

UNCLE'S LITTLE PLAYMATE.

The evening that Uncle brought Tuff to our house we could never have imagined the mischief she was going to cause. You see, it was this way. The Murphys, who lived next door, had a rather valuable white cat, and took endless trouble with it. One evening uncle arrived home carrying an ordinary-looking brown paper parcel. Placing it on the table he looked round with a benevolent smile, and remarked, "There, my dears, I've brought you a little playmate." Immediately we all crowded round in great excitement. Uncle lifted the parcel up and said, as he began to unwrap the paper, "My dears, I've brought you a little playmate." When he dropped it suddenly and commenced sucking his fingers. The parcel rolled off the table to the floor, and began spitting and scratching so fiercely that the children all ran behind Aunt, and Jane, the charwoman, screamed and twined her soapy arms around dear uncle's neck.

After turning over several times the parcel lay quite still. Then uncle dumped Jane on the floor and asked what was the matter with us all. "It's only a cat—one of those beautiful white ones, like Murphy's," and he reached down to tear the paper off, but the parcel stirred ominously, so he lifted it up with the tongs. Holding it out at arm's length he told Jane to tear the paper off, but Jane had discreetly retired. He then told Tommy, but Tommy commenced to cry, so he did it himself, tearing a bit off here and there. He got two or three scratches, but finally the little playmate stood revealed—a small white cat, the very image of Murphy's, crouching in a kind of wicker-work chapel, with ribbon threaded on.

Now, Aunt didn't like cats, so she straightway took the matter up. Thus was the little playmate welter the manner of her sex.

"You know I hate cats, but then, of course, I am never considered."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"I mightn't be your wife; you never consider my feelin's. I'm working year in and year out, and—"

"Great Jimmy! What has that got to do with the cat?"

"There, I said so! The cat before me; anything and everything before your wife. If it was not for the children I would seek a situation as housekeeper."

Then we retired into the back garden, as we always do on these occasions, and waited for something to come through the kitchen window. In about five minutes the cat and the chapel duly alighted in the rhubarb. Thus was the little playmate welcomed into the rhubarb of—I mean the bosom of the family; and as her career began so did it go on. There was nothing but trouble all the time she was with us. She was certainly the fiercest, most vicious cat you ever saw. If you would put down a saucer of milk she would snap your hand before she lapped the milk.

We had hitherto been on good terms with the Murphys. In fact, their cat, Muff, stole chops and things off our kitchen table as often as it did off theirs; but the extraordinary similarity between the two cats aggravated by uncle calling our "Tuff," led to a great deal of friction, and when Mr. Murphy knocked his own cat off the fence with a brick, thinking it was ours, intercourse between the two families ceased altogether.

Aunt threatened daily to do away with Tuff; indeed, but that it would have looked like knocking under to the Murphys, Tuff's career would have ended within three days of her arrival. Uncle said the cat was all right if treated properly, but, of course, you couldn't expect women

to understand animals. However an incident occurred about three weeks later which caused him to change his mind.

One afternoon Tuff flew at baby and scratched him very much, all because baby swung her round by the tail. "What's the use of having a cat that won't stand a thing like that where there are children?" Aunt said, as she took baby away.

Armed with a broom she returned prepared to take summary vengeance, but Tuff, entering fully into the spirit of the thing, seized the other end and shook it so fiercely that Aunt in alarm dropped the handle and made for the door. Tuff headed her off however, so, screaming for Jane, she made a rapid retreat to the top of the dining-table. "Jane! Jane! come and turn the cat out; it's gone mad!"

Jane, not catching the latter part of the sentence, ran boldly enough, but when Tuff, with arched back, spat at her, she ran into the hall, slamming the door after her. Whereupon Tuff, by way of signaling her victory, began careering round the table knocking over one or two little knick-knacks en route. Aunt, fearing the cat would spring on her from behind, turned round and round on the table as Tuff went round and round on the carpet, but a rather stout, middle-aged lady cannot keep up this sort of thing indefinitely, so after a few turns Aunt quietly sat down on the table and had hysterics, while Tuff, rather suspicious of this new mode, sat on an ornamental spittoon and glared at her.

Now, some two months previously Uncle had had a telephone installed in the bedroom, and Aunt used this daily in all and every domestic crisis. As soon, therefore, as she recovered some measure of self-control, she said, in a stage whisper, lest the cat should hear: "Jane ring up the master. Tell him the cat's gone mad and he must come home at once, immediately."

Jane had never used the telephone before, but she had seen Aunt use it, so she thought she could manage it all right. Running upstairs she took the receiver off first, turned the handle, and shouted, "The missus says you've come home 'cause the cat's mad and she can't get off the table. Do ye 'ear me? Aye! Aye! Do you 'ear me?"

Of course there was no answer. She shook the receiver fiercely. "D'ye 'ear me, hay?" Then she replaced it and commenced to think what Aunt did. "Oh, of course, I should have said, 'Are ye there?' Again taking the receiver off she bawled a vehement crescendo. "Are ye there? Are ye there?" Then, in reply to a distant voice—

"Is the master in?" she asked. "The master?" repeated the clerk who answered the telephone. "Who do you want, please?"

"I want Mr. Hildebrand Jones to tell him as how the cat's gone mad, and the missus—"

"Good heavens, Mrs. Jones! a sunstroke or—"

"Look here, young man, this is Jane; will you tell Mr. Jones—"

"Yes, yes—one moment, please—one moment," and he dashed into the private office where Uncle was busily engaged with two German gentlemen on important business.

"Sir," said the clerk, excitedly, "Jane wants you."

