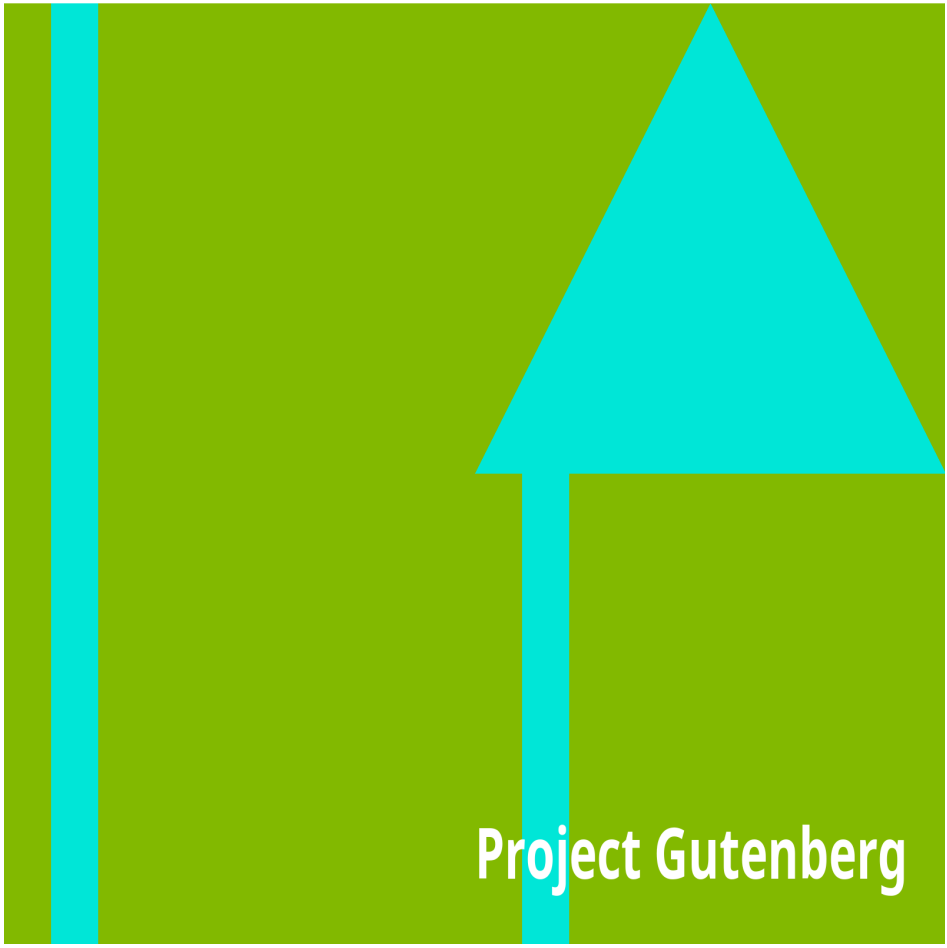
Tattine

Ruth Ogden



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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TATTINE ***

TATTINE

by Ruth Ogden

[Mrs. Charles W. Ide]

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CHAPTER I. TROUBLE NO. 1

Whether you happen to be four or five, or six, or seven, or even older than that, no doubt you know by this time that a great many things need to be learned in this world, everything, in fact, and never more things than at seven. At least, so thought little Tattine, and what troubled her the most was that some of the things seemed quite wrong, and yet no one was able to right them. All her little life Tattine's Mother had been setting things straight for her, drying every tear, and unravelling every tangle, so that Tattine was pretty downhearted the day she discovered that there were some things that were quite beyond even her Mother's power to alter. It was on a lovely June morning that Tattine made the first of her unwelcome discoveries. She was feeling particularly happy too, until she made it. She was sitting up in an apple-tree, sketching, and doing it very well. She had taken only a few drawing-lessons but had taken to them immensely, and now with one limb of the tree for a seat and another one for an easel, she was working away at a pretty chime tower, that stood on a neighbor's land.

Down on the grass beneath her Betsy and Doctor were lying. Betsy was a dear, homely red-and-white Laverack setter, and Doctor, black-and-white and better looking, was her son. Doctor's beautiful grandmother Tadjie was lying, alas! under the grass instead of on it, not very far away. It was a sad day for the dog world when Tadjie left it, for although she was very old, she was very beautiful up to the last with a glossy silky coat, a superbly feathered tail, and with brown eyes so soft and entreating, they fairly made you love her, whether you were fond of dogs or no.

