

Spinster and Cat

THE birds were making a great chatter in the vines outside. As Toldine dressed she kept an anxious eye on the window. She went downstairs and opened the back door to the fresh green summer morning. Sammie was not on the wash bench, his place. Toldine looked anxiously over the dewy grass with its long early shadows under the apple trees. She thought of all the other cats that on some tragic morning hadn't appeared, and wondered how long they were going to let her keep this one. Then she heard "Miaow!" from inside the house. He had slipped past her skirts into the kitchen.

"Ach, you was here then?" she cried. "Was that why the birds made all that fuss—over you?"

"M'yow!" he answered her and jumped up against her skirt to beg her to hurry.

But before she fed him both must stop for their invariable morning rite of greeting. Toldine crouched and put her hand on his head, and Sammie lifted his head a little to meet the curving touch. The sleek gray floss of the fur was warm under the dry roughness of the palm; and beneath the pressure of the knotted fingers the fur was flattened down in streaks and then, rising softly back, crackled with fine electric life. A look of deep affection came from the mysterious, unchanging beryl-brightness of the eyes. The head ducked, the body arched and curved, Sammie began to purr, purr loudly.

"Was you glad to get in?" Then she accused him, "Where

you been? You been somewhere!" She tried to pull off the dry cobweb thread that had entwined two of his whiskers. "You don't like that! Ach, then you shouldn't get into such places, come in with your whiskers mussed up like a stray cat. You won't say where you been!" Then she crouched lower, stroked his head again and her voice softened to the mysterious murmur of affection between them. The beryl eyes looked brightly back at her. The purr deepened into a sound lower, richer, more continuous, at the very heart of contentment. "Here he is again! Got his paws wet. Ain't you ashamed to come in with wet paws? No, you ain't ashamed of nothing, are you? Ja, he's a nice fellow, ja, he's a fine fellow."

And then, all at once, Sammie was through. He wanted just that much and no more. He began to claw at Toldine's skirt, with piteous little reminders, as she rose staggering to her feet.

"You'll get something. You needn't be afraid. You don't get left out. Not in this house. I guess you didn't catch nothing. Had poor mousing."

When he saw her begin her neat little morning preparations he was ready to be satisfied. She went out to the back step for the bundle of twigs that she had gathered from all over the two lawns the night before and broken into even lengths. She took off the lid of the cook stove, with the incurved ribs of iron showing clean and ashy-gray, put in the two-days-old newspaper, laid a criss-cross pile of twigs over that, and then, at the right moment, just when the twigs began to crackle, she bent to the hod and grabbed out three sticks of rough kindling from the radio crate Carl had chopped up and let her have. If she did this exactly as it should be done she needed no coal for her morning coffee. When the fire was going, she put on the clean but battered blue-granite coffeepot with the coffee left over

from yesterday noon. She got a fresh pail of slopping, shining water. Then she took down the miniature pie tin which she called "the cat's dish," filled it two-thirds full of milk, and set it on the stove after the coffee had boiled and when there was just enough heat left to warm it. "Ja, he has to have his milk warm. He won't take it cold," she said commending him.

Now came her little arrangements in the dining room. She laid a clean newspaper over her place on the Japanese tablecloth, put on her plate, one of the old German silver knives and one of the spoons (it wasn't necessary to dirty a fork in the morning), set on two slices of bread and a little saucer of butter. When there were berries in the garden she had berries. She laid the other half of the newspaper down on the rug beside her chair. Sammie marched over to that, yawning. Then she broke a little bread into Sammie's dish and brought it down to the newspaper, holding it away from him carefully when he jumped up too eagerly. He had been fairly patient before, but now that his milk was within reach he set up a terrible commotion of miaowing.

"Ach, you can't be that hungry! Well, now you got it."

She set down the pie tin, and then she heard with complacent pleasure the dainty, rapid, skillful sound of his lapping. The sound was "company."

She poured out her coffee, spread her bread, cut an oblong piece of cheese into four exact slices with her knife. She spread out her last night's Dubuque paper which Carl's little girl had brought over to her after Carl had finished with it, flattened it out with her hand, and began to read the society items which she had saved until this morning. She took a thick reading glass and moved it slowly from item to item. "Mr. and Mrs. G. Armstrong Davis announce the engagement of their daughter,

Ethelyn . . ." No matter how people kept after her, she could keep from spending her money for glasses. From time to time she laid a strip of cheese on a strip of bread, took a bite, a drink of coffee. Petunias were crowded into a jelly glass on the table, and a faint fragrance came from them. Woman and cat ate in almost noiseless contentment.

