

# Maggie's Kitten

Lucy Maud Montgomery  
1907

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# Maggie's Kitten

L. M. Montgomery.

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It was noon recess at the Plympton School, and Maggie Taylor had slipped away to the brook to eat her lunch alone. She never had anything but bread and butter—not always the butter. Her schoolmates laughed at her for this, and they sometimes made fun of her patched dresses and shabby hats. So she preferred to go away alone.

She would not have minded this if she could only have had a pet of some kind. She envied those of her schoolmates who had a dog or cat. Maggie was very fond of cats. She thought it would be lovely to have a dear little kitten like Lucy Miller's.

There was a small, marshy fen a little distance down the brook from where Maggie sat and presently she heard a faint cry coming from it. It sounded like a kitten's cry. Maggie sprang to her feet and picked her way down to the reeds.

"Pussy, pussy!" she called, peering into the tangled thicket with excited blue eyes. The pitiful cry came again in answer. Maggie stooped and parted a clump of reeds. Underneath them, crouched in a little islet of turf, was a small, yellow kitten with shining, famished eyes.

Maggie caught the poor little creature indignantly from the damp earth. She knew the habit which certain people in Plympton had of leaving kittens they did not want to keep in the woods to die of hunger. This poor little morsel of yellow fur had evidently been cruelly cast away for this purpose. Its bones were almost sticking through its skin.

Maggie ran with it back to a spot where she had eaten her lunch. She had not been hungry, and there was a slice of bread and butter left. She broke off little bits and fed them to the starving kitten. She felt a sense of delight and satisfaction. This was her pet—her own.

She knew very well that she would never be allowed to keep the kitten at home. Her mother, overworked and impatient, did not like cats. Often as Maggie had pleaded for a kitten, she had been refused.

Down the brook, visible from where she sat, was an old, mouldering shanty. It was a mere box of a place, which had been used years ago by a party of sportsmen who were accustomed to spend a week or two there in the duck season. Of late years it had remained unused, and was fast going to decay. She decided to keep her kitten there. She could bring it food every day when she came to school.

When the school bell rang she gave her new-found and now purring pet a regretful hug, then ran with it to the old shooting-box, put it inside with a crust of bread, pulled to the sagging door, and left it.

She slipped down to see her pet when the school came out. Fluff, as she had decided to call him, seemed quite contented in his new home. It was a good distance from the school and road. Maggie had little fear that any one would discover her pet. She went home as if she trod on air.

She had not far to go. The little house in which she lived was only a quarter of a mile from the school. Maggie sat down on the doorstep to eat her supper of bread and milk. In the stuffy little kitchen behind her the pale, tired mother was ironing. In the yard her father was cutting wood. He was a tall, thin, bent man, with slow motions and a brooding, discontented face.

Maggie ate half her bread and milk. The remainder she poured into a rusty tin pint and hid it under the step. She meant to run up to the old shooting-box with it at dusk.

From where she sat she could see Aunt Jessie Brewster's house. She wondered what it must be like to live in a big, roomy house like that, with great orchards and barns.

Maggie knew very little about her Aunt Jessie beyond the fact that she had never spoken to or noticed her small niece and that nothing made her father so angry as any mention of Aunt Jessie's name. Maggie did not know why, but everybody else in Plympton knew.

Years before, when old Mr. Brewster had died, he left all his property to his daughter, completely ignoring his disliked stepson, James Taylor. But Plympton people said that Jessie Brewster had done well by her half-brother at first. He remained with her as overseer, and got on well until he married. Miss Brewster did not approve of his selection of a wife. She told him so plainly, and a bitter quarrel was the result.

He built a tiny house down by the pond and tried to make a living by all-round jobs. He worked hard and incessantly, but he seemed to be one of those people who are always unlucky. He never got on. Jessie Brewster did not relent. Apparently it mattered nothing to her if her half-brother and his family were to starve on the roadside. He struggled feebly on in his slow, ineffectual way. The little family would more than once have suffered actual want if it had not been for his hard-working wife. By her needle and wash-tub she earned the greater part of their subsistence.

Of all this—the old quarrels and heart-burnings, the pinching and the toiling, Maggie was as yet happily ignorant. Her only real trouble had been the lack of playmates and pets. This lack was now supplied, at least in part. She had Fluff.

On this yellow waif Maggie poured out all the affection of her warm, little heart. Often she denied herself food that Fluff might sup unstintedly. All her spare time she spent at the old box, playing with and chattering to her pet.

It was in August when she found him. When the chill November days came Maggie began to wonder uneasily how Fluff was to be kept through the winter. He could not live in the old shanty, that was certain; he would freeze to death. Neither could she take him home. She knew quite well that no pleadings would win this privilege.

One morning a plan darted into her head. It was a gloomy, bitter morning, and there had been hard frost in the night. Fluff mewed with the cold, and crept into her lap for warmth, shaking his chilled paws comically. Maggie patted him softly, and brooded over her plan.

She knew her Aunt Jessie was very fond of cats. Once she had heard her father say bitterly that Jessie Brewster thought more of her cats than she did of her own flesh and blood.

“If I go up to Aunt Jessie,” said Maggie, tremulously, to Fluff, “and tell her what a dear, good kitten you are, I’m ’most sure she would keep you for the winter. I’d never see you—and, O Fluffy, I don’t know what I’ll do without you. But it’s the only way I can think of. I’ll take you up to-night.”

That evening at dusk Maggie set off. Her heart beat painfully at the thought of facing Aunt Jessie’s keen eyes and grim face. But Fluff’s precious life was at stake.

Fluff ran out to meet her; he was cold and hungry. Maggie put down the milk she had brought for him, and cried softly, as he lapped it up.

