

The Bartletts' Thanksgiving Day

The Tale of a Father and Daughter, Both of Whom Were Stubborn and Proud--The Thanksgiving Dinner Which Vanished by Magic--The Reconciliation After Twelve Years of Estrangement--By L. M. Montgomery

JOSEPH BARTLETT drove home from the store at the corners in such a brown study that he sat in the buggy in the muddy yard for fully ten minutes before he got out. His wife watched him from the window and wondered wistfully what he was thinking of; then she sighed. She knew what she was thinking of and had been thinking of all day. The morrow was Thanksgiving and every other mother and father in Abbotford would have at least some of their family to help eat the Thanksgiving dinner.

"Everybody except father and me," she reflected sadly. "There's only Maggie and she won't come because pa won't ask her. And he won't—he's so desperate proud and stubborn. And me's she—they're as like each other as two peas. Dear me, it's twelve years since Maggie went away—twelve Thanksgivings without her. It doesn't seem worth while to cook and fuss just for pa and me."

Her husband now came in, with his arms full of bundles. "Here's your turkey, mother," he said. "I picked the best Sam Kennedy had. And here's all your other things. Tea ready? I'm hungry enough to eat a graven image." So said Joseph Bartlett, but he failed to make his words good, for when he sat down to the table he ate little and slowly; between minifaults he fell into reveries, staring at his plate, with his knife and fork poised upright at either side.

"Did you see many at the store?" asked Mrs. Bartlett. "No. There wasn't anybody there except Mrs. Allen and— and them two children of Maggie's. They looked desperate miserable—never saw such sickly-looking young ones. Robert's to the backbone, that's what they are."

"Did—did—you speak to them, pa?" asked Mrs. Bartlett, timidly. "Hi! What's that? Speak to 'em. It's likely, ain't it? I thought you knew me better'n that. When I say a thing I stand by it."

Mrs. Bartlett sighed. "I do wonder if Maggie'll have a good dinner tomorrow," she said wistfully. "I heard that John hadn't sent her any money for a long time."

"How do you hear things like that?" exclaimed Joseph Bartlett angrily. "I've told you often enough that I'm not going to have you gossiping to people about her."

"It was the minister's wife told me, father."

"The minister's wife can mind her own business then! As for Maggie and her young ones, I don't care whether they've got a good Thanksgiving dinner or no dinner at all. Maggie made her bed and must lie on it. She might have known what to expect when she married John Roberts. I darsay it's quite likely he hasn't sent her anything lately. He'll never make enough to bring himself home. It was just like his foolishness starting off in the Klondike—thought he was going to pick up gold by the handfule, I s'pose—instead of staying home and looking after his wife and family. Now, don't you mention Maggie's name to me again, mother!"

Mrs. Bartlett did not remind her husband that he had been the first to mention it. She only sighed again and proceeded to clear away the dishes; then she stepped softly about the pantry, preparing the Thanksgiving dinner for the morrow's cooking, while Joseph Bartlett smoked moodily in the chimney corner.

Twelve years before this their only daughter, Maggie, had married off Roberts against her father's will. He had never forgiven her for it. He had forbidden her his house and had never spoken to her from that day. Maggie had all her father's pride and obstinacy.

She never sought a reconciliation. Her mother spoke to her when they met, but Joseph Bartlett had forbidden his wife to visit Maggie, and although it nearly broke her heart she obeyed.

Maggie had had a hard time since her marriage. Her husband was poor and never seemed to "set along"; two years before this he had gone to Klondike and Maggie had lived alone with her two children ever since. Klondike remittances were few and scanty, but, if she found it hard to make both ends meet, she never complained.

At nine o'clock the Bartletts went to bed. On the pantry dresser the turkey reposed to state, stuffed with Joseph's favorite sage and onion dressing. A big, firm, white cabbage lay in a pan beside it, flanked with a couple of turnips. Above it, on the shelf, were two rich mince pies, a dish of cranberry jelly and a plate of red apples.

Joseph Bartlett stood at the pantry door and looked at the good things approvingly, while his wife covered the turkey with a towel. "Pretty appetizing, mother, pretty appetizing," he said. "I can't take no pleasure in them," his wife said sadly, "when I don't know whether Maggie'll have a good dinner tomorrow or not."

"I wish you'd stop harping about Maggie! Didn't I tell you not to speak about her again? She'll have as good a dinner as she deserves, probably. I'm going to bed."

Thanksgiving morning dawned fair and bright. Joseph Bartlett arose at seven.

"I declare I'm tireder than when I went to bed," he said. "I don't feel a bit rested."

"Now, just look at the mud on my boots, will you, mother! How on airth did I get 'em in such a mess? I was as careful as I could be yesterday. You'll have to slick 'em up a bit 'fore church time."

When Mrs. Bartlett went downstairs the fire was on and her husband had gone out to the barn. She went into the pantry for the oatmeal and became aware of a curious sense of bareness. Where was the turkey? The mince pies? The vegetables? Nowhere to be seen! She opened the lower door of the cupboard and peered in. No, they were not there. It was curious. Pa must have moved them. But where had he put them?

"Pa," she said to her husband who entered at that moment with an armful of wood, "what have you done with the turkey and things?"

"Done with 'em? Why, I ain't touched 'em," Joseph Bartlett responded in bewilderment. Mrs. Bartlett sat down on the nearest chair. "Well, they're gone," she cried.

"Gone? Nonsense, mother, you're dreaming! I ain't dreaming," said his wife positively, "go into the pantry and see for yourself. That turkey has gone, bits and bawls, and likewise everything else that I put there for dinner!"