But when she was half way through, her sister Henrietta came over from next door with a plate of cookies and a hunk of suet.

"Ach, you're eating a'ready! You're earlier than them over there. Ja, I don't know, Dorothy she ain't one to get up, and Carl now he's getting to be just like her. I brought you these cookies you should eat with your coffee. This suet I brought along for the cat. I see it on the table. I thought he might as well make 'way with it. You let him eat in here?"

"He won't hurt nothing."

Henrietta threw down the suet. It landed with a thump on the paper. Sammie drew back startled and outraged, but under encouragement consented to sniff at it with his pink nose. Then, giving his white-mittened paw one delicate, utterly decisive shake, he turned his back and walked away. It described the suet perfectly.

Henrietta was astonished. "Look at that! I thought he'd gobble that up. I thought all cats liked meat." But her face was red.

Toldine said dryly, "No, suet he won't touch."

"You got him spoiled!"

Toldine made no comment.

When Henrietta left, Sammie came back to his dish and finished his milk with calm gusto. Toldine regarded him with deep sympathy. "Ja, you know how you wanted your

breakfast!" They liked it better to be left together. Contentment flowed around them.

After breakfast Toldine carried out her small array of dishes to the kitchen, dipped warm water out of the reservoir, poured the coffee grounds about the roots of some plants. The cookies she had not touched. They were not needed for breakfast. Sammie followed her. He sat down on the linoleum in a square of sunshine and began his morning laundry work. He gave a few casual licks at his snowy chest, brief attention to his white mittens, and then set to work with concentrated ardor on a patch of seemingly spotless gray fur just behind his left shoulder.

Toldine regarded him with humorous and admiring appreciation. "Ja," she said, "you got to wash up, too?"

When she had finished, every dish used was in its precise place. Sammie was shining. His white chest swelled into a magnificent spotless shirt front. His white mittens were perfect. Spots of scrubbed gray fur were moist and flat. His whiskers rayed out from his fluffy chops majestically. He was satisfied with himself.

Every morning there were these preliminaries through which Toldine and Sammie both must go. Now they were ready for the real business of the day.

Henrietta, looking from the kitchen window of the other house, thought, half contemptuous, half baffled:

"What all does she think she's doing out there?"

Toldine was in the garden. She went about looking at plants with minute attention. She picked the withered pinks and threw them upon the little heap of plant débris she was piling up at the edge of the garden. She tied twine around the spread-

ing phlox. She found out just where the dry earth needed digging with her gritty little trowel about the flower roots. She filled two wooden buckets (candy buckets, the store man had given them to her, they had cost nothing), and then to and from these she made excursions with an old tea pot and put just the amount of water needed upon just the plants that must have it. She began making bouquets for the house. Her array of receptacles stood out on the wash bench: two jelly glasses, a bottle, a saucer, an inkwell. "Such bouquets!" Dorothy said. But, "Toldine, she's got her own way of doing things," Henrietta warned her. The saucer Toldine massed full of rose-colored petunias picked from their stems. She stuck three pansies—blue, white, yellow—into the inkwell. Into one tiny cylindrical bottle that had once contained twenty-five cents' worth of perfume she set a single tuft of sweet alyssum. She had found the bottle "thrown away." This bouquet was her triumph.

Once she made an excursion into the wood shed. She mounted a dry goods box and stood for five minutes motionless, impassive, gazing with concentrated attention through a knothole into the back yard of old John Carpenter's, next door, until she had observed enough for her satisfaction. Then, with a small dry smile, she stepped down from the box, left the shed, and went back to her flowers.

"You coming out, too?" she said.

Yes, Sammie had now made up his mind to join her. Toldine never urged him against his inclinations—even if there had been any use in that!—but she was gratified when he chose to be with her. He followed her about for a while through the garden in the fresh morning sunshine. Certain matters called for his attention, and others for hers. There was a patch of

warm earth where he must roll. It was necessary for him to keep an eye on a gopher entrance. He was on the lookout for birds, too, although this Toldine would never admit to Henrietta. They praised him for bringing mice and then scolded him for catching birds! "How are you to know?" Toldine demanded in consoling indignation. But she guarded the birds from Sammie as she guarded him from his larger enemies.

