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## THE NONCONFORMING CARDINAL AND THE CAT

Once upon a time, there was a nonconforming cardinal--bright of color and swift of feather--who decided not to fly south with his kind for the winter.

However, the weather soon turned bitterly cold, punctuated with biting sleet and pelting snow, and the bright-feathered cardinal reluctantly started to fly south. In only a short time, ice began to form on his wings, making them heavy and difficult to move. With wings crusted, neck stiffened, eyes glazed over, and nostrils iced nearly shut, the nonconforming cardinal--nearly frozen--plummeted to earth, landing in a barnyard--his ice-glazed and feathery body bouncing like a hard red ball on the frozen ground.

Nearly dead from overexposure, the nonconforming cardinal came to rest on a cow path that had been cut into the snow-covered barnyard by countless hoofs walking back and forth from the nearby barn to the nearby feed troughs. Just when the cardinal was certain that an inevitable hoof of death approached, a cow passed over and crapped on him. "Death has no hoof after all," mused the cardinal, certain that the khaki-colored dung would seal his doom. But to the cardinal's bird-like surprise, the manure warmed him, defrosted his wings, and melted the ice covering his tiny nostrils. Warm and happy and able once again to breathe freely, the nonconforming cardinal began to chirp a colorful song of springtime.

Just then a gluttonous cat--who had heard the commotion as she lay curled in her bed in the hayloft that towered above the scene--came up to the dung pile to investigate, her white paws--as silent as snowflakes--hardly touching the ground as she approached. Hearing the colorful song of spring, the always hungry cat pawed gently at the manure pile until she spied the orange bill and the bright eyes of the nonconforming cardinal. Delighted to have found such a delectable April treat in mid winter, the white barnyard cat promptly devoured the nonconforming cardinal--dung-coated, khaki-colored feathers and all. Ecstatic in the wake of an apparent gastronomical triumph, the gluttonous cat gingerly trotted back to her bed in the hayloft. A cowherd found her two days later--white, stiff, bloated, and cold.

This story of the nonconforming cardinal and the cat is open to multiple interpretations, five of which follow:

1. When you walk to the sound of a different drummer, you must accept the consequences.
2. Not everyone who craps on you is necessarily your enemy.
3. Not everyone who gets you out of a pile of dung is necessarily your friend.
4. If you're warm and happy in a pile of manure, don't start singing.
5. Not all rewards gotten without struggle are necessarily good for you.