Joseph Bartlett stepped into the pantry and saw for himself. He gave a whistle of amazement. "A clean sweep, sars enough. We've been burgled, mother. Some of them scamps from Abbott's creek have slipped in here last night and snopped our Thanksgiving-dinner. That's what comes of having the woodshed door unfastened. I'll make a button this very day. Well, ain't that too bad now?"

Further search revealed that the midnight prowler had helped himself to a basket to carry off his booty, but revealed nothing else. "We're out of our Thanksgiving dinner, that's one sure thing, mother," said Joseph Bartlett at last, as they sat down to breakfast. "It's a wonder I didn't hear nothing last night. You sleep so sound it ain't to be wondered at you didn't; but I really [To Page 27.]



"Thank You for the Turkey, Father"

Arthur E. Jansson

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L. M. Montgomery

Illustrated by Arthur E. Jameson

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“Thank You for the Turkey, Father”

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“Since the dinner is gone I’m going to church,” said his wife. “I’d planned to stay home and cook it, but there is nothing to cook now. Well, I hope whoever got it will enjoy it. I don’t think I’d be very thankful to be eating stolen vittles.”

They drove to church, two miles away, arriving early. Simon Green was on the porch when they entered. The two men shook hands.

“How are all your folks, Simon?” inquired Joseph, while Mrs Bartlett turned away to speak to another woman.

“Very well, thank you,” said Simon. “I’m glad to see you and the wife are all right. I was afraid Mrs Bartlett was sick when I heard that you passed down the Corners road at one o’clock last night.”

“Me! Corners road?” said Joseph Bartlett blankly. “I wasn’t traveling the Corners road or any other road at one o’clock last night. I was in my bed.”

“Well, now! Mirandy must have been mistaken. She got up at one and went down to the pantry to get some stuff for the toothache, and when she came back she said she was afraid Mrs Bartlett was sick, for she’d just seen you go by down the Corners road. She must have taken someone else for you.”

“Yes, she must,” said Joseph Bartlett; but he said it uncomfortably, and he whisked his wife into church before Simon could speak to her. All through the sermon he set in a brown study. Had he—could he have? But no, it was impossible! He hadn’t done such a thing for forty years. Mirandy Green must have been mistaken.

When the service was over and Mr and Mrs Bartlett were standing on the green

in front of the church, Maggie Roberts, with her little son, came up to speak to her mother. Then, with a scarlet spot outflowering on each of her thin cheeks, she offered her hand to her father.

He look it with an answering flush of surprise. He had always said that the first advance toward a reconciliation must come from Maggie. He would never make it, that was certain. But now that she had made it he was willing to respond. But—but—what was Maggie saying?

“Thank you for the turkey, father. It was real good and kind of you. Oh, I saw you. I was downstairs at half past one last night getting something for Jacky’s cough and I saw you come into the yard in the moonlight and leave the basket on the porch steps. And—and—won’t you and mother come home with me and help us eat the dinner? Mollie stayed home to cook it. I want you to come.”

“I reckon we might as well,” said Joseph Bartlett gruffly. “Here, you and your ma go and drive yourselves down in the buggy. I’ll walk with Jacky.”

“I was so touched last night when I saw pa steal in with that basket,” said Maggie, as she and her mother drove down the road. “And when I found what was in it I just said to myself, ‘Now, pa has come half the way at last and I’ll go the other half. I’ll just ask him tomorrow to come and have dinner with me.’”

Mrs Bartlett preserved the silence of utter bewilderment. There was something here that completely mystified her. But until she could get alone with her husband and find out the truth she decided that silence was the part of a wise woman.

That Thanksgiving dinner was an unqualified success. Mollie, Maggie’s eleven-years-old daughter, had cooked it to perfection. She was a smart little thing, if she were rather delicate looking. In her brisk yet noiseless way of stepping about her work Joseph Bartlett found that she resembled her grandmother; for the sake of this he forgave her her surname at last.

“This is a good Thanksgiving,” said Maggie joyfully. “I had a letter from John last night, saying that he was coming home in the spring. And now you and father are here to dinner. This turkey is a prime one, isn’t it, pa?”

“It ought to be,” said Joseph Bartlett, “I picked it myself. I’ve learned to tell a good turkey in sixty years if I haven’t learned much else. Sam Kennedy can’t cheat me as he does some people.”

When Mr and Mrs Bartlett found themselves on the homeward road the latter turned to her husband, with the air of a good, sorely-tried woman whose patience has come to an end at last.

“I’d like to know what all this means, pa,” she said.

Joseph Bartlett laughed shame-facedly.

“You know pretty near as much as I do now, mother. But I’ll tell you what I suppose has happened. Simon Green told me that his wife saw me go down the road last night—and Maggie says she saw me sneak into her yard and leave a basket on the steps; and our Thanksgiving dinner certainly was on her table today. When I was a boy I used to walk in my sleep. My folks had a terrible time with me. But I grew out of it before I married you and I never told you of it because I was ashamed of it. I hain’t walked in my sleep for over forty years. But that’s what I must have done last night. I was thinking a lot about Maggie after I went to bed—for all I shut you up so sharp when you talked of her. I was worrying over her having no Thanksgiving dinner. So I s’pose I just got up in my sleep and took her ours. But don’t you ever let on to Maggie how it was, ma. I ain’t sorry it happened the way it did. But she mustn’t ever know.”

“Anyway,” he added to himself, as he put the horse away, “that was how my boots come to be so muddy. I declare that was puzzling me as much as the disappearance of the dinner. It’s a comfort to have it solved. But I certainly hope I’m not going to take to sleep walking in my old age.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Bartletts' Thanksgiving Day* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]