The street was waking up about them. The folks in the other house were up now. Toldine didn't need to watch for that. She had a contemptuous knowledge of it from their shouting and banging about. The milkman came. As always, he grabbed for Sammie and, as always, Sammie ran. "Whatcha wanta run for? I wouldn't hurtcha!" the milkman shouted vociferously. "Hey, fellow! I was just gonna have a little fun with you. Why, our old cat, I rub up her fur the wrong way and swing her around by her tail, and she likes it!" And as he set down the pint bottle of milk on the wash bench, he demanded with loud facetiousness, "Well, Miss Schönwetter, I hear you and Old John next door have struck up quite a friendship! Now, don't ask me where I heard it. I hear everything. You can't fool your milkman. Say, don't you think it's pretty mean of you to deprive some nice fellow of your good cooking all these years? Better let me find you some nice old bach when I'm out on the route and bring him around. I see all these old baches."

"I guess not," was all that Toldine answered. He went away whistling joyfully. But when he had left and Sammie came back to the garden Toldine patted the cat's head. "Ja, you don't like him. No, I don't neither," she said with great contentment.

Now the annoyances began. Enemies menaced them every day; and even in this secluded garden every day was a struggle. There was a steely alertness under Sammie's silken placidity.

He blinked his eyes in the sunshine, but always a bright slit was showing. Toldine was on the watch for that boy across the street—that tormentor. Then there was that big nondescript brown dog that usually came rampaging through the garden at some time during the morning. Toldine took the part of all animals against all people. But she couldn't really care for that dog, and she saw what Sammie had against him. Anything she fed him went down in a gulp. Just speak to him and he'd be all over you. Before you were through, you had to be cross with him; and Toldine didn't like that. He should have seen!—she thought.

And there were always people. Toldine did no calling except to visit the family graves in the cemetery. But people came to the Schönwetter place. There was a tradition that no plants did so well as those from the Schönwetter garden. Toldine had a knack. She couldn't tell what it was and made no attempt to do so. That, she thought again, they ought to have seen!

Some of these people Sammie accepted and some he didn't. When Addie Epperson came Sammie sat blank and motionless. She gave a little shriek. "I didn't know that cat was here!" She fussed and fidgeted around and asked nervously how Toldine could stand him. "I think cats are so creepy!" There was ineffable contempt in Sammie's immobility. He wouldn't even bother to walk away from Addie Epperson. All her effusions over the "wonderful flowers" did not thaw Toldine's silent, grim disdain. Fat, heavy, perspiring Mrs. Kaster was worse than that. "Shoo! Scat! S-sss! Get out o' here! I can't stand no cats around." She had no perception of Toldine's cold fury. She went around stepping on budding plants and asking for seeds just the same; and when she left she urged Toldine heartily, "Why don't you ever get out o' here and come over?"

You want to be sociable. It'll do you good." There were a few people of whom Sammie approved. There was Mrs. Williams, just out of college, shy and lonely, the wife of the high school Principal. He flung himself instantly before her on the warm ground strewn with dry shreds of grass and sticks and withered petals. "Look at your coat!" Toldine told him in mild accusation. But she sympathized. "Ja, he knows." The lonely young couple, out of place in the little town and aware of criticism, were pleased by this acceptance. Mr. Williams lingered a long time talking with Toldine and trying to ask businesslike questions about gardening, of which he knew nothing. Toldine didn't care what people said. She kept things to herself—to the uneasiness, relief and the total miscomprehension of her family; but all her life she had cherished a deep, calm, satisfactory detestation of the heartily unconscious Mrs. Kaster.

Now she was getting deeper into her work and deeper into the summer day. So was Sammie. Their paths were gradually diverging. Sammie—like Toldine herself—followed a neat, pre-arranged routine, changing somewhat from week to week, and varying slightly to suit the weather. But on a day so fine as this he could allow himself some leeway from his set rule of procedure. Toldine noted every so often with satisfaction that he was still about. He was affectionate this morning. As she crouched among the potato plants he came and rubbed his head and then his whole soft length against her sun-warmed arm. "Ach, so you like me, do you?" He blinked his shining eyes in agreement. Toldine answered, in a mutter, an old accusation. "Lazy! I guess you ain't lazy! You don't have to tell folks about everything you do." He kept regular office hours, just like a man, in his mousing places. Only he was more sensible

than a man. When there was nothing to do he didn't pretend to do it. He was leaving the garden, however, by stages. He had got as far as the shade of the snowball bush now. He took his time.

