he turned around and marched out of this home of the five animals.

Behold, the sheriff of the county and his two deputies coming up to this same stable which Flanders had just left. The sheriff said to him, “We are looking for Bitsy Bangs.”

Flanders paused and said, “She’s right here, sheriff.”

And from the stable she called out, “I’m Bitsy Bangs, sirs.” And she came out, followed by her five pets.

“Ma’am,” said the sheriff, “we have been getting many complaints from your neighbors about your pets that you take care of.”

“My kids do go and get carried away.”

“They are causing much trouble in the area.”

“I let them loose to run around the countryside. I love them, and I let them do whatever they want.”

“They run free then?”

“Most of the time, sir. Did they do anything wrong?”

The sheriff took out a little notebook and began to read from it: “There is a Great Dane that barks all night and that bit a child and that tips over garbage poly carts. There is a black cat that kills birds and that attacks other cats and that scratches up automobiles. There is a guinea pig that leaves piles and puddles and vomit on people’s porches. There is a cockatiel that flies around people’s houses and curses in swear words, and that chases other birds away from people’s bird feeders and that bit a little girl on the ear. And there is a snake that likes to scare old people and that hides under people’s beds and that bites men.”

“My kids just get carried away.”

“I’m sorry, Ma’am. But I have come to tell you that the mayor and the city council are going to have a meeting to decide what to do with your pets. We might have to take your animals away.”

She was dumbfounded with disbelief. Then she said, “You’re just saying that.”

But one of the deputies spoke and said, “They’re a menace to our community.”

And the other deputy said now, “They’re a problem to all of us here in the area.”

“What am I going to do?” cried out Bitsy.

“If your pets come around and stop making trouble, you may be allowed to keep them. If they keep doing what they are doing, you will not be allowed to keep them anymore,” said the sheriff. “It’s all up to the city council.”

“What am I going to do?” she cried out again.

The sheriff said, “I do not know, Ma’am.” And he and his two deputies walked away.

And Bitsy Bangs stood there, and she wept.

Flanders stayed here with her for a little while longer.

When she stopped crying, she asked him, “What do you think that I should do in order not to lose my children, Flanders?”

And he said, “I would say to maybe discipline them when they do wrong, Bitsy.”

“Discipline them?”

“I can see that you never did that with them.”

“How can you tell?”

He gave her a look.

“Yeah,” she said. “I guess everybody in the county can tell.”

“You need to lay down the law—not with words, but with actions.”

“But they won’t listen to me.”

“They will if you spank them.”

“You want me to spank them?”

“Well, yeah.”

“I cannot beat my kids.”

“Spanking is not beating.”

“What would God think of such a thing for me to do to my beloved pets, Flanders?”

“God has a lot to say about it. Look up Proverbs 13:24. Look up Proverbs 19:18. Look up Proverbs 23:13-14. Look up Proverbs 29:15, Look up Proverbs 29:17. Therein are six Bible verses that clearly prove the old saying, ‘Spare the rod; spoil the child.’”

“I have to use a rod upon my pets?”

“Use a folded up newspaper. That will do the job just fine when it comes to animals.”

“Prove it to me, Flanders, and I will believe.”

“It is written, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ Proverbs 22:6.”

“Proverbs was written by Solomon, the wisest man on Earth. He does have a point there.”

“Proverbs was written by Solomon under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.”

“Yes, Flanders. It was really God Who wrote the book of Proverbs.”

“What are you going to do about this commandment of God which I recited to you today?”

“I think that I have to go about and begin now to train up my animals in the way they need to go.”

“That’s the first good thing I heard at this stable today.”

“And I have to spank them to do this?”

“Spank them hard and spank them much.”

“And the Bible really says to do that?”

“It is written, ‘Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.’ Proverbs 22:15.”

“In that I can see another commandment from God.”

“The necessary rod of correction in the hand of every good and Godly mistress, O Bitsy.”

“With all of the trouble they did give me these last few years, I am mad enough now to use a real rod!”

“That’s the right spirit, girl. Spank them good. It is time.”

“Right on their back ends for sure!”

“God made the back ends just the right place for a parent to spank his or her wayward children. The good custom with children is a wooden paddle upon their bottoms. The same discipline can be used for a mistress’s wayward pets.”

“Come here, boys,” said Bitsy with the voice of authority and with righteous anger.

The five pets stood there and exuded defiance upon their animal faces and hooted and mocked in disrespect.

In firmness and resolve, Bitsy went back into the house and did come back with a Sunday newspaper.

“Come here, boys,” said Bitsy, having had enough. None came. All five animals “smiled and laughed.”

Then the time came. She said, “I told you boys a hundred times to be good. Now I will tell you only once.” And she folded up the newspaper into a rod.

And at once Bitsy grabbed a powerful hold upon the back of the Great Dane’s neck, and she said, “Denmark, this is all for being bad.” He stood there in amazement that his mistress should be so assertive with him. And she commenced to pound his canine bottom with this paper over and over again. He began to whimper in bewilderment. And after half a minute this chastening was done. Submissive now, he looked up at her in respect. And he chose for now on to be good.

Then Bitsy grabbed a hold of the big black cat by the back of his neck. And he trembled in fear. Never before had his mistress been aggressive with him like this. And Bitsy said, “Tomcat, this will make you behave for me.” And she began to chasten him with this “rod.” Over and over the

newspaper landed upon his feline bottom. The black cat gave forth most sorry “meows.” And after half a minute it was all done. Tomcat looked up at his mistress in manifest subjection. He would misbehave no more.

