

THE TWO CATS.

"You dearest, sweetest little duck, so it was! Mamma's pussus pet!"

It sounded much like "mamma's pussus pet," but the voice was so young, so fresh, so coaxing, that Joe Parker could not believe his ears.

There was something "magnetic" about it, to use the slang of the day; at least it attracted Joe to the row of raspberries that hung their green arms all abroad on the old pocket fence between his garden and the next neighbor's and irresistibly bent his head to peep through those respectable palings and see what he could see.

And this is what he saw: Such a lovely girl! Her hair was red, to be sure, but it was that bronze red that looks brown in the depth of its ripples and gold on their crests. Just now, in the blazing sunshine, it was all a rich deep red, with gilt threads among it, but then she had such eyes! large, clear, red hazel eyes, as beautiful as a robin's or a squirrel's, fringed with dark lashes and over-looked with delicate dark arches, a little tilted with a look of surprise that was the result of shape and outline.

I regret to say that her fair, soft brow and cheeks were slightly freckled, but in such a fresh red and white the smallest spot will show, and nobody is perfectly beautiful, not even Mary Ann May, commonly called "Manny May." For instance, her mouth was large; but then it was so full, so red, and parted over such firm white teeth, that it seemed just to match the saucy little nose above and the round dimpled chin below it. Her waist was large, too, just as large as the waist of any sculptured goddess wrought by Thidias or Praxiteles, for Manny had never been pinched in mind or body, or given over to that awful tyrant "They," who puts our girls to the torture of rack and boot from their infancy, that they may be and do as "They" do and are.

But she had a tall, strong, shapely figure, and its movements were all instinct with the untrammelled grace of nature. As she stood in her mother's garden, with both hands clasping her pet to her bosom, a basket of dandelion greens and an old case knife at her feet, she was a perfect picture; but she had not an idea of it.

Joe's theories fled as he gazed. The voice had not misled him, it was not a mother's voice; the darling on whom Manny lavished her sweet words, her tender embrace, even her kisses, was—a cat.

But such a cat! Peter was as great a beauty as his mistress. His coat of deep blue-gray was striped and dashed with shining black; a ring of black encircled his massive neck; his tail was ringed also with sable, and five wide black stripes ran from between his ears down to the very tip of the tail, merging as they went into one broad band, then there was a snow-white spot upon his breast, and his powerful paws were black as jet.

"Manny's dumb silly about that there cat," was her father's chronic growl; but there, since Manny was all the child left to him, and in his secret heart its living idol, he only growled. He would not have uttered a derogatory word about Peter for anything; he even remembered to get a bit of meat for him whenever he went to the village, and had once been known to turn back half a mile for that very purpose.

As for mother May, she spoiled the cat just as she had spoiled Mary Ann. She was a dear, kindly, tender-hearted old woman, with an utter inability to rule or order or mold anybody or anything. She took life as she found it, and neither fretted at nor tried to amend it—a sort of moral feather bed, soft to exasperation, but, after all, restful to the cager, hard-worked, exasperated and wiry people of her race.

"A proper, nice woman," Semantha Carrier said; "alcan, an' eternally good-natured. No faculty in her, and one that riles you consider'ble when you want to have things see; but when you're sick or sorry, sort of comfortin', like a poultice."

Peter knew his power and his position. Puffed from his early kittenhood, he soon learned, like the young of the human species, that he could tyrannize over his petters, and then the warmest, softest seat was given up to him, the door opened at his first appeal, the giblets of the rarely used fowls were saved for him, his tastes gratified and his notions respected. One is sometimes tempted to half accept the masculine theory that women like tyrants, when one sees how they manufacture them for themselves.

Now, Joseph Parker had just come to Meriden to live. A certain Mr. Webb, who had a manufactory in Vermont, had moved to Meriden to get more water power, and as Joe Parker was his foreman in the paper mill, he had moved too, hired a house a little way out of the village, next to Mr. May's homestead, and brought with him his mother—and his mother's cat. Hence this story, and what- ever it may be sprinkled with.

Joe Parker's cat was not at all like Peter May. He was black, all black, with green-yellow eyes, and an aspect that made a stranger think of the regulation cat that was the familiar of witches in all history. He came from Hanover to Meriden by rail, unaided up in a strawberry crate, hissing, spitting, yowling and sharpening his claws on his frail prison all the way, to the terror of every passenger in the car. Indeed, Joe was forced to carry crate and all into a baggage car at the third station, and ride with it the rest of the way, for the brakemen refused to look after it, so daunted were they with the wild animal within. Tiger was sent into solitary confinement in the cellar as soon as Mrs. Parker reached her house, and was subdued by hunger and darkness before they dared to let him range abroad in the new neighborhood.