Little Varselles came running over from the other house. Toldine welcomed all the little children—saved pieces of hard candy for them from her Christmas presents and secreted funny toys in out-of-the-way nooks about the house. Dorothy had dressed Varselles in her Sunday dress which had got dirty. She was barefooted and sucking sugar.

"Hello, Aunt Toldine."

"You up a'ready?"

"Yes, I *been* up." Then she asked just what Toldine was dreading.

"Where's Sammie?"

Toldine said she didn't know. She went on working while Varselles hung plaintively about her. Toldine saw the cat all the time, but she made no sign, and neither did he. Then Varselles discovered him. He was sitting very upright in the mottled shade of the snowball bush, and—oh, how fine he looked! His gray coat glistened with sunlight. A tiny iridescence shone at the tip of each hair. His eyes glittered green, with woven satiny color under the glassy surface, a round of color dented in to the intense slit of black opening and closing at the centre. His white chest swelled out in fluffy majesty from under his whiskered face, his white-mittened paws were set neatly on the ground, and his tail was curled compactly around his person.

Varselles was in ecstasy. "Look, Aunt Toldine! See! I've found him."

It gratified Toldine that Varselles was always after the cat,

but it worried her too, for she knew what might happen. "He looks so pretty. Oh, I want him!" Gurgling wildly with joy, she dived for him. Instantly Sammie retreated. His eyes had a baleful glare. He suddenly spat—knew he shouldn't have done it—was angry and didn't care; stretched out as long as an eel, ran, slid, and was lost in the berry bushes. Varselles plunged after him and then turned back loudly weeping.

"Aunt Toldine! He spit at me!"

"Ja, he was bad," Toldine admitted. "But it was the way you went after him."

"But I love him. I want him. Why won't Sammie let me get him, Aunt Toldine?"

"Ja," Toldine told her, "you love him too hard. That he won't stand for." Varselles was staring at her with tragic eyes. "You want to treat him—ja, as if you liked him, but just the same as he does you, not so much more."

"The dog likes me to like him!"

"Ja, but the dog ain't the cat. You got to know."

But she never would know, Toldine thought. Fond as she was of Varselles, she had already judged the child by her small inner tribunal. Too much fuss. Fussing, stewing, noisiness, rampaging, a to-do—all these things she condemned. That you only did when you couldn't get things done without it. Ja, and that Becker fellow from south of town—he was a bachelor, and he liked cats and wasn't so blustering around as most men. Toldine smiled a discreet little smile; ja, but him, too, Sammie walked away from. If the fellow followed he turned with one brief snarl. He admired cats too much and was too humble. No, you couldn't stand that kind of a fellow all the time. He would be in the way. Toldine and Sammie had their own little hard criterion.

She was glad Henrietta wasn't around, however, or Dorothy. "That cat spit at Varselles. You ought to get rid of it." She could hear them saying that. It would be one more black mark in the long list of their grievances against Sammie. Ja, because he was hers, Toldine supposed—belonged to her and paid no attention to them—they could never rest until they had made her get rid of him. She had given Henrietta what she demanded of the family belongings: the big skillet, the leather chair, an immense platter for which neither of them had any use. She even let "those two" gather the best apples. But she fought to keep Sammie. All morning she kept warily out of sight of that kitchen window.

And it wasn't only the folks in the other house. In spite of the praises Sammie received—"Fine cat!" from men and "Will he let me pick him up?" from women—in spite of that radiant, innocent delight of little children—Toldine knew that there was always something working against him. "Well, Toldine's alone there, she gets lots of company out of her cat," the family said to other people in tolerant shame. But she knew how they resented her having him. Boys in the neighborhood were on the alert to torment him. Mrs. Judge Lawson went around telling people that cats must be destroyed if the birds, "so much more valuable," "man's little helpers," were to be saved—ja, when she wasn't stewing about the minister, or the school Principal, or the town garbage! There were all the women in town—old maids, too, some of them—who talked about "some child" and grudged Sammie his food on principle. It wasn't enough for her and Sammie to live off here by themselves minding their own business. Other people wouldn't allow it.

The worst was that old John Carpenter. Ja, and if she were to tell what she knew about him! The folks in the other house

would try to make her get rid of Sammie; but they would never dare do it themselves. There were things of hers that they wanted. And after all, she lived next door and belonged to the family. John Carpenter said he had had enough of that noise. It was disgraceful. If the owner wouldn't get rid of that cat, some night he'd do it himself. Rousing the neighborhood when Christian folks were all in bed! Why did folks want to own animals, anyway?