The German gentlemen smiled, Hildebrand flushed angrily. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But, sir," persisted the clerk, full of excitement, "Mrs. Jones has gone off her dot—or—I mean got sunstroke, or something."

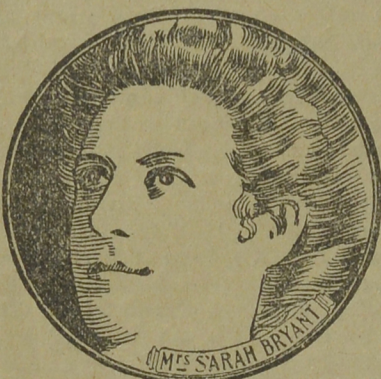
Hildebrand seized the telephone. The German gentlemen politely rose to take their leave.

"What's—what's the matter, Jane?" "Oh, sir! Come home at once. The missus can't get off the table and the cat's running all round."

"Yes, yes, I'll come at once, at once. Send for Dr. Banks," and picking up his hat he dashed past the astonished Germans down the steps, and jumped into the cab that

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was waiting for them. Cabby had his instructions, and he thought he had the Germans, so he drove straight to the station.

"Thunder and lightning!" yelled Uncle, when the astonished cabby opened the door. "What did you come here for? I want Pretoria Villa, quick."

"But the German gentlemen," spluttered the mystified cabby.

"Never mind the German gentlemen. Drive me to Pretoria Villa as quickly as your old clotheshorse will gallop."

"Clothes-horse yourself. Who's going to pay me for dragging them there Germans round town all morning?"

"You mercenary thief," shouts Uncle, waving his purse in the man's face. "Drive me to Pretoria Villas quick. Do you hear me? Quick! I'll pay you anything you want."

Cabby jumped back to his seat and drove on, just as a policeman came up to see what the crowd was about.

Blowing heavily, the ancient cab-horse stopped at the front gate just as Dr. Banks drew up in his brougham.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones," said the doctor, as they alighted together. "Your servant telephoned that you wanted me to call at once. Anything serious?"

"Come in, doctor; come in. Mrs. Jones has had a sunstroke or something of that nature."

The dining-room window was open, and Aunt, still on the table, could see them coming up the path. Anticipating speedy release, she gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure. Uncle shuddered.

"So you've come at last, Hildebrand," she shouted through the open window. "I seem to have been waiting weeks."

"Yes, yes, my dear. You are all right now," said Uncle, soothingly, and the doctor and he gazed at her critically through the window.

"Oh, do come in and kill the horrid thing!" and as Aunt said "thing" she screamed and jumped round on the table because the cat which Hildebrand and the doctor could not see, had moved towards the door. The doctor shook his head gravely, and Hildebrand stumbled up the steps like one in a trance.

(Concluded tomorrow.)

FULL OF SNAKES.

They Crawl Across the Highways in Daylight.

Practically every cellar and damp place in the little village of Allamuchy, near Rutherford Stuyvesant's estate in Washington, N. J., is full of snakes. They crawl across the public streets in broad daylight, and on some days the citizens kill as many as a dozen with clubs. Peter Mowery and a companion despatched five rattlers while going to dinner the other day.

Snakes have abounded in Allamuchy Mountain for centuries, and have remained undisturbed until a few weeks ago, when Rutherford Stuyvesant's workmen started blasting out rock for building a macadamized driveway. The blasting was too much for the snakes, and hordes of them have taken refuge in the village.

Women and children will not venture on the streets, and even the men will not travel unless armed with either a stout cane or a heavy hickory club. Men arm themselves on Sunday before starting to church. Housewives invariably send their husbands into the cellars after supplies, being afraid to venture there themselves.

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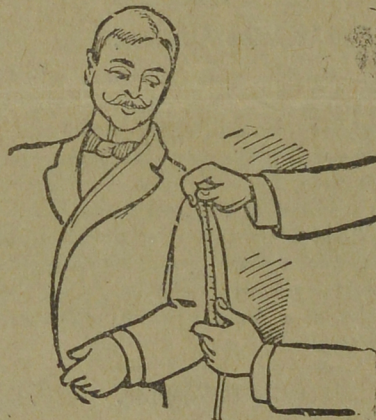
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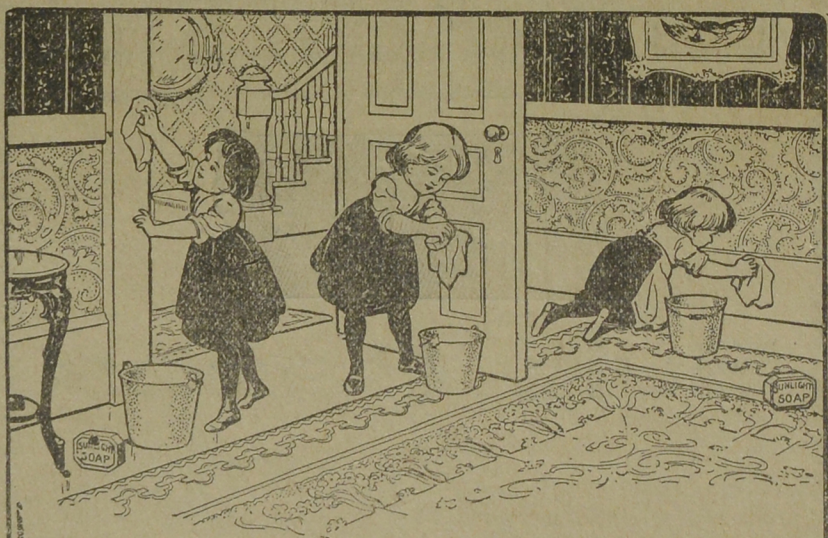
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