

Leslie Madeline

Minnie's Pet Cat



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CHAPTER I.

THE LOVING PUSS

Fidelle, Minnie's second pet, was a beautiful tortoise-shell cat.

She was an elegant creature. Her fur was of moderate length, of pure black, white, and reddish orange. Her eyes were large, bright, and affectionate in expression. Her form was delicate, and her motions active. In character, she was the most attached, graceful little puss I ever knew.

The moment Fidelle heard Minnie's voice, she walked to the door, and was ready to welcome her, rubbing her glossy sides against the child's feet, and making little soft notes of pleasure.

Sometimes Minnie had the headache, or was tired, and lay upon the sofa; when she did so, Fidelle loved to jump up and walk softly over the little figure until she came to her mistress's face, when she quietly lay down near by, or sometimes licked her hand lovingly. She never did this to Mrs. Lee, or any other member of the family.

Fidelle was an active puss, and often went bird-catching, or mousing during the night; but generally, when Minnie opened the door of her chamber in the morning, there was Fidelle ready to receive her.

During the warm weather, it was Minnie's habit to take an early stroll with her father through the grounds, or to accompany him to the nursery, garden, and orchards, when he went to give orders to the men who worked for him.

On such occasions, Fidelle was always on hand, sometimes running along by her side, and then skipping to the top of a tree, or gamboling on before her.

When Minnie was very small, she often used to hug the kitten so tightly as, no doubt, to cause the little creature pain; and then, in running around the room after it, the young miss used to catch it by the tail; but Fidelle never resisted, nor, if hurt, revenged herself. She seemed to understand that Minnie loved her, and that it was her duty to submit quietly to all the caprices of her young mistress.

One day, when the child was about four years old, a rude boy came, with his mother, to visit her. Seeing Fidelle frolicking about the room, highly delighted with a ball of thread, into which she had got her dainty little feet entangled, Wallace caught the cat by the tail, and held her by it in the air.

Minnie screamed with all her might, as she flew to the rescue of her pretty pet.

"Go right away, you ugly boy!" she cried out. "Poor Fidelle! darling kitty! I won't let you be hurt so."

Puss remembered the insult and abuse. Whenever she saw Wallace coming toward her, she hid herself behind the sofa; and once, when he came suddenly upon her, she gave him a long, deep scratch on his hand.

Minnie never after liked this boy; and once, when Mrs. Lee was intending to invite his mother to repeat her visit, the child begged earnestly that Wallace might be left at home, saying, "He is so cruel to Fidelle, I can't bear to have him here."

I told you, in the other book about Minnie's pet parrot, that she used often to ride with her mother in the afternoon. There was nothing she liked better than to take Fidelle and Tiney out with her. Sometimes Mrs. Lee allowed this; but when she was intending to make calls she feared the pets would be troublesome.

Fidelle was greatly disappointed when she could not go. She would ask as well as she knew how, and I dare say some of her mews were promises to be good; but Mrs. Lee knew best when it was proper, and was obliged to be firm.

Kitty then used to stand at the door, watching her mistress, as she jumped into the carriage, returning her "Good by, dear Fidelle," by little soft purrs.

When the carriage was out of sight, Puss seated herself at the window to watch for their return. Whether it was one hour or two, she almost always sat patiently, sometimes indulging herself with a nap, but never getting so sound asleep that the first rumble of the wheels did not awaken her.

As soon as the carriage began to roll up the avenue, Kitty was all excitement, looking from the window, and moving her tail back and forth, then with a spring bounding to another window, where she could see them alight. If the door happened to be shut, she cried piteously until let out, when she ran quickly and jumped on Minnie's shoulder, purring as loud as she could, to express her joy.

A lady was once visiting at the house, who said she liked dogs, especially such splendid great ones as Leo; but she couldn't see any thing agreeable or intelligent in a cat.

"There are some wonderful accounts of the sagacity of cats," remarked Mr. Lee, smiling at Minnie's quick flush of indignation. "If my little daughter will bring me that book we were looking at yesterday, I think I can soon convince you that they are certainly not wanting in intelligence."

"They are capable of strong attachments," said Mrs. Lee, as the child rose and left the room, followed closely by Fidelle. "I think none of Minnie's pets show more real affection for her, nor more gratitude for her kindness."

"Is this the book, father?" inquired the little girl, putting a handsomely bound volume into his hand, and looking very bright and rosy.

"Yes, child, this is it."

"I thought it was, by the picture of the cats."

The lady looked surprised; and presently asked, earnestly, "Can't you read, Minnie?"

Vivid blushes spread all over the child's face, as she softly answered, "No, ma'am."

"We have our own views on that subject," said the gentleman, smiling, as he drew his only daughter tenderly to his side. "She will learn fast enough when we put her to her books. At present, our only desire is to see her enjoy herself, and lay in a good stock of health."

"Why not do both, Mr. Lee?" asked the lady. "My little Marie Louise is only four, and she can read almost as well as I can. She is learning to write, too, and really pens a letter very prettily."

"I dare say," added the gentleman, gravely, after giving his wife a comical look; "your daughters are all geniuses, which, I am happy to say, Minnie is not. She is only an obedient, affectionate, practical little girl," giving her a tender caress.

"But come, we were discussing, not the child's merits, but the cat's."

"True; and now for your account of them."

