

The Inglenook

How Annetta Was Cured.

Annetta loved Tom very much; perhaps, because nobody else had ever loved him, for he was an old cat and not at all pleasant to look at. He was black and white and yellow spotted; a little bit of his tail had been snipped off in the trap and he had lost part of one ear in a street fight; for he had an unpleasant disposition and was always getting himself into difficulties. Ever since he was a little kitten, he had been a source of great anxiety to his mother on account of the late hours and low company which he kept, and, at the tender age of six weeks, with a defiant toss of his little tail, he shook off all maternal restraint and became a tramp. For a long time he wandered about the streets picking up what he could find to eat, and sleeping at nights under culverts or in doorways.

This was not a pleasant life to lead, for dogs chased him and boys threw stones at him, and he was often very tired and hungry. One gloomy evening he came out of an alley, and after looking about him for a little while, turned into a narrow side street. It had been raining hard all the afternoon, and now as the twilight came on it was more dismal than ever. Dirty drops of water chased each other down the dusty shop windows; little muddy torrents went singing along the gutters, and there were many puddles upon the uneven sidewalk.

It had been a hard day for Tom. He was strolling along slowly thinking of a number of things and keeping his eye out for a good opening for a mouse, when he met Jamie and Annetta. They had a very large umbrella over them, and a very little sack of cheese between them, out of which from time to time they each took a small bite; and when Annetta saw the hungry old cat, she stooped down and laid a morsel of the cheese on the sidewalk before him. When he had eaten that, she gave him another piece, and as she seemed to be such a kind little girl, Tom decided to follow her home and live with her for a while.

This arrangement was very agreeable to Annetta, but Annetta's mother didn't enter into it with that enthusiasm in which Tom could have wished. She said he was an ugly cat and had a wicked look out of his eye; and once when he was sleeping on the back steps she swept him off with the broom. But Annetta overlooked all his faults and considered him the embodiment of feline perfection. She never forgot to put his meals on a little tin plate in the back yard; it was Annetta who smoothed his rough fur and picked the burrs out of his tail when he came in after a long tramp from nobody knows where.

And Tom was very sensible of this kindness and laid many mice at the little girl's feet, as tokens of his gratitude. And once he brought her a little dead bird, and then Annetta scolded him, and that afternoon she and Jamie buried the bird in the back yard with much funeral pomp, and they tied a black veil over Tom's head and made him march in the procession as chief mourner. After that he ate his birds away from home.

Tom had been stopping at Annetta's for about two months, when one morning as Jamie was crawling through the fence to show his new overalls with straps across the back, almost like suspenders, Annetta's mother called to him and said: "Don't come over to day, for we are afraid Annetta is taking the scarlet fever," and by evening the news was confirmed, and a little yellow flag was hung out; and then Annetta's mother called across the fence again and said:

"Annetta wants to know if Jamie will take care of the cat while she is sick."

Now, this was not a pleasant task for the little

boy, for he and Tom had never been the best of friends. He undertook it very cheerfully, however, for he was in the habit of obeying Annetta implicitly, and, after all, he was a little bit proud of the trust.

He followed the old cat around from morning till night. He arranged his meals as he had seen Annetta do. He was not happy if his charge was out of his sight for a moment, and Tom's reckless habits and wild ways worried him so that his little face took on a worn and anxious look.

The only real peace he got was in the evening, when he had seen Tom eat his supper and stretch himself out to sleep in the pleasant twilight; then, after feeling his nose to see if it was cool (for Annetta, who knew a great deal about cats, had told him that as long as a cat's nose was cold no anxiety need be felt about his health), he would sit down wearily on the back steps, feeling that he had done his duty for that day, and could give a good report to Annetta; for every morning Annetta would print in very large letters upon her slate, How is T. TODAY? and her mother would hang it up in the window. And Jamie would print a very abbreviated list of Tom's doings for the day upon his slate and hang it on his window, and in this way they kept each other posted.

Annetta had been ill about a week when one evening after he had his supper and had his nose felt to the satisfaction of Jamie, Tom disappeared through a hole in the back fence in company with a disreputable looking white cat, who lived with an old lady in the next square. And all that night he didn't return, and when Jamie got up in the morning, he found the cat's little box with a piece of old comfort in it, cold and empty.