And now Sammie was gone. "Ja, he got disgusted!" Toldine looked in his haunts—the nest of grass under the apple trees, a certain spot beneath the berry bushes. He was in none of them. She missed him, but she was relieved. There were other dangers—traps, dogs, poisoned rats—in the barns and pastures where he hunted. But until Varselles had forgotten he was better out of sight. Toldine went back and settled to the business of spraying the potatoes and worked hard until noon.

The afternoon was very hot. Toldine had got all her heavy work done in the morning. She took some sewing out to the shade of the big tree that grew between the two houses. From there she watched the "doings" in the other house. Fussing around ironing in that hot kitchen!

"Ja, you know better, don't you?" she said to Sammie.

She watched the goings-on with a scorn of which her thin, dark, impassive face gave no sign. Why couldn't that girl—she still called her nephew's wife "that girl" in her own mind—have got up a little earlier if she had all this to do? And if the ironing kept her so busy, why must she try and put through all that extra baking at the same time? Over there it was always a turmoil—ja, if not one thing, then another. And if two of them were so many for her to 'tend to, so that she flew at them and

scolded them and couldn't keep them with clean faces, why did she want to go and have another right away? Henrietta living there with them made things all the worse. They must do her way all the time, and she must do their way. Henrietta ought to remember Katrinka, the little tiger the Schönwetters had had years ago. Toldine thought of that with a subtle reminiscent smile. When Katrinka had a batch old enough, then she cuffed them off and went back to her own business. Toldine was condemning the whole workings of the other house, its entire philosophy. Still, if Henrietta hadn't been living there, she would have tried to stay with Toldine. Some folks didn't know how to get on alone. So let her stay there!

She could see Henrietta in the dining room, working like mad, cutting out dresses. If folks would use what they'd got they'd be better off. Who needed so much anyway?

"No, you don't, do you?" she said to Sammie. "And you know how to have a better time than any of them!"

Always more, more, more, and then never satisfied!

She rocked. She and the cat had their own little arrangements for hot weather comfort. Sammie lay over near the pump where water had been spilled earlier in the day and where the ground still kept the faintest suggestion of damp coolness. The shade under the big tree was a vantage ground for observation of the neighborhood. Toldine's face was inscrutable. Dorothy always said, with easy patronage, "Aunt Toldine goes her own way, she never pays any attention to other folks." Henrietta said, "You don't know what all she sees."

Henrietta came over now. Toldine saw that she had her eye on Sammie. But she halted and said resentfully:

"You look cool!"

"I don't stew around in this heat."

Henrietta accused her, "You got only yourself to look after."

Then she remembered her purpose in coming. Her face swelled and grew red. She made gestures with her fists.

"That cat went and spit at Varselles. She come in crying and said that cat spit at her!"

Toldine made no answer. She bit off a thread, but she was wary. The old, half-smothered quarrel between them was flaming up in the heat. That silence of hers always infuriated Henrietta, who couldn't keep still herself. Henrietta never quite knew what was behind it, any more than she knew what that witchy cat was thinking. His refusal of the suet still rankled. She burst out:

"You ought to get rid of that cat. If you don't somebody else is going to do it for you." Her eyes were glaring. Dark hints of old family passions were in her tone. There were two sides, as there were two houses. "That cat'll do a mischief to somebody some day."

Toldine spoke with disdain. "He won't do anybody any mischief." But she trembled inwardly.

"He won't?" Henrietta demanded.

"Not to anybody that lets him alone."

They were glaring now at each other, Henrietta's eyes in a blazing fury, Toldine's just as furious but cold. In that one statement the whole family quarrel was concentrated. Toldine wanted to be let alone and Henrietta to manage. It all went back to that—and farther, as the two old women only dimly realized—away back to the father and mother, to the Schönwetter and the Kleinfelder, to the stormy demands of the father and the wary independence of the mother, to the very birth and conception of Henrietta and Toldine. Other things were entangled in its now: which orchard trees belonged to which

family; misunderstandings that were always threatening to flare up into a "regular quarrel"; the constant threat of Henrietta's coming over to live with Toldine, look after her, and get that cat out of the house. . . .

"Mother! Why don't you come back here and help me?"

The sharp irritation of the voice cut into the tense atmosphere between the two women and left them helplessly glaring across the chasm. Dorothy had come to the door with one of the little dresses in her hand.