Mr. Lee turned over the leaves of the book, thanking God that his dear, conscientious, simple-hearted Minnie was not artful, disobedient, and affected, like the child of their visitor, even though the latter might be ever so learned a miss; and presently came to the chapter on domestic cats, from which we shall quote a few incidents.

CHAPTER II. THE CAT AND CHICKEN

“In the summer of 1792, a gentleman who lived near Portsmouth, in England, had a favorite cat, with a family of kittens. As he did not wish so large an increase to his family, he ordered all the kittens to be drowned.

“The same day, the cat was missing, and, on farther search, one chicken also.

“Diligent search was made in every place that could be thought of, but in vain. Day after day passed, and at last the gentleman concluded some accident had deprived them of life.

“Nearly a week after the kittens had been drowned, a servant had occasion to go to an unfrequented part of the cellar, where, to his great astonishment, he saw the cat lying in one corner, with the chicken hugged close to her body, and one paw laid over it as if to protect it from injury.

“Puss and her adopted chicken were brought into a closet in the kitchen, where they continued some time, the cat treating her little charge in every respect as a kitten. Whenever the chicken left the cat to eat the soft dough provided for it, she appeared very uneasy, but on its return, received it with the affection of a mother, purred, and presented the appearance of being perfectly happy.

“The gentleman, being curious to know whether the affection of puss was returned by her protege, carried it to the hen, the cat following with loud cries of distress. But on being released, the chicken at once returned to her attached friend, who received her with enthusiastic delight.

“Some time after, the chicken was, by some accident, killed, and, though another one was tendered her, the cat pined, and was inconsolable for the loss of her favorite.”

“O, father,” cried Minnie, her face glowing with excitement, “wasn’t that strange? I mean to try Fidelle, and see whether she likes chickens.”

“More likely she’ll make a meal of them,” said the lady, laughing. “At any rate, your story only proves my opinion of cats, as thieving, mischievous creatures, to be true. Even she stole a chicken from the hen, the rightful owner of it, and alienated its affections from its own mother.”

“But all her kittens had been taken away from her, and pussies must have something to love, as well as people,” exclaimed Minnie, while her quivering lip and flushed cheeks showed how much she was in earnest in what she said.

“My dear,” remarked her father, “the lady is only joking, to carry out her side of the argument, which, when I have read farther, I am sure she will see is a weak one.”

“Here is a case just in point.”

“A lady had a tame bird which she was in the habit of letting out of its cage every day. When at liberty, it would fly to the top of the mirror, or on the picture frames, and then to the floor, to pick up crumbs.

“One morning, as it was busily picking crumbs of bread from the carpet, her cat, who had always before showed great kindness for the bird, suddenly seized it, and jumped with it in her mouth upon the table.

“The lady screamed, being greatly alarmed for the safety of her favorite; but on turning about, instantly discovered the cause. The door had been left open, and a strange cat had just come into the room.

“After turning it out, her own cat came down from her place of safety, and dropped the bird on the carpet without doing it the smallest injury; for it commenced again picking crumbs, as if nothing alarming had occurred.”

“What do you say to that, Mrs. Belcher?” inquired Mr. Lee, earnestly.

“I must confess,” she answered, “that was the most sensible puss I ever heard of. She certainly did a good deed, and ought to have been commended for it.”

“She showed presence of mind in danger,” added the gentleman, “an affection for the bird with which she daily associated, and gratitude for the kindness of her mistress, who had, no doubt, treated her tenderly.”

“Now here is another case.”

“In the parish of Stonington, Surrey, England, a man was passing through a hay field in the month of September, 1793, when he was surprised to see a cat and a hare playing together in the hay. He stood more than ten minutes gratified at the unusual sight, when the hare, alarmed at seeing a stranger approach, ran into a thicket of fern, and was followed by the cat.”

“I’m sure, father, Fidelle and Tiney are good friends,” cried Minnie, exultingly. “They often play together.”

“Tiney is getting too fat and lazy to play much with any body,” remarked Mrs. Lee, smiling.

“Will you please read more, father?”

Mr. Lee was looking over the book, and laughed heartily.

“Do please read it aloud, father,” again urged Minnie.

The gentleman commenced.

“In 1806, Mr. Peter King, of Islington, had two large cats, which used to sit at table with him. They were waited upon by servants, and partook of the same dainties in which he indulged himself.

“Mr. King was a great admirer of fine clothes, richly laced, and of making a display. One day, as he sat eating, with his cats for company, he thought, perhaps, they might like liveries, as well as he did. He accordingly sent for the tailor, when he had them measured for their suits. The clothes were speedily sent home, and the cats wore them for the rest of their lives.”

“That doesn’t prove much for you,” remarked Mrs. Belcher, archly.

“It only shows there are some foolish cats as well as some foolish men. But whatever we may think on the subject, the king of Guinea, once thought a cat so valuable that he gladly gave a man his weight in gold if he would procure him one, and with it an ointment to kill flies.

“A Portuguese, named Alphonse, was the happy individual; and he so well improved the money he made by the trade, that after fifteen years of traffic, he returned to Portugal, and became the third man in rank and wealth in the kingdom. All that for the despised cat.”

“O, I don’t despise them in their place!” urged the lady. “They are good to keep the cellar and out buildings free from those troublesome animals, rats and mice. But I never could make a pet of a cat.”

“Nor eat one, I suppose,” he added, roguishly.

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