The little boy climbed on the back fence and looked this way and that. At last he was relieved to see the old cat coming slowly down the alley. He crawled through the fence feebly and laid down in the shade as though he were very tired. Then he got up and ran round and around, and jumped over an old chair and yowled, and bristled out his tail, and Jamie was running after him trying to catch him when his mother came hurrying out of the kitchen and cried:

"Come into the house, Jamie, I am afraid the poor cat has a fit."

The little boy stopped short and leaned against the fence. It seemed too dreadful to be true! What would Annetta say, and how could he answer her anxious inquiries about her pet? But that morning no slate appeared in Annetta's window, and the little girl would not have known her old cat if he had jumped upon her bed. He might have laid any number of choice mice at her feet and received no caressing pat from her little hot hands.

Jamie wandered disconsolately about the yard trying to think of some way out of his difficulties. He wished Annetta was here to advise him; but one thing was sure, Tom was entrusted to his special care and must be cured. So that afternoon he tied a string about the cat's neck and led him out into the street. As they passed by the house where the owner of the rabbit lived, they saw him sitting on his steps his chin buried in his hands, and he spoke to Jamie very kindly.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am taking Tom to a doctor," Jamie replied promptly. "He has had a fit."

The owner of the rabbit was interested at once. He came down to the fence and looked at the invalid.

"What matter him have it?" he said. James shook his head.

"Maybe he has went out and eat a lot of raw beefsteak," suggested the boy.

"No he hasn't," said Jamie decidedly, "for I have just been feeding him scraps and things, like Annetta told me to."

Here Tom put his paw to his face and smiled, for he knew very well that he and the white cat had stolen a large steak from the old lady and eaten it all the very night before.

"Do you know what would be good for him?" Jamie went on in an anxious tone. The boy made a hasty mental review of his list of remedies; after thinking deeply for a while he asked:

"Have you tried burying a pin?"

"A what?" said Jamie, and even Tom raised the hair on his back, for he thought it possible that the pin was to be buried in him. He was much relieved to hear that it was only to be put under the ground at a cross road.

"It's good for warts," the boy continued, "but I don't know whether it will do him any good or not. If a cat's fitty, there ain't nothin' much you can do for him, nobow. And that cat looks like he might be."

Jamie's heart sank as he hurried Tom away. He knew exactly where he was going, for once when he and Annetta had gone down town to see a parade they had stopped to rest in a doorway, where Annetta had said there lived a great doctor, who cured thousands of people every day, she guessed, and as she seemed to have such a high opinion of his ability, Jamie had at once decided that this practitioner should try his skill upon Tom.

He found the place without much difficulty. The stone steps to the office felt very hot to his little bare feet, as he trudged sturdily up them with the cat in his arms.

With a beating heart he went into the waiting-room and sat down in a leather covered chair with Tom upon his lap. How many people there were, coming and going all the time. Jamie wondered if they were all sick, and if any of them had the scarlet fever. There were no other cats there, but surely a doctor who could cure a person could cure a cat.

For a long time he sat there, and the sunshine grew more and more slanting as it streamed through the window and made little dancing patterns on the floor. By and by the people went away, and then a door opened and the doctor himself came out. He was an old man with a high shining hat. There were so many charms upon his watch-chain that they jingled when he walked. He carried a little brass-bound medicine case under his arm, and was putting on his gloves as he came. When he saw the little boy he stopped and looked down at him.

"Are you lost?" he said, "or are you waiting for someone?"

"No, sir," Jamie replied, swallowing a lump in his throat. "I've come to get some medicine for Tom, he has had a fit. He is run round and round and nobody couldn't catch him."

There was a typewriter girl in the office who, when he held up the cat, put her handkerchief to her mouth and left the room.

"She needn't be afraid," said the little boy, contemptuously, "they ain't ketchin'. Me and Annetta has played with Tom for weeks and weeks, and we ain't never had any."

"How many has your cat had?" asked the old man.

"He ain't my cat," Jamie replied, "he is Annetta's cat, and I am taking care of him until she gets well. She is the little girl that lives beside of me and she is awful sick. I s'pect she's goin' to die. She has got the scarlet fever, and is ist speckled all over," and Jamie waved his arms to show how completely the dire disease had laid hold of Annetta. The doctor looked into the little boy's anxious face for moment, and a queer look came over his own kind face as he turned quickly and went into his own private office. Presently he returned with some powders done into a neat little parcel.

"You're to give him one of these," he said, "if he shows any signs of being sick again. Let him drink all the milk he wants and I think your cat will be all right."