

HOW I KEPT HOUSE FOR TWO CATS.

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When my mother and my niece felt that they needed a holiday, I assured them that I was quite capable of keeping house by myself. But I soon found that I had been rash, for there belonged to the establishment two cats, that I had in that generous moment overlooked.

Clementina is the elder, and the mother of Nellie Grey. The latter, as I have been writing, has been watching my pen. She has just seated herself upon my paper, evidently intending that nothing but the truth, and the whole truth, shall be herein set down concerning herself and her mother—I beg Clementina's pardon—concerning her mother and herself. No Russian censor could look wiser or more severe.

I made Clementina's acquaintance last summer, when she was a little, frisking, grey and white kitten, that thought her tail the funniest thing in the world, unless it might be her toes. It is strange, but it is only babies and kittens that seem to derive satisfaction from their toes. When I saw her again this summer, she was terribly changed. Of course I expected that she would be a cat with dignified don't-touch-me manners, but that she should be the misanthropical creature I met, when she permitted me to touch her back and the tip of her tail, I really did not expect. True, three of the family to which Nellie belonged, found a watery grave in their early infancy, but judging from the way she has treated this very interesting kitten during the last few days, grief for the others cannot have changed her so. The only explanation I can find is that she being a most skilful mouser, would like to ramble at will seeking her lawful food, but a dog in the next street is a terror to cats, and she has narrowly escaped death at his jaws several times. This, when one thinks closely, is enough to make any cat morose.

Now for my tale of woe.

I knew these cats were pampered and indulged, but I listened closely to the instructions concerning their diet, and thought my task easy. The principal articles of food, it had been impressed upon me, were porridge and milk. Occasionally they would take a little bread made very soft with hot water and milk to taste. Meat they were very fond of, but this must be allowed them very sparingly, for all authorities on cats unite in saying that a plain porridge diet is by far the best. Fish, on which they doted wildly, they might be indulged in occasionally.

Scarcely had the train carried my relatives away when Clementina's mews attracted my attention. I looked at their saucer. It was empty. The dish where their porridge was kept was empty too. The next-door cat, Sambo, with whom they (our cats) were very intimate, sprang out of the window licking his whiskers in a very satisfied manner, which explained the aching void.

Remembering the bread softened with hot water, I prepared the compound, and it seemed a savoury dish. They both kept looking up at me with longing eyes and hungry cries while I did this. I put their food before them. Each one touched her nose to it once or twice, then turned away with a sad weary air. I felt the preparation with my finger. It was a little warm. I then cooled it by moving it about with a spoon. They sat on their tails watching me with distrust in their gaze. I put it

down. They tried it again, then turned and left the room. I too went away, and began to feel very insignificant, indeed.

Soon Nellie, who is young—some three months old—came to me, and, with a forgiving frisk, jumped into my lap, then on my shoulder, and in a minute was devoting herself to my eyelashes. Of course, I objected, and took her off my shoulder. She then amused herself with my fob-chain and fingers, sometimes licking the latter until I could not endure her little rough tongue any longer. Nibbling the tip of each finger in succession, suddenly she would take a flying leap at the swinging ball on my chain, and seizing it would gnaw it vigorously. I had begun to feel that neither my hands nor my chain would stand much more, when Clementina at this juncture sprang in at the open window with her "here's-a-mouse" call, that Nellie never mistook. What seemed to me precisely the same sound would only rouse a passing interest in the kitten, such as raising her head and yawning, but she distinguished the different mews as surely as a soldier knows the difference between parade call and "turn-in."

For a moment I was glad that they would have something to satisfy their hunger, but my gladness soon vanished when Clementina deposited the living creature on the rug and proceeded to torture it. I rose hastily, and cried "Get out, kitties," "Shoo, kitties," but to no purpose. Intent on their cruel delight they did not pay the slightest attention to me. I tried to save the little animal, but when it sprang nearly on my arm, I incontinently fled. The last glimpse I had of it was with Nellie climbing up the curtain after it. When I ventured back they were both lying on the rug with as benign an expression as though they had just finished building an hospital for feeble and disabled mice.

It was with a great deal of self-distrust that I prepared their porridge next morning. I almost trembled as I placed the saucer before them. Nellie daintily lapped a little of the milk. Clementina only turned and looked me in the face with a scornful expression, that said more plainly than words—

"You are a nice person to have the charge of cats, you are."

Then she left me with the air of an offended goddess. I have never had the pleasure of meeting a goddess, much less an offended one, but however much a goddess would differ from an offended anybody else, in that degree did Clementina differ.

I had forgotten the salt.

Too soon she came back, this time with a bat. Again the rug received the spoil. Nellie soon had a lesson in natural history, and found out that though bats and mice have similar bodies, they are vastly different creatures. She undertook to stir it up gently with her paw, when there was a sharp click of the bat's teeth, and the astonished kitten drew back, and examined it. Again and again she charged and was repulsed. Clementina, with an attentive paternal gaze, had been watching the encounter. Thinking it time to stop such nonsense, she now rose and made a leisurely attack, but she was as astonished as her daughter, for instead of the bat she got a bite, and the strange thing, recognizing an antag-