"You've left all that work piled up on the table."

Henrietta was helpless before the demands of her son's family, whom she adored. Her new dress for Varselles must be finished before evening. With an angry gesture she turned and went back into the hot dining room where Toldine could see her working furiously, grumbling, doing worse than grumbling, all the rest of the afternoon. The "regular quarrel" was barely averted again.

Through the whole altercation Sammie had never blinked an eye. Now he got up with cold decision and went to the door.

"Yes," Toldine muttered approvingly, "it's better in there now."

The shades were down. It was dimly pleasant in the old-fashioned interior, never changed since the death of Mrs. Schönwetter years ago. Sammie slept on a cool strip of floor. Toldine went over her curious store of mending: rolled-up balls of lace from Carl's baby dresses, bits of silk pinned together, several colors of thread rescued and wound on spools. In here they were both safe.

But by four o'clock it had grown stuffy in the house. It seemed empty and lonely. Toldine called to Sammie, but he wanted to sleep and only flicked his ears. She could hear the

racket in the other house and she almost wished they would ask her in to supper. Two meals alone were enough. She was glad to see old Mrs. Graf coming up the walk—some one to whom she could talk, one of her few accepted cronies. At the moment that Mrs. Graf reached the door Sammie got up, stretched and prepared to leave. But he could go now. They were busy in the other house.

“Wo geht denn die Katze?”

“Ja, I don’t know where all he goes.” Toldine added, “Come in, have a cup coffee.”

“Ja, well . . .”

Mrs. Graf sighed, but it was for this that she had come. Every so often these two must see each other. The intimacy between them had been kept up for over forty years. Now they were sure that they could rely upon each other. Mrs. Graf went to see only Toldine now. On both the impassive faces there was a taciturn glint of pleasure. Mrs. Graf took off her little black hat with the black pansies, and exposed her round, smooth head with the round ear-rings. Toldine lighted more kindling, put on fresh coffee, got out the cookies, and they sat down to the table. It was for Mrs. Graf that Toldine had saved all her observations.

“She, over there, is going to have another.”

“Ja, so?”

“Ja. They haven’t told it. But I noticed.”

“But vot is den de last one? He is only—”

“Ja, fifteen months in October. Ach, I don’t know! That I wouldn’t tell to any one but you. . . . It was true, Mutter Graf, what I thought about John Carpenter. He goes to see that Jensen woman. He goes out after dark and he comes back when it is just light. She does his washing. I looked over and saw his

washing this morning. She'd put bluing in them sheets. That he would never do for himself."

"Ach, so?"

"Ja, that I wouldn't tell to anybody else, either. . . . I see by the paper a man flew in a flying machine over the jungle. Snakes in there thirty-five feet long! Ach, such things everywhere! Why does he want to fly over such places? What good does it do to him when he gets through? Why don't he tend to his own business? Those snakes they'll get along without his flying over to look at them. I stay to home."

"Ja, ja, dot is so," Mrs. Graf said. She sighed. She asked, "How is denn die Katze?" And when Toldine told her about the neighbors, about the other house, she advised:

"He's company. You stick to him."

Henrietta always resented having Mrs. Graf come to see Toldine. She hinted darkly, "When those two get together . . ." But she didn't have time to talk about it to-night. The new dress was finished, and so she and Dorothy and Varselles and the baby must all go to town—Toldine thought—to show themselves off. Henrietta had forgotten now about the quarrel; and Toldine and Sammie had his little time to enjoy the lawn all by themselves.

The evening was placid but hot and breathless still. Sammie sat on the edge of the cement along with the flower pots, viewing the evening landscape with the tranquility of a contented householder. Birds swooped low over the garden; but he was not after birds just now.

Toldine sat out in her little rocker and sewed as long as there was light, savoring the evening fragrance that came from the petunias. Once she muttered, "Ja . . ." She was thinking of

something that had happened a long time ago. She almost forgot how the years had passed. At dark she went all over the two lawns through the fresh dew gathering her little bundle of sticks. Carl, before he left also for town, brought her the paper. She turned on the light and sat reading it, moving and moving her glass but saving the society items for the morning.

"Girl Bandit Robs Bank." All such things! Ten was her hour for going to bed. Before she locked the door she looked for Sammie. "Ja, he's gone. It's past his time now." He might be in his box in the woodshed, but who could tell? She ought to hunt for him, rescue him, shut him up in the house where he couldn't disturb folks. The night was warm and dark and breathing. Why interfere with him? He went his own way.

