



Tom Shows His Kindness

TOM HAD A NEW AND GREAT TROUBLE. BECKY THATCHER WAS ILL. He was afraid that she might die.

The joy of life was gone. He played no games. He was not interested in anything.

His aunt did not know what was wrong. She tried to find some help for him.

She was always reading about health. She read about how to go to bed, and how to get up from bed, what to eat, and what to drink, and what clothes to wear for good health, and how to think for good health. She believed all that she read. When she read something new, she wanted to try it.

She took Tom outside in the early morning and poured cold water over him. Then she covered him with a wet cloth and put him to bed, with heavy covers over him. When he was so hot that water formed on his skin, she was happy. She thought that this would help him.

But Tom became sadder and sadder.

She tried pouring hot water over him instead of cold. She tried less food. Soon Tom stopped fighting against what she did. And then

she was sure that he was very ill indeed.

Next, she heard of something new named Painkiller. She put some in her own mouth, to taste it. It was like a mouthful of fire.

She gave some to Tom and watched him. This Painkiller had a strong result. The boy was wildly interested. He acted as if she had built a fire under him. She knew that she had found the right thing.

And Tom knew that it was time for him to act. He thought of several plans. He decided to say that he liked Painkiller. He asked for it so often that his aunt gave the whole container to him. Now he could have Painkiller at any time. She did not know that everyday he put some in a hole in the floor.

One day as he was doing this, the cat came in and seemed to want some of the Painkiller.

“You do not want it, Peter.”

But Peter continued to seem to ask for it.

“Are you sure?”

Peter was sure.

“You have asked for it, and I will give it to you. I am a kind boy. But if you do not like it, remember that you asked.”

He opened the cat’s mouth and put in some Painkiller.

Peter jumped high into the air and cried a wild cry. Then he started going around and around the room, running against chairs and tables. Next he stood on his back feet and danced, with cries of joy. Then he went faster around the room again. Aunt Polly arrived. He rolled over and over, gave one last great cry, and jumped through the open window.

Tom was on the floor, weak from laughing.

“Tom, what is wrong with the cat?”

“Cats always do that to show their joy.”

But Aunt Polly saw the Painkiller. She knew what had happened. She caught Tom’s ear and pulled him up, then hit him with her hand. “Why did you do that to the cat?”

“Because I am sorry that he has no aunt to care for him.”

“Has no aunt! Why do you say that?”

“Because if he had an aunt she would give him a drink that burned his mouth and not think of his feelings. She would say, if the drink was good for a human, it would be good for a cat.”

Aunt Polly thought. If it hurt a cat, it might hurt a boy, also. She put her hand on Tom’s head. “I was trying to help you.”

“And I was trying to help Peter. And it helped him. I never saw him move so fast.” He was smiling at her now.

“Oh, Tom! I will not give you any more Painkiller. Go to school. And try to be a good boy.”

Tom was early at school. He was often early now. Today, as he often did, he waited at the gate. He did not play. He was sick, he said. And he seemed sick.

Jeff Thatcher came down the road, and Tom’s face was brighter. But quickly it was dark again. Jeff was alone.

When Tom saw a girl’s dress far away, he watched and watched. But the girl was never the right one. He entered the school and sat down to suffer.

Then one more dress came through the gate. Tom’s heart jumped. The next moment he was outside again, shouting, laughing, running after other boys, jumping over the fence, standing on his head. He was doing all this to make Becky Thatcher watch him.

She never looked at him. Was it possible that she did not see him? He came running and shouting. He threw a boy’s hat over the schoolhouse. He ran through a group of boys, and then he fell at her feet.

She turned away with her nose raised high in the air. “Some people always want other people to look at them!”

His face became red. He stood straight and walked quietly away.