

The Story Page.

The Cat's Nightdress.

BY ANNA BURNHAM BRYANT

"My best hockey stick!" cried Johnny, angrily, glaring at poor little frightened Margery, who had just broken it trying to make a "teeter" with the help of that and her Aunt Harriet's ironing board. "Why didn't you take Uncle Abram's gold-headed cane—or the umbrellas?" he added, flinging himself out of the door in a rage. Johnny wasn't always a pleasant boy to live with.

"Just you wait, Miss!" he stuck his head in again to say, revengefully. "I know a way to fix you. Just you see if you get a look at my new little bossy-calf. Uncle Abram is going to give me 'Ya!' I guess now you wish you'd let my things alone 'stead o' breaking 'em!"

"A bossy-calf! O Johnny, please I never saw a dear little bossy-calf—never—not anything littler than a great big hooky-cow! Say you will, Johnny!"

But Johnny was gone, and the bang of the door behind him sounded like a loud, cross No! as Margery listened to it.

"It won't live, probably," Uncle Abram was saying out in the kitchen. It was so still in the room that Johnny had left that Margery could hear every word as plain as could be. "'Twas a plaidin' kind of a little critter anyway, and it come on so awful cold last night the barn wasn't warm enough. If I'd had anything to wrap it up in I'd have blanketed it like a baby, but all the old stuff has been used one way an' another, or stole by tramps, and I couldn't find a thing. I'll carry something over to-night, and try to save the little thing if I can. Johnny dots on it so. Wish I hadn't promised it to him."

"Wish't your barn wasn't such a ways off!" said Aunt Harriet, in a troubled voice. "That path through the wood is enough to be the death of any mortal. Some of these cold nights I expect you'll just come home froze, and that'll be the end of you."

"Oh, sho!" said Uncle Abram, picking up his milk pails, and just at that instant Margery stood in the doorway.

"O Uncle Abram!" she cried, standing before him with both her hands clasped tightly, "can't you save it?"

"Oh, I guess so," said Uncle Abram, easily. "I'm a master hand at saving all kinds of little live critters. I'll see what can be done, my baby!"

"Cause—'cause"—she almost sobbed, "you can't think how terrible bad he's going to feel if he dies! And he's had one de-spoilment a—ready—I broke his hockey stick!"

"There, there, child! what if you did?" said Aunt Harriet, kindly, going up to her and wiping the poor little red eyes with a corner of her blue checked apron as Margery hid her wet face in it. "I guess he's broken things enough of yours since you've been here to make it about even. There, go along and read your storybook. Your Uncle Abram will save the bossy, if 'here's any way to save it."

After dinner the weather grew sharp and cold, the wind blew in angry gusts, and the whirling snow that filled the air fell like a shower of cambric needles. Uncle Abram set off early for the far-off cow barn. His kind heart couldn't bear to have what he called "the critters" suffer. He was well wrapped up, and set off at a good pace with the pails in one hand and the lantern swinging in the other.

Margery stood watching the shifty weather-vane on the tall barn, trying to make up her mind about the weather by it, as Uncle Abram did. "It points to so many different kinds, Aunt Harriet!" she complained. "There! if it will only hold still with reoster's tail toward me a minute longer, I can be sure about it. Yes 'tis truly! north by southeast, I most know. And Uncle Abram always says that's the good quarter."

Suddenly Aunt Harriet threw up both her floury hands in dismay.

"He's clean forgot to take anything to wrap up that little bossy-calf in! Where's Johnny? I've a good mind to set him trotting after him. Only he wouldn't get there if I did, like as not and he don't know the way either."

"I know the way, Aunt Harriet! I've been two times with Uncle Abram. And Johnny can't, because he's gone skating. You know he asked you at dinner time."

"And you can't either. So sit down and read your book, and let 't go. What can't be helped is best forgot about."

That was Aunt Harriet's one counsel for every kind of trouble—"Go and read your book." There might have been a worse one.

