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## Kitty, My Pretty White Kitty

By S. B. HACKLEY

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"De house is full up, sah." The shining, white-aproned embodiment of suavity and importance, on the steps of the high-class boarding house of the Misses Lovejoy, in the little health resort town of Bolling Springs, bowed until his clipped head well-nigh touched the elusive pink spider lilies in the flower boxes beside the piazza steps. "I has to osten to you de intensit regrets o' my ladies, but ebuh room is taken. De last one wah bespoke by wiah dis foahnoon."

When a man all his fifty years gets everything he wants and goes 700 miles on his physician's recommendation of the water and baths for a rheumatic knee, he naturally feels vexed when, at his journey's end, he doesn't get the first of his wishes granted.

Terry Alderson's fine dark eyes clouded a bit as he turned away and started across the high sloping street toward the Coppell house, recommended as the second best boarding house in Bolling Springs.

And just then "Miss Nellie," a little, slim, auburn-haired and smiling lady about thirty-five years of age, with the gentlest, softest brown eyes, came up the street. Alderson met her at her gate. His face cleared instantly, and when she stooped to pat the immense white cat that advanced to meet her, with "Kitty, pretty white kitty, are you glad to see me?" on her lips, an unreasoning twinge of jealousy went over him. Why should a beauteous creature like that waste affection on a cat?

That evening Alderson sat on the upstairs porch that opened off his room at Mrs. Coppell's, and in the full light of the moon he watched Miss Nellie Lovejoy as she stood by the row of sweet-scented daturas, whose great, dew-covered white bells made a glory of the Lovejoy side yard. Then he saw her stoop and pat the white cat that followed her.

"I wouldn't mind being that cat," he thought whimsically.

The next afternoon, coming from the bathhouse at the springs, some distance from the boarding place, Alderson overtook Miss Lovejoy going home from her work as a clerk at Framm's store. He spoke to her, and making a pretense of desiring some information, walked along with her as far as her gate.

Ten days of religiously drinking the mineral waters and taking the baths and Alderson's rheumatic knee was nearly well, but he was having strange feelings in the vicinity of his heart.

He had never cared anything for women as he knew them in the North, but he had never before been acquainted with an auburn-haired Southern lady, with a voice like soft, rippling water and eyes like pools in the forest. Boxes of roses began quite frequently to come down on "No. 11," the late afternoon train, from the nearest big town for Miss Nellie Lovejoy, and fancy wicker boxes of chocolates without number, with "T. M. Alderson's" card inclosed.

And Mrs. Nellie glowed and dimpled and smiled until the Framm customers, who had always loved her, fairly worshipped her.

And in the seventh heaven of delight Jonathan received the boxes of candy and flowers, and watched through the front door screen each afternoon the gentleman from Detroit, as he lingered at the gate, loath to lift his hat from his handsome gray head in good-by to Miss Nellie.

About three o'clock one morning of the fifth week of his stay in Bolling Springs Alderson was awakened by a "meowing" in the back yard. For an hour there was a continuous squalling. When the cat finally ceased its noise Alderson, who loved late sleeping, could sleep no more. He rose thoroughly exasperated.

The next night there was a repetition of the feline serenade. Alderson bounded from his bed and saw in the yard below the balcony the big, white cat that belonged at the Lovejoy house. He threw a convenient golf stick in its direction and returned to bed, but sleep was gone.

"To whom does the white cat that stays at your house belong?" Alderson asked a bit stiffly of Miss Nellie as he overtook her on her way home that afternoon.

"Snow Darling?" she smiled. "Oh, he belongs to Mrs. Gilman, an old lady who has made her home here so long, and we all make a pet of him," she went on in her musical tones.

"If he keeps up that after-midnight noise as he did last night and the night before," Alderson commented, "somebody'll make a corpse of him."

"Why, we—we didn't hear any noise," Miss Nellie remonstrated. "You

Three nights went by before the white cat again serenaded the Coppell house. Then two nights together Alderson's rest was broken. At that time he was the only boarder who slept on that side of the house, and the only one who heard the caterwauling. At the end of the second night Alderson went to the Lovejoy house and remonstrated.