Now, Joe Parker had not been in Meriden long enough to make much acquaintance there, and was very hard at work the first few weeks of his stay, so that he always went to sleep in church on Sunday, and missed any sight thereby of the blooming daisies in the choir or in the pews; he was ashamed of it, to be sure, but there was the change of air from Vermont mountains to the fat meadow land and low lying pastures about the river, and then he was really overworked for a time in helping to place the new machinery, move the old, and settle his mother in this strange place, where he knew no one to whom he could apply for help or suggestion. It was not Sunday to-day when he peeped through the fence at Manny, and suddenly, as if by a stroke, lost his honest young heart—for, beloved reader, this is only a love story. Only a love story; only a record of the great world story, the event of so many lives, the finality of all.

That passing bell

That tolls me into heaven or hell,

As the old parson says When I was a page

say, "Only a love story, I think of that

complet of Tennyson's:

One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat

Slowly, and nothing more

Quite enough for once to munge the average

reader; and so is this matter of love, be it in

the passion of Romeo and Juliet or the less

wordy and more commonplace emotion of a

foreman in a factory and a farmer's daughter,

for, after all, "de the best that ye may,"

'tis love, love, love that makes the world go

round—yes, that makes our sad old world a

merry go-round.

"Love will find out the way," says an ancient

song, and Joe was no exception to the

rule of the Pathfinder. He persuaded his

mother to send him over to the neighbor's the

very next night for a pitcher of milk, and

also to negotiate for their daily supply. This

being successfully effected, he went daily for

the milk before milk hours, and his pail was

filled by Mary Ann, blooming with the sweet

morning air, neat, trim and lovely at 6 o'clock

a. m., as a city girl at her late dinner. Joe

grew worse and worse. He thought of Manny

in mill and market; her face shone above

the machinery, her laugh tinkled with the

mill bell. He made friends with Peter also;

for cats know lovers—when they are cat

lovers—just as well as children know their

friends. Tiger was still kept in the high-

fenced chicken yard on the Parker premises—

now devoid of chickens—as a measure of pre-

caution against his straying; he was too dear

to his mistress to be ventured at large yet. It

is not to be denied that Manny looked with

favorable eyes upon Joe Parker; a personable

young fellow with a good position does not fall

at the feet of every farmer's daughter, even if

she is a beauty. The "anxious and aimless"

have in their ranks many a lovely face and

capable character. Manny had been no fur-

ther than the district school for her educa-

tion, and her home training was too hard,

practical, thorough work. She read no

novels or "story papers;" The Weekly Cour-

ant and The Puritan Recorder helped her

through Sundays, but on week days she had

work to do, and at night was tired enough to

go to bed early. So she was simple as well as

sensible, in the best sense of simplicity, and

did not coquette with Joe any more than was

natural to any girl. She dimpled and blushed

when he came in, pretended to be vexed when

Peter preferred his knee to her lap, called him

an "awful thing" if he caught her hand in his

with the milk pail handle, and was always

ready to go to singing school and evening

meeting with him, so that his true love ran

ominously smooth.

But, alas! there was trouble coming. Tige,

the Parker cat, hurt himself seriously in an

attempt to climb the palings of his jail yard,

for they were old and rickety, and could not

bear his weight. His mistress nursed him in

the house for six weeks with great care, and

when he was quite well again, and stronger

than ever with much feeding, he was turned

out of doors and allowed to roam and ravage

as he would, and at once he lit upon Peter.

Dire was the conflict, but Mrs. Parker

hastened to the rescue with a pail of water,

and the astonished Peter, quite drenched to

the skin, fled, while Mrs. Parker picked up

Tiger and carried him into the kitchen, lau-

dering over him as if he were a hurt child.

Now Mrs. Parker was a shy and silent

woman, but very resolute; she at once made

up her mind that the May's cat should not

intrude on her premises to disturb Tiger.

She had the garden fence re-

inforced, and even a strip of wire

netting added to its height on the May's

side; but she could not, cabin, crib or con-

fine Tiger himself—a circumstance that vexed

her much. And when Peter came home to

Mary Ann, after that first duel, dripping like

a drowned rat, she, too, was indignant; but

what could she do? Battles set in, howls by

night, skirmishes by day; a piece was soon

blitten out of Peter's lovely waving tail, and

Tiger lost half an ear. Manny made invidious

remarks about Mrs. Parker's cat every day of

her life, and Mrs. Parker made Joe's meals

bitter to his soul with evil speaking of Peter

and Peter's family—meaning the Mays. Yet

they were friendly enough, except on the cat

question. Mrs. May taught Mrs. Parker how

to knit new heels into Joe's yarn stockings,

and Mrs. Parker showed Manny's mother the

last pattern of crochet edging; they ex-

changed samples of cake, talked sickly ul-

pickles and preserves; in fact, had a liking

and respect for each other—all but the cats.

Before the last pleasant autumn days were

gone Joe had gathered courage to ask Mary

Ann to marry him, and she had prettily con-

sented; they were "keepin' company" now,

and the old folks looked on well pleased to

think that neither of their children would

stray far from home, though Joe insisted on

having a small home of his own, if only a

tenement in the village, properly remarking:

"We won't mix folks, Manny—it don't suc-

ceed; besides, I want you all to myself"—a

peremptory sort of logic that pleased Mrs.