Margery's eyes were on her book, but her feet were plowing along that snowy path in spite of herself. She couldn't help thinking of that poor little shivery bossy-calf, and it was plain enough that Aunt Harriet couldn't

either, for presently she spoke out, half to herself, as she looked from the window.

"I 'most wish I'd let you go, after all, seeing you know the way, and you'd meet your uncle. The going part is all safe enough, and coming back you'd have him to look after you. But there!"

That was enough for Margery. As Aunt Harriet disappeared to set the table for supper, Margery went up the back stairs like a mouse, and had on her cloak and warm "pumpkin" hood in "no time." Up the attic stairs she went with soft scudding steps to find something to carry for Uncle Abram to wrap the bossy in. Aunt Harriet mustn't be asked—she might change her mind. In a flash she snatched the first warm feeling thing her hand touched, and rolling it in a tight bundle under her arm as she went, she sped softly down the stairs and out of the house, and took the woodpath with feet that tingled so to get out of Aunt Harriet's eyesight that they never stopped to feel how cold it was.

And oh, but it was cold! It kept growing very dusky, too, and she thought of bears and wolves and other dreadful creatures, but there was no use in going any way but forward, so she floundered on. Suddenly she gave a sharp scream that changed into a cry of joy, for just in front of her stood Uncle Abram, red-faced and snowed, very much surprised to see a puffing, panting, blue-nosed little girl in the middle of his forest path. This "short cut" to his big cattle barn was one he had slashed out for his own use, and few other people ever attempted it.

"Bless my soul-a body!" he exclaimed as he began to be sure that it was really his own little Margery and not some Red Riding-hood out of a fairy-book. "Where did you come from?"

"Here's—something—to keep—the bossy—warm!" she panted, letting the awkward bundle fall at his feet.

"Bless your soul-a-body!" he cried again, heartily, catching it up quick out of the snow. "Who ever let you come out like this? I've wrapped the bossy all up warm in some hay—but I declare for't! Long as you've brought this all the way, I'm going to do him up in it! You just turn round in your tracks, little one, and make for home, and I'll go and fix up the little critter, and be back and ketch up with ye! You won't be afraid, will ye?"

"No, indeed," cried Margery, joyfully, and they both went in different directions. It wasn't very long before he was back as he said, and, even with his lantern, they made quick time going home. She noticed that he kept laughing all the way, but he wouldn't tell her any reason except that he was so glad the bears hadn't eaten her. He laughed even when they went in at the door and found Aunt Harriet much frightened at not finding Margery, whom she had only just missed and was calling everywhere. He laughed in the morning when he came down to breakfast, and finally invited them all—Johnny and Aunt Harriet and Margery—to take a ride 'round the road" and "see the little new bossy."

When they got to the barn he was not the only one that was laughing, for there was a comical little red calf, with very long legs and a very bumpy forehead, wearing a most dandyish-looking blue "swallowtail" with brass buttons, its fore legs stuck gracefully through the sleeves of the coat, while the narrow blue tails swayed first on one side of his back and then on the other.

"That's what—she—fetched—to—wrap—him in!" gurgled Uncle Abram, holding his sides. "I made up my mind you would see it!"

"Better call him 'Dandy,'" said Aunt Harriet, "Do' know's I ever see a four-legged calf wearing a swallowtail before."

"Keep it on him, Uncle Abram!" shouted Johnny, capering about in huge delight. "I'll get all the other boys up here to see the show. Say, he'll live now, fast enough, won't he?"

"Depends—on whether you're a gentleman!" said Uncle Abram, gruffly.

"Oh, he is—he will be!" said Margery, sweetly. "He knows now I tried to make up to him for breaking his hockey stick."—The Congregationalist.

The Wiles of Bobby.

The adage about old maids' loving cats found its denial in Miss Fidella Winters, for there was nothing she hated worse than cats—except children.

One by one she had dropped her school-girl friends, or had been dropped by them as they became mothers and grandmothers; and now she lived alone, except for Joanna Gray, who had served her more than forty years,—though neither of them ever mentioned the time,—and maid's and mistress' opinions were run in the same mould.

