



HETTY'S
THANKSGIVING

Isabella Alden

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PART ONE

S CAT!" said Aunt Jane. "That everlasting cat is always under my feet; what I stand it for is more than I know. Scat, I say! Get out with you, and don't let me see you again today!" And she took the broom to help poor kitty out.

Then Hetty thought that her cup of unhappiness was full. Much she knew about it. Just as Muff, the cat, sat down in a miserable little shivering heap in the snowy walk, Miss Florence Percival stopped and leaned over the rail, her hands outspread, and made a remark to her.

"You poor creature, how cold you look! Come here, pussy. What have you done to be sent out in the snow? I suppose you have been naughty and scratched the baby, but since it wasn't my baby I forgive you. Come here."

"Meow!" said Muff, but she sidled up to the lady with a sweet voice, very unlike Aunt Jane's. She even sprang to the top of the railing and stood looking at the lady out of beseeching eyes. Pleasant words were not so plentiful from grown-up people that she could afford to miss any.

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"You poor thing!" said Miss Florence again, and she reached out and took the cold cat in her arms, and cuddled her under furry sleeves. "A bit of brown calico around your neck, tied like a ribbon! You are some poor little girl's pet, I know. Why did you run away from her? Where do you live?"

She walked along the street as she talked, petting Muff who purred contentedly, but for all that pricked up her ears when she saw Hetty at the window, and announced that she was ready to go to her.

"That's your mistress, is it? A poor little pale girl; you were naughty to leave her. What a dreary-looking house she lives in, and what a sad face she has! I hope you are good to her, for she doesn't look as though people were. Kitty, I wonder if she would like a call from me?"

Waiting for no answer from Muff, Miss Florence knocked at the side door; she was in the habit of doing pretty nearly what she wanted to.

"I've brought your little girl's kitty home, I think," she said pleasantly to Aunt Jane, who looked cross at her. "The poor thing seemed to be very cold and dismal. If she has been naughty I dare say she is sorry. May I come in and see your little girl?"

"She is a perfect plague!" said Aunt Jane, but she meant the cat, and she held the door open for Miss Florence to enter.

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"Are you sick?" the visitor asked, as she took the little cold hand in her soft warm one. "What is the matter, my child?"

"It's the misery in my knee, ma'am; it won't let me walk nor anything. It is almost four months since I have taken a step."

"Poor little girl! Have you had the doctor?"

"I should think we had!" burst forth Aunt Jane. "I paid him four dollars and a half of hard-earned money, and much good it did! He says it is rheumatism, and she'll get over it maybe when warm weather comes. But land! Cold weather hasn't much more than come, and I have to keep her sitting in that chair and wait on her like a queen; and that everlasting kitten forever under my heels."

"It is all the friend I have, ma'am," said Hetty beseechingly, as if she feared that the beautiful lady in her furry cloak and hat would carry it away. Aunt Jane had dashed into another room, so she did not hear this confession.

"Poor child!" said Miss Florence. "So you will have to eat your Thanksgiving dinner in a corner; or do they move you up to the table?"

A sickly little smile appeared for a minute on Hetty's face, then she said gravely, "I never had a Thanksgiving dinner, ma'am."

But Aunt Jane heard that speech and flashed out an answer. "I should like to know if you hadn't! That shows how

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grateful you are! As if I didn't work my fingers to the bone to give you three meals a day, every day of your life!"

Hetty's pale cheeks began to grow pink, but she answered meekly, "I didn't mean that, Aunt Jane; I was thinking about real, truly Thanksgiving dinners like what there was in that book—a turkey, and mince pie, and jelly, and oh, lots of things. I never saw such a dinner, you know."

"People who do nothing to earn their dinners, but just sit in a chair and make trouble, ought to be thankful for bread and potatoes." Aunt Jane was certainly *very* cross.

Miss Florence did not pay much attention to her; she was thinking how strange it was for a little girl to be almost ten years old and know so little about a Thanksgiving dinner!

She thought a great deal more than that; thoughts, you know, work very fast, and by the time she was ready to speak again she had something wonderful to say.

