

I GOT IT

by Jonas Biliūnas (1879-1907).

Translated from Lithuanian by Andrius Kulikauskas. 2017. Public Domain.

It was a little white kitten. Its scrawny body was all shaking from cold and fear; its unkempt hair, rain drenched and mud splattered, bristled. I found her in the field, crouched alongside the fence, curled up and miserable. Upon seeing me, she meowed so pitifully, and looked at me with eyes from which shone fear as well as hope. She was still so young, so young, but so shriveled. Perhaps people took her away from her mother; perhaps they first wanted to put her in a bag and take her to the river to throw her in the water, but then brought her to the field, and dropped her by the fence, that she might not find her way home but starve to death: amongst the people there was no more room for her; perhaps it's not the first day that she stoops here, hungry and freezing...

And what's it to me? She's of no use to anybody...

So I rejoiced, as does the hunter in sighting a hare. For indeed, I was outfitted. Across my shoulders I carried my bow, and in my hand I held arrows. I thought I was a true inhabitant of the American wilderness, celebrated by Cooper. Although I was merely a second grader, I felt like a giant, who, it seemed, could stumble upon a pack of wolves, and have no fear.

Whereas this was just a shriveled little kitten.

Having paced off ten steps, I planted myself, took my bow off my shoulders, pulled the arrow and started to aim. With sad eyes, the unfortunate little animal looked at me, as if asking, what am I doing... and waited.

The arrow whizzed through the air, and I saw how the kitty suddenly flung, head over heels, painfully, painfully meowed, and started shaking its legs.

I got it. Like a true hunter, I ran over to it, but all of a sudden I felt my heart go cold and I stopped, astounded: the kitty's face was pierced by unspeakable pain, its eyes shut; with all her remaining strength she managed to lift herself by her front feet and she started to crawl, dragging her body along the earth: and she likewise dragged the arrow stuck in her breast, while from her wounds dark drops of clotted blood dripped upon the sand.

Disappointed, not knowing what to do, I threw the bow and arrows behind me, and not looking back, ran home. In my heart, I felt pain and gravity, as if a great, great burden weighed down upon my chest.

Only on the third day did I dare to go back to the field: the kitty lay on her back, dead. Right beside her were the bow and arrows I had thrown. Snatching them, I snapped the bow and arrows into bits, and tossed them far about the field. I just didn't dare to pull out the arrow which had sucked itself into the kitten's breast and now stuck out of her.

That was the only shot I ever took in my life. But it was successful: to this day I carry it in my chest...