The wide expanse of lawn surrounding Miss Fidella's old fashioned house was protected by a high fence of iron pickets so closely set that the most meagre kitten could

not squeeze through, so sharply pointed that there was not a possibility that the most agile cat or child would leap or climb over it.

The gate was kept securely latched, and children could not stray up the graveled path; they could only look through the iron grating at the trimly pruned rosebushes and the prim flowerbeds.

But one day Miss Fidella saw a strange sight; some careless butcher or baker-boy had neglected to fasten the gate, and a child! yes, actually a child! carrying in his arms a kitten! was coming up the walk as fast as his sturdy legs could carry him.

He was obliged to use hands as well as feet to climb the steps, but he held fast to the cat.

Miss Fidella recovered from her surprise sufficiently to go to the door.

"Heddo!" he cried, before she could speak.

"Why—why—"

"Heddo, I say; isn't oo tay, 'Heddo'?"

"Hello," said Miss Fidella feebly. "But—little girl—"

"I isn't 'little dir!," he interrupted scornfully, lifting up his kilt; "see my twousz! 'Little dir's doesn't wear twousz, does 'em?"

"But you can't come in, I say," said Miss Fidella decidedly.

"I is in now," he chuckled, walking into the parlor and looking curiously around him. His face wore several coats of dirt, molasses, and bread-crumbs; his kilt was stiff with dirt, and as for his hands! Miss Fidella shuddered at the thought of touching them, or of letting them touch her.

The kitten squirmed from his arms and hid beneath a cabinet, and Miss Fidella sank into a chair and tried to think what to do. She actually depended upon Joanna to attend to disagreeable matters, but Joanna had gone out not long before. The child drew a long, tired breath.

"Tate Bobby up," he cried, perching himself into her lap.

"O, mercy! you dirty, filthy child!" screamed Miss Fidella.

Bobby regarded his hands gravely a moment.

"Wass 'em."

Miss Fidella did not know what else to do; so she took him to the parlor bedroom, filled a wash-bowl with warm water, took soap and cloth, and gingerly removed the different strata, until a rosy face appeared, and his soft light hair clustered in damp curls about the white forehead and fat little neck.

"My! my!" she shivered, "I do really feel quite nauseated."

Bobby looked into her face.

"I zink oo pitty yady."

"What? Miss Fidella's nausea left her."

"Pitty hair, pitty cheeks, pitty oo," smiled Bobby, looking at the very curly blonde hair and the pink cheeks with their white background.

"Well, really," murmured Miss Fidella, "children and fools always tell the truth, I've been told." She took up one dirty hand tenderly, and began to wash it, when down went the other hand, and for a few moments he churned the water up and down. The bowl was so high that he had to reach up, and the water trickled down his sleeves until Miss Fidella put the bowl upon the rug at his feet.

Again she tried to wash his hands. Splash! a foot went into the bowl.

"O my, O my! Joanna! Joanna!" she cried, though she knew that Joanna was not within sound of her voice.

Bobby took his foot out, and a pool of water oozed from his shoe and stocking.

"Tate 'em off," said Bobby.

She untied the wet, dirty shoe-lace, and removed shoe and stocking.

Splash! the other foot went into the bowl; then there was another tussle with a wet shoe and stocking. The moment his feet were bare, Bobby jumped to the bowl, and danced up and down until he danced all the water out of the bowl; then he permitted Miss Fidella to wipe his hands and feet.

His clothes were dripping; what was to be done with him.

She tried to take off his kilt; but the task was a hard one for fingers so strange to a child's clothes. At last, however, it was off, and she wrapped him in a flannel dressing sack of her own.

"Now by yo," he yawned sleepily.

She was helpless before this autocraft, so she sank into a little, low rocking-chair; he climbed into her lap, cuddled his head upon her shoulder, curled one arm confidently about her neck, and murmured drowsily, "Pitty yady; sing, pitty yady."

Heavier and heavier pressed the little head; the arm about her neck relaxed; the hand fell; the child was asleep; but Miss Fidella kept on rocking and singing, while into her heart there crept something that she