

“Wow! Will ya look at those bushes go up?”

The fire consumed the sumac hedge and jumped to the big trees around the house. The cats ran, crying, to the door. The Goat Lady let them in and came running back out with a bucket of water.

“Look at that. One crummy bucket against that beautiful fire.”

She ran back and forth, back and forth, with the bucket. Her dress flapped around her like the wings of an injured bird.

When the roof of the house caught fire, she called in to the cats. They gattered around her feet in mewing softness. She led them into the alley. Suddenly she turned. The children thought she saw them and slinked lower in the weeds, but she ran back into the house. As the roof fell in, they could hear mewing sounds coming from inside.

When they heard the fire whistle, they scattered and ran as fast as they could go. A girl with glinting golden braids was a stride ahead of everyone else. After a couple of blocks she heard a pleading, mewing sound behind her and she slowed down and dawdled along kicking at rocks and turned. There was a frail, limping cat following her.

“Here kitty,” she said as she bent down and curled her fingers around a rock.

No wonder old men are quiet. It must
take hours to relive the memories of a
lifetime.

—*Bill J. Fogarty*