Well, Tattine was sketching away and was quite absorbed in it, but Doctor, who was little more than a puppy, thought it very dull. He lay with his head between his paws, and, without moving a muscle, rolled

his eyes round and round, now gazing up at Tattine, and then at his mother, trying to be happy though quiet. Finally he stretched himself, got on his feet, cocked up his ears, and came and stood in front of Betsy, and although not a sound was heard, he said, so that Betsy perfectly understood him, “I can’t stand this any longer. If you have any love for me do please come for a run.”

Then Betsy took one long stretch and with motherly self-sacrifice reluctantly got up, prepared to humor this lively boy of hers. Suddenly Doctor craned his head high in the air, and gave a little sniff, and then Betsy craned her head and sniffed. Then they stole as stealthily away as though stepping upon eggs, and Tattine never knew that they had gone. It was no stealthy treading very long, however. No sooner had they crossed the roadway than they made sure of the scent they thought they had discovered, and made one wild rush down through the sumach and sweet-fern to the ravine. In a few moments it was one wild rush up again right to the foot of Tattine’s apple-tree, and Tattine looked down to see Doctor—oh, could she believe her two blue eyes!—with a dear little rabbit clinched firmly between his teeth, and his mother (think of it, his mother!) actually standing proudly by and wildly waving her tail from side to side, in the most delighted manner possible. As for Tattine, she simply gave one horrified little scream and was down from the tree in a flash, while the scream fortunately brought Maggie hurrying from the house, and as Maggie was Doctor’s confidential friend (owing to certain choice little morsels, dispensed from the butler’s pantry window with great regularity three times a day), he at once, at her command, relaxed his hold on the little jack-rabbit. The poor little thing was still breathing, breathing indeed with all his might and main, so that his heart thumped against his little brown sides with all the regularity of a Rider Engine. Tattine’s first thought was for the rabbit, and she held it close to her, stroking it with one little brown trembling hand and saying, “There! there! Hush, you little dear; you’re safe now, don’t be frightened! Tattine wouldn’t hurt you for the world.” Her next thought was for Doctor, and she turned on him with a torrent of abuse, that ought to have made the hair of that young M.D. stand on end. “Oh, you cruel, CRUEL dog!

whatever made you do such a thing as this? I never dreamt it of you, never." At this Betsy's tail dropped between her legs, for she was a coward at heart, but Doctor held his ground, his tail standing on end, as his hair should have done, and his eyes all the while fairly devouring the little rabbit. "And the worst of it," continued Tattine, "is that no matter how sorry you may feel" (Betsy was the only one who showed any signs of sorrow, and she was more scared than sorry), "no matter how sorry you may feel, that will not mend things. You do not know where this baby lived, and who are its father and mother, and like as not it is too young to live at all away from them and will die," and Tattine raised one plump little hand and gave Doctor a slap that at least made him "turn tail," and slink rather doggedly away to his own particular hole under the laundry steps. And now it was time to find Mamma—high time, for it seemed to Tattine she would choke with all the feelings, sorrowful and angry, welling up within her. Mamma was not far afield—that is, she was very near, at her desk in the cosy little alcove of the upstairs hall-way, and Tattine soon found her.

"Now, Mamma," she asked excitedly, "did you know that Betsy or Doctor would do such a thing as this?"

The trembling little rabbit in Tattine's hands showed what was meant by THIS.

Mrs. Gerald paused a moment, then she said reluctantly, "Yes, Tattine, I did."

"Have they done it before, Mamma?"

"I am sorry to say they have."

"Have you seen them bring struggling rabbits dangling in their mouths right up to the house here, Mamma?"

Mrs. Gerald merely shook her head. She felt so sorry to have to own to such a sight.

"Why did I never know it, Mamma?"

“You have never chanced to be on the spot, dear, when it happened, and I was in no hurry to tell you anything that I knew would make you sad.”

“I think it would have been better to tell me. It’s awful to find such a thing out suddenly about dogs you’ve trusted, and to think how good and gentle they look when they come and put their heads in your lap to be petted, just as though they would not hurt a fly; but then, of course, anyone who has eyes knows that they do lure flies, snapping at them all day long, and just for the fun of it too, not because they need them for food, as birds do. Mamma, I don’t believe there’s anything meaner than a Laverack setter. Still, Tadjie would never have done such a thing, I know.” Mrs. Gerald was silent, and Tattine, expecting her to confirm what she had said, grew a little suspicious. “Would Tadjie, Mamma?” with a directness that would not admit of indirectness.

“Yes, Tattine; Tadjie would. She was trained to hunt before ever she was given to Papa, and so were her ancestors before her. That is why Doctor and Betsy, who have never been trained to hunt, go wild over the rabbits. They have inherited the taste.”

“Trained to hunt,” said Tattine thoughtfully. “Do you mean that men just went to work to teach them to be so cruel?”