Then the mistress picked up the guinea pig by the back of his neck, looked him in the eye, and said, “You’ve stepped over the line, Buddy.” Then she set him back down and began to strike him on his bottom with the paper rod. He squealed holy terror in overacting. But he still got spanked anyway. And after half a minute it was all over. He was overwhelmed at so violent a reaction just now from the hand of his mistress. And he knew now what happens to pets when they disobey their mistress. He would not step over the line again with her.

Now came the cockatiel’s turn. Right now he was too afraid of his mistress to fly away. He opened his mouth and said, “Help. Help.” But his judgment would not wait. And Bitsy took a hold of him around his little neck, set him upon the ground at her feet, and said to him, “Cocky, you will never sass your mistress again. This will be for your own good.” And she slammed the newspaper rod upon his bird bottom several times for half a minute. And when she was done, he opened his mouth and said, “Sorry. Sorry.” His days of causing trouble for his mistress with his mouth came to an end.

Last came the snake. Dominant, Bitsy said to him, “Rattle, when I get done with you, you will learn who the boss is.” He tried to slither away in fear. But she grabbed him by the back of his neck, and she commenced to swat his limp tail upon the ground with the paper many times over. His whole snake body went as limp as his tail in this show of force for the first time by the mistress over the snake. And when this spanking was done, she let go of his neck, and his head fell to the ground where the rest of him lay, and he would not move. He surrendered now to his mistress for his first time.

There lay her five pets, spanked for their first time, and crying. On their animal countenances was all due respect and regard for their mistress now. They now looked up to Bitsy with the submission of good and loving pets. They now learned their first lesson.

“Well, Flanders,” said Bitsy, “I went and did it. Now they will start listening.”

“Rome was not built in one day, Bitsy.”

“What do you mean?”

“They have been naughty all their lives with you as mistress. It will take more spankings in the time to come before they come around to become the pets they need to be for you.”

“Then I will spank them again,” said Bitsy with determination.

“Discipline is a natural part of being a mistress.”

“I promise God right now to be the mistress that God would have me to be.”

“God will bless you for that, Bitsy.”

“Alas!” she said with a sigh, remembering what the sheriff and his two deputies said to her just a while ago.

Understanding her woes, Flanders said, “You’re afraid that the police will come and take them away from you.”

“All of this that I learned today and did do, Flanders...it might all be too late.”

“You love your animals very much.”

“I love all animals very much.”

Just then up came walking toward them the mayor himself.

“Help me, Flanders,” cried out Bitsy, and she grabbed Flanders by his upper arm with both of her arms and did hold him tight in trepidation.

Holding her tight, Flanders said, “God is with us, Bitsy.”

The mayor spoke and said, “Hello.”

“Hello,” said Bitsy, trembling in Flanders’s arms.

“Can we help you?” asked Flanders.

And the mayor said, “I came to tell you that the city council and I held a special meeting about your pets, Miss Bangs.”

“I’m losing them. Aren’t I?” she asked.

“No. You are not,” said the mayor. “We agreed to give you another chance.”

“I get to keep them?” she asked.

“We at city hall have heard numerous reports from your neighbors about good things you’ve done for them and for their pets.”

“I did good things to my neighbor’s animals?” she asked.

“Indeed, Miss Bangs. I can tell that you have a love for animals.”

“What did I do?”

“Well, for one thing, you’ve been kind enough to fry up some bacon and to bring it personally just to treat your neighbor’s dog. For another thing, you’ve also visited another neighbor with a bowl of evaporated milk just to treat his kitten. For another thing, you’ve also rescued another neighbor’s puppy from a storm sewer. Also you have more than once brought a tree branch from your yard to another neighbor’s pet goat for him to munch on the branch’s leaves. Also you have visited another neighbor just to pet his pet rat. This is just the beginning of all the good deeds that I have heard from this city that you have done for them and for their pets.”

“I do remember now having done those things,” said Bitsy.

“And the city council and I have voted unanimously to let you keep your pets for as long as they behave.”

“Oh, Mayor. I promise that they will behave for now on,” said Bitsy. “Thank you. Thank you.”

“You are truly a woman of God for the way that you love the Creator’s animals,” said the mayor.

“Thank you. Thank you,” she said.

“Thank you, Mayor,” said Flanders.

And with that the mayor left Bitsy and her date and her animals.

And Flanders spoke and said to her, “Your good deeds and great love for all animals everywhere is a true testimony to your love for God’s creation, Bitsy. And things will be better now between you and your own animals.”

“I am so happy in the Lord now that I could cry.”

“Go ahead and have a happy cry, Bitsy.”

“I think that I will laugh instead I am so glad.”

“Go ahead and have a happy laugh, Bitsy.”

And she laughed in relief and encouragement and in joy of the Lord. And he laughed in rejoicing with her.

Then he said, “I brought something in my car to share with you, Bitsy.”

“What is it?”

“It is something that I bought from the store.”

“I did help you to pick out some tart red cherries.”

“Yeah. Fresh ones. I put the canned ones back on the shelf and went ahead and bought the three quarts that you had left in your produce department.”

“Did you like them?”

“I saved them for today for the both of us.”

“And they are in your car right now?”

“Uh huh. Would you like to eat red tart cherries with your date for the day?”

“I’d love that.”

“Let’s do that right in there in the stable.”

“In front of my animals?”

“I would say more like ‘with your animals.’”

“You and I and my family together eating fresh cherries?”

“Would you and they like that?”

“My animals would enjoy eating with their mistress and her date there in their stable.”

“Even red tart cherries?”

“I know my pets well. If their mistress likes red tart cherries, so, too, will they.”

And Flanders said, “I’ll go get them.”

And he ran off and came back with his three one-quart size containers in his arms.

And Flanders Nickels and Bitsy Bangs and five hungry well-behaved pets sat down on the stable floor and ate up together all three quarts of tart red cherries.