Toldine lay all night in one identical little spot in the bed. Those folks in the other house—she had made their beds, rumpled and tumbled and everything in a heap. That wasn't necessary! Toldine was a good sleeper. Henrietta said resentfully that she had nothing to worry her. Still she heard queer faint sounds—creaks, rattlings, breathings through the dark. The doors were safely locked. But everything was different in the night.

A growl, and then a long rising baleful yowl cut through the soft darkness, tearing into one jagged shriek at the end. Toldine sat up instantly, stiff with fear.

"They're at it!"

For long steady moments there was no sound again. She lay down cautiously, her eyes wide open, ready to get out of bed. But that couldn't have been Sammie, no matter how those folks in the other house might complain in the morning. Sammie, who was so nice in the house, so dainty and particular she could let him go anywhere, who on winter evenings sat furry and

soft beside the hardcoal burner and sounded all the warm contentment of the room in his steady, blissful purring. Ja, but in the night, who knew what became of him? She thought uneasily, remotely, of dark haymows, dark, wide pastures through which stealthy creatures glided, seeking the lives of the other creatures. Sammie was different, outside, at night. In the winter she tried to catch him, to bring him in and keep him warm, but he kept flitting just ahead of her, just beyond the reach of her hand, wary and elusive as a rabbit or a fox with the starlight glittering wild and cold in his eyes, across the snow.

Again came that ominous yowl, and then the shriek split through the air like a blinding zig-zag streak of vocal lightning.

Toldine got out of bed. She stood trembling on the cold floor. A window in the other house banged up. "That cat!" she heard, and, "Ought to be shot!" They wouldn't dare do anything to him. But some one might—that old John Carpenter. . . . She crept downstairs in her bare feet and opened the door to the black night air. If it was Sammie she would catch him and save him, keep him with her where no one could get him. Trembling and defensive she stood.

The sound was only a low growling now. She couldn't tell where to locate it. She said, "Sammie!" The growling was still. She felt about with her hands—touched something crouched and furry. A snarl!—and then two forms flashed past her. "Sammie!" Was one of them Sammie? She couldn't tell. He had fled as if she were some one he had never seen before. She didn't know Sammie from any other cat in the night. She stood helpless, wringing her hands, hearing the sounds of conflict that all at once dropped into stillness.

It had grown quiet, too, in the other house. Well, maybe they would go to sleep now. If they could go banging and shouting

about all day, why should they make a fuss if there was a little noise at night? Not a sound from John Carpenter's. Anyway, it was no use to go after Sammie. He wouldn't let himself be caught. Ja, and that was all right, too! She didn't want to catch him. The things she liked were the things that wouldn't let themselves be caught.

As Toldine stood there barefooted in the dew, she felt a sudden strange pleasure in the flying sight of those two wild creatures. Even in the remembrance of the caterwauling that tore through her very ears she took a grim delight. "Pretty kitty," that nice little Mrs. Williams said—yes, but only "pretty kitty" when he wanted to be! Let folks complain! If she didn't interfere with their way, why should she interfere with his? After all, Sammie was a cat. He would have to take his chances and live his own way. She didn't blame him. It was good to be alone here in the dew and the darkness with the little breaths of wind that came from nowhere, and the fragrance, and the stirring odors. . . . The locked houses stood about her silent and discreet. Let them all complain, if they must, in the morning. She was going to let the cat run where he pleased.

She crept upstairs to bed again. She heard a sound from next door and halted with her hand upon the bed, motionless, minutely intent. In the other house the baby was crying. But that wasn't it. Old John Carpenter was just sneaking into his back porch, too late to hear the caterwauling, or to make any trouble to-night. Ja, this old John Carpenter—she had watched him! Now in the daytime folks could see he was "looking around" again—nice widows, nice spinsters not too old—but he thought no one knew where he spent the night. Well, let him think! Folks were all so careful, and they all thought no one knew. In the morning they complained about the cats. It

wasn't decent. It was a shame. "You ought to get rid of that cat. That cat ought to be shot." Well, she wouldn't get rid of him. She would keep him as long as she could. Toldine got into bed. She muttered with grim amusement, thinking of old John Carpenter and his complaints—of all of them and their complaints:

"Ja, you needn't say so much, either!"

She turned then in her cool bed and went to sleep.