Mary Ann and made her assent hearty and

prompt.

They meant to be married in April; in no

less time could the modest array of clothing

and house hold be made ready, for chiefly it

must be sewed by Manny's deft hands; and

sowed it was, with no intervention of ma-

chinery, and almost ready, when—how shall

I tell it!—one pleasant February day Peter

traded into the house with a bleeding ear, a

blatting eye and one leg so hurt that he could

not even limp on it. This was the climax.

Manny had winked at Tiger's enormities all

that winter for Mrs. Parker's sake (meaning

Joe); she had only once hurled a basin of

dishwater over him, three times chased him

with a broom handle, and not thrown more

than a dozen stones at him—which didn't

count, for women never hit anything if they

throw at, or at least miss say so.

But now Manny's patience gave a great

gasp and died. She flew out of the door lat-

ent to maul or slay, but Tiger's black tail just

whisked out of the gate; she could not follow

him, so she did the next thing, which was to

wash Peter's wounds, put him to bed in the

cellar, fetch him dry catnip and warm milk,

and leave him to that solitude that the

wounded animal soels and the wounded man

stuns.

It was tea time then, and when Joe came in

at his hour for visitation he found Manny no

longer tender, arch or sentimental; the hazel

eyes had a redder spark in them than he had

ever seen, the cheeks flamed, and the red lips

were puckered into a lovely severity instead

of wreathed with smiles.

"Joe," she began, rushing at once into the

fray, "yon will have to kill Tiger. I can't

stand it. He has chewed up Peter till he's

'most dead."

"My dear girl," said Joe, in a dismayed

tone, "nother sets by Tiger so."

"I can't help it; he's a horrid, dreadful

cat, and he'll murder Peter, and he's got to

be killed."

"But, Manny, think of mother; she's goin'

to be alone, and she thinks everting of

Tiger. Why, she never would forgive me if

I killed him."

"Well, if you like her better'n you do me,

all right, I shall kill him, unless pa will;

so there!"

Now Joe was not used to girls and their

ways. He thought Mary Ann meant every

word she said. He was really frightened.

"But, Manny, just think. What will mother

say?"

"I don't care a cent what anybody says. I

will not stand by and see my dear sweet old

cat killed by a dreadful beast like that and

not defend him. I'll poison it."

"Oh, Mary Ann!" cried Joe.

"Then kill him yourself," she retorted.

"I cannot," said Joe, steadily.

Well he knew how his silent mother loved

Tiger, like many other women, she bestowed

her pet all the demonstrative affection she

was too shy and too reserved to lavish on Joe.

The cat slept on her bed, followed her about

the house and garden, sprang up into her lap

and purred there as she sat alone in the

evenings, and however fierce a fighter of his

kind, was devoted and loving to his mistress.

More than ever did she cling to him now, in

her wordless jealousy of Joe's new love; for

she knew that

"My son's my son till he gets him a wife,"

and deeply she felt, as most mothers feel, that

her rule and her joy were over.

Joe looked at Manny with his heart in his

eyes, but that young person's willful soul had

got the better of her sense and her affection

both; she had given Joe her final test; she

would find out now whether he loved her or

his mother best. Poor Joe!

"You won't," she asked, setting her lips in

a firm red line.

"No," said Joe, with equal firmness.

The situation had come to a dead lock.

Just then a wild scream was heard, and a

scurrying of feet. Mrs. Parker, with a face

of fright, drew herself up on the picket fence,

and called for Joe.

"Come quick!" she cried. "Tige has tumbled

into the cistern!"

Joe ran as fast as he could. He knew the

cistern was two-thirds full, and its sides slip-

pery, but he had not an idea what to do; he

lost his wits—and Mary Ann found them!

She overtook him at the door of his mother's

kitchen. "Here! here!" she said, breathlessly;

"here's pa's scoop-net; it's real strong. You

can't get him out any other way." And yet

five minutes before she had made it a vital

issue with Joe that he should kill this very

cat. Girls are queer.

So Tige, resisting to the last, was fished

out of the water butt and handed over to his

delighted mistress, who rolled him in her

apron and took him in for repairs, flinging

over her shoulder to Manny a curt: "I don't

know how to thank you enough."

"Manny!" said Joe, holding out his arms in

the moonlight.

Mary Ann rushed into them, and sobbed

out:

"I did not like all possessed! I never should

have liked you a mite again if you'd killed

Tige!" Oh, woman! woman!

So they were married, and lived happy

ever after, and had a cat of their own hand-

some than Peter, better than Tiger, and

peaceable as a Quaker.—Rose Terry Cooke

in Harper's Bazar.

FOR WHAT SHALL WE BE THANKFUL!

Some Old, Oft Repeated Questions, and

Their Unfashionable Answers.

"For what shall we be thankful?" say the

sorrowing. "Grief abideth with us, and in

our hearts is the bitterness of continued

trouble."

"For what shall we be thankful?" say the

poor. "The earth overflows with plenty, but

we are destitute. Cold and hunger is our

portion, and want is our companion all the

days of the year."