"I'll tell you what we will have to do, little Hetty. You and kitty will have to come to my house and eat a Thanksgiving dinner this very week; day after tomorrow, isn't it? We are going to have turkey, and mince pie, and jelly, and lots of other things, and I'm sure you would like to be my guest."

It is a pity that I could not show you a picture of Hetty's eyes just then. They looked so very bright, and yet so full of astonishment.

"But ma'am, I can't walk," she said timidly.

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“No, but you can ride in a nice sleigh, tucked in among the nice furry robes. Our John can take you in his arms and land you right in the middle of the cushions; he will think you are nothing but a nice little mouse.”

Whereupon Hetty laughed gleefully, and then was frightened at the sound of her own voice, and looked around to see if Aunt Jane heard.

PART TWO

AUNT JANE heard, and came back presently with a pleasanter face. The idea of Hetty's really being invited out anywhere to get a good dinner, was something new. Hetty listened in astonishment while her aunt said she was sure she would be glad to have the poor child get a little pleasure and something better to eat than she could afford her. It sometimes made her real cross to think of Hetty sitting there day in and day out.

Hetty, thinking it over, made up her mind that after this she wouldn't mind Aunt Jane's crossness so much.

There was business to be done now in the little gloomy house. Hetty's old brown wool dress that she wore last winter was hunted out, and mended, and sponged, and pressed, and really looked very nice. By nine o'clock on Thanksgiving morning she was dressed and sitting by the window to watch for the sleigh.

Down the little narrow street it came with a wonderful jingle of bells, and the horses pranced before the door, and the gay robes fluttered in the wind, and John came in and himself wrapped Hetty in a soft warm shawl which Miss

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Florence had sent, and took her in his arms as though she had been a mouse indeed, and sunk her in among the furry robes and away they went!

At Dr. Benedict's a regular after-breakfast frolic was going on. The girls and their cousins were having a merry-making over the fresh box of toys that had come from Uncle Max the night before. Into the midst of all this warmth, and brightness, and fun came John bringing his mouse, which he dropped into the great easy-chair beside the glowing grate.

"It feels like a feather bed, such as grandma used to have once, before she went to Heaven," said Hetty, leaning her happy little head against the cushions.

The next thing she said after a few minutes of thoughtful silence, astonished the children very much:

"I guess this *is* Heaven, and your aunt Florence is one of the angels; and I'm glad I've got here."

So were the children, but it seemed funny to them that this was Hetty's idea of Heaven.

About the wonders of that Thanksgiving dinner there is no use to try to tell you! To the Benedict children it was nothing more than a good dinner; but to Hetty it was like stepping into a story book which she had once read, and being one of the characters.

"I've had just the very things that Laura had in the book, jelly and all! There's only one thing different."

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“What is that?” Maud Benedict asked, thinking in her loving little heart that if it was nice and to be had, Hetty should have it.

“Why, she could hop all around, and she went skipping through the room, singing. But then, walking doesn't matter much, when I can sit in such a chair as this.”

Florence, in the library, heard this, and she spoke to her brother:

“Now, Dr. Benedict, I want you to use your skill to take away that ‘difference,’ and make Hetty just like the Laura in the book.”

“I've been thinking about that,” said Dr. Benedict; “I will make an examination by and by, when she feels better acquainted with me. I don't think there can be anything serious.”

How did it all end? Why, it hasn't ended. Dr. Benedict looked at the poor knee that had so much “misery” in it, and decided that with care, and daily treatment, she ought to get well very soon; then they had a family council, and decided that the very best place for her to stay until she got well, was right there where she was.

So John was sent back to Aunt Jane with a basket that was packed brimming full from the well-filled cellar—she could have a Thanksgiving dinner indeed—and Miss Florence went along to explain, and they brought Muff home with them; and that night when Hetty was tucked into her

beautiful bed, she actually kissed Muff right on her cold nose and whispered:

“Oh, you dear, darling cat! If it hadn't been for you, I shouldn't have imagined what Heaven was like; and now I can.”

“Something besides Muff ought to be thanked if you like it. Don't you know, little girl, that your dear friend, the Lord Jesus, told me to take you home and see if Dr. Benedict couldn't cure you?” This was what Miss Florence whispered to her as she kissed her good-night.



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