Miss Nellie was not at home, but Misses Euphemia and Jessie expressed their regret and promised to try to get Mrs. Gilman to keep "Snow Darling" in at night. Alderson went home somewhat mollified.

Jonathan watched him uneasily as he took his departure.

"If my ladies knowed what was good fur 'em," he commented, "dey'd invest in about a dime's wuth o' 'Shoah-death-to-cats' and administer hit unbeknownst! But bein' ole maids, poah things, dey don't know dat when you gits a man mad—he'll fugit about bein' in de marryin' notion!"

Before breakfast next morning Alderson appeared at the Lovejoy house, tremulous with nervous anger. Miss Nellie opened the door. "I'm sorry if the kitty disturbed you," her soft voice was very sweet, "but Mrs. Gilman loves him so, she can't bear to restrain his liberty and fasten him up at night."

Alderson's exasperation broke out in mild fury. "Loves the pestiferous bunch of fur, does she? I love sleep, too, and I'm going to stay in the house where I am and get it! The next time that cat disturbs me, I'm going to restrain his liberty—with a bullet!"

"That wouldn't be right," quavered Miss Nellie.

Alderson turned abruptly and left her without another word.

He was not disturbed that night, but the next day he kept out of Miss Nellie's way. The night after, at the usual hour of half-past three, he was awakened by a feline wailing. He rose instantly. A single shot from his pearl-handled revolver and "Snow Darling" was no more.

Next day a very fat and exceedingly irate lady telegraphed her son to come to her. Jacob came. Alderson was haled into the police court and fined ten dollars for shooting Mrs. Gilman's cat.

"I'll go to jail and dry up before I pay that fine!" he informed the court. "Sixty days in jail or the fine paid!" answered the judge.

"I'll live on bread and water for the next two months in my cell before I will pay that fine!" Alderson commented.

The town rang with the tale.

"De jailer says dat Detroit man's a-gettin' pale and his rheumatism's comin' back on him—not gittin' his mineral baths and de water. He say he plumb oneasy about him!" Miss Nellie overheard Jonathan saying to the cook about a week after Alderson's incarceration.

Suppose he died of the heat or something? For three nights Miss Nellie cried herself to sleep. Then she could stand it no longer. She went to the judge's office and paid Alderson's fine.

The judge, supposing that Alderson had requested his landlady to bring the money, to spare himself mortification, sent an order to the jailer: "Release T. M. Alderson. Fine paid."

"Judge said your fine was paid and to turn you out. That's all I know!" The jailer answered Alderson's remonstrance.

He went to the judge. "Who dared to pay that fine?" he demanded.

"Lady brought it. Supposed you sent it by your landlady," answered his honor.

Fuming with anger, Alderson strode off in the direction of the woods across the river. In a thicket of pines lying prone on the pine needles, sobbing like a hurt child, he came upon Miss Nellie. At sight of the little disconsolate figure in the leaves he felt his anger cool. A twig broke under his feet. She sat up, shaking.

"Oh, don't be angry with me!" she begged. "They said you were sick and suffering in that awful jail and I—I couldn't bear it! I went and paid your fine!"

With the touch of the wind, sweet with piney fragrance, in his flushed face and Miss Nellie's low sobs in his ears, Alderson's pride and obstinacy fled. Nothing mattered but that little white bundle at his feet. He bent over and lifted her.

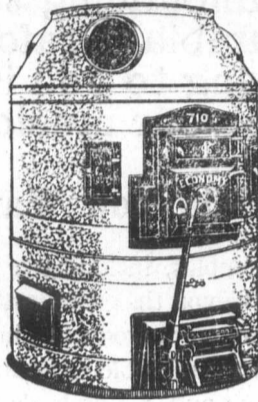
"You were afraid I couldn't rough it out?" he said, very tenderly. "You thought I needed somebody to look after me? I do, and for all time! Won't you do it, little girl?"

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