“I’ll be so lonesome without you, Fluffy. And p’raps in the spring you won’t know me and won’t come back to me. And, O Fluffy, dear, I’m so afraid of Aunt Jessie! Pr’aps she won’t take you in at all, and then I don’t know what we’ll do, you poor, dear, little thing!”

Fluff purred hopefully. Maggie tucked him away under her shawl, and set her little blue lips firmly. She must lose no time. There was a short cut up through the woods to the brown house. It seemed very short to Maggie. And it was a very trembling, small figure that crept up to the front door with Fluff cuddled invisibly under her shawl. The warmth from his little body and his deep-toned purr alone gave her courage. But when she heard steps in the hall, after she had knocked, she would have run if her feet would have carried her. The door opened, and Miss Brewster stood on the threshold, looking down with questioning surprise at the small, shrinking figure on her doorstep.

Miss Brewster was a tall, handsome woman, with keen, dark eyes. She looked like an obstinate woman, but not like an unkind one.

“What little girl are you?” she said, quite gently for her if Maggie had but known it. But to the frightened child her voice sounded cold and forbidding.

“Maggie Taylor, ma’am,” she whispered, tremulously.

A change came over Miss Brewster’s face at once.

“What do you want?” she demanded coldly.

Maggie felt the change. She was in dire distress, lest all hope for Fluff were gone. Every word of the little pleading she had thought out so carefully vanished from her mind. Yet she must say something before Aunt Jessie would step back and shut the door in the face. In desperation she held forth Fluff, warm and frightened and squirming, to Miss Brewster.

“Please, ma’am,” stammered poor Maggie, “I thought maybe you’d take Fluffy; I’m afraid he’ll freeze; he’s an awful good cat. O, I’m ’most sure he won’t be any trouble. Please, please, take him—he’s such a good cat, and he can’t live in the old shanty all winter, and they won’t let me take him home.”

The tears came then, and rolled down her cheeks. Fluff had ceased to squirm, evidently realizing that his fate hung in the balance. His head and tail hung down forlornly.

Miss Brewster had listened in blank amazement. Something like amusement now dawned on her face; but she still spoke suspiciously.

“Who told you to come here?”

“Nobody, ma’am,” sobbed Maggie. “I heard you were good to cats, and I couldn’t bear to see Fluffy freeze to death; so I just thought I’d come and ask you to take him. I didn’t mean any harm. And I know he will be good. He doesn’t eat much—truly, he doesn’t eat much.”

“Come in,” said Miss Brewster, briefly.

Maggie followed her timidly into the sitting-room. Miss Brewster placed a chair before the fire and motioned Maggie to sit down.

“Now, Maggie, if that’s your name, tell me all about this. Don’t be afraid, child. I’m not going to eat either you or your cat.”

Maggie drew a long breath, and told her aunt all unhesitatingly—how she had found Fluff starving in the woods and had kept him in the old shanty, and how he had grown fat and cunning and so good; and how fond she was of him, and how she was so afraid he would freeze or get lost when winter came; and how the only way she could think of to save him was to bring him to her Aunt Jessie, who was fond of cats, and might be good to him just for the winter.

“I suppose,” said Miss Brewster, severely, when the little plaintive voice ceased, “that you would be wanting to run up here every day to see him.”

“O, no,” said Maggie quickly, “I know I could not do that; but I thought perhaps I might come to the edge of the woods just once or twice in the whole winter, and you might let Fluffy come down to see me.”

“Well, I’ll keep him for you,” said Miss Brewster, looking meditatively into the glow of the fire.

Maggie stood up, feeling both glad and sorry. She kissed Fluff’s head and whispered a tearful good-bye into his yellow ear before she let him slip to the rug.

“Wait a minute, child,” said Miss Brewster abruptly.

She went out of the room, and soon returned with a tray in one hand and a hat and coat in the other. On the tray was a plate of cake and a glass of some warm drink.

“Eat that, Maggie,” she said kindly, “and warm yourself well. You aren’t half-clothed. I should think you’d be in more danger of freezing to death this

winter than that fat kitten. I'll be good to him, never fear. When you have finished your lunch I'll go a little way down the road with you. It's too dark for you to be traveling around alone."

When Maggie had eaten her cake Miss Brewster put on her hat and coat, and they walked down the road in silence. When Maggie discovered that her aunt evidently intended to go all the way home with her she began for the first time to wonder what her father and mother would think of it all.

At first, when Miss Brewster and the frightened Maggie walked into the tiny kitchen, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor were too much taken by surprise to think or say anything. Before either of them found tongue, Miss Brewster spoke.

"I never thought to cross your threshold, James, but I don't mind acknowledging that I've been a fool. And I want you to forgive me. I've wanted it for years, but I'd never have come to tell you so if it hadn't been for that mite of a child of yours. She has got genuine spunk in her. I'm pleased with her and I want to cultivate her acquaintance."

Maggie had listened to this speech with bewildered eyes, seeing which, her mother told her to go to bed. Maggie obeyed at once, so she did not hear any more of the conversation, which must have been a long one, for it was quite late when Miss Brewster took her leave.

But Maggie did know that very soon after she and her father and mother all went to live in the big house with Aunt Jessie, where she had nice clothes and good food and all the love her heart craved.

Besides, she had Fluff, who lived to a green old age, and waxed fat and valiant; and though Maggie spoiled him atrociously, she was nothing to Aunt Jessie, who was guilty of such unheard-of indulgences as would have ruined any ordinary cat.

But then, both Maggie and Aunt Jessie knew that Fluff was not an ordinary cat.

Cavendish, P. E. Island, Canada.



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Maggie's Kitten* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]