“Well, I suppose in a way setters are natural hunters, Tattine, but then their training has doubtless a great deal to do with it, but I want to tell you something that I think will give you just a grain of comfort. I read the other day that Sir John Franklin, the great Arctic explorer, who almost lost his life in being attacked by some huge animal—it must have been a bear, I think—says that the animal when he first gets you in his teeth gives you such a shake that it paralyzes your nerves—this is, it benumbs all your feelings, so, that, strange as it may seem, you really do not suffer. So let us hope that it was that way with this little rabbit.”

“But there’s a little blood here on one side, Mamma.”

“That doesn’t always prove suffering, either, Tattine. Soldiers are sometimes wounded without ever knowing it until they see a little sign of blood somewhere.”

Tattine listened attentively to all this, and was in a measure comforted. It seemed that Mamma was still able to better things, even though not able to set everything perfectly right. “Now,” Tattine said,—with a little sigh of relief, “I think I will try and see what I can do for Bunny. Perhaps he would first like a drink,” so downstairs she went, and putting some milk in a shallow tea-cup, she dipped Bunny’s nose in it, and it seemed to her as though he did take a little of it. Then she trudged up to the garret for a box, and, putting a layer of cotton-batting in the bottom, laid Bunny in one corner. Then she went to the garden and pulled a leaf or two of the youngest, greenest lettuce, and put it right within reach of Bunny’s nose, and a little saucer of water beside it. Then she went down to tell the gardener’s little boy all about the sorrowful thing that had happened.

The next morning Bunny was still breathing, but the lettuce was unnibbled; he had not moved an inch, and he was trembling like a leaf. “Mamma,” she called upstairs, “I think I’ll put BUN in the sun” (she was trying not to be too down-hearted); “he seems to be a little chilly.” Then she sat herself down in the sun to watch him. Soon Bunny ceased to tremble. “Patrick,” she called to the old man who was using the lawn mower, “is this little rabbit dead?”

“Yes, miss, shure,” taking the little thing gently in his hand.

“Very well,” she answered quietly. Tattine used those two little words very often; they meant that she accepted the situation, if you happen to know what that means. “Now I think I will not trouble Mamma about it,” she said to herself thoughtfully, so she went to the closet under the stairs, got a little empty box she knew was there, and, taking it out of doors, she put the little rabbit in it, and then trudged down to the tool-house for her spade and rake.

“Bunny is dead, Joey,” she called to the gardener’s little boy as she came back. “Come help me bury him,” and so Joey trotted behind her to the spot already selected. “We must make this hole good and deep,” she explained (Joey stood looking on in wide-eyed wonder), “for if Doctor and Betsy would kill a little live rabbit, there is no telling but they would

dig up a dead one." So the hole was made at least four inches deep, Bunny was buried in it, and the earth, with Joey's assistance, stamped down hard, but afterwards it was loosened somewhat to plant a little wild-wood plant atop of the tiny grave. "Now, Joey, you wait here till I go bring something for a tombstone," Tattine directed, and in a second she was back again with the cover of a box in one hand and a red crayon in the other. Sitting flat upon the grass, she printed on the cover in rather irregular letters:—

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BORN—I don't know when.    DIED June 17th.
     LAVERACK SETTERS NOT ALLOWED.
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This she put securely into place, while Joey raked up a little about the spot, and they left the little rabbit grave looking very neat and tidy. The next morning Tattine ran out to see how the little wild-wood plant was growing, and then she stood with her arms akimbo in blank astonishment. The little grave had disappeared. She kicked aside the loose earth, and saw that box and Bunny were both gone, and, not content with that, they had partially chewed up the tombstone, which lay upon its face a little distance away. They, of course, meant Betsy and Doctor. "There was no use in my putting: 'Laverack setters not allowed,'" she said to herself sorrowfully, and she ran off to tell her Mother of this latest tragedy.

"Yes, I know, Tattine dear," said Mrs. Gerald, in the first pause; "there is neither pity nor mercy in the heart of a setter when he is on the scent of a rabbit, alive or dead—but, Tattine, don't forget they have their good sides, Doctor and Betsy; just think how fond they are of you and me. Why, the very sight of us always makes them beat a tattoo with their tails."

"Yes, I know, Mamma, but I can't feel somehow that tattoos with their tails make up for killing rabbits with their teeth."

CHAPTER II. A MAPLE-WAX MORNING

A team came rushing in between the gate-posts of the stone wall, and it looked like a run-away. They were riderless and driverless, and if there had been any harness, there was not a vestige of it to be seen; still, they kept neck and neck, which means in horsey language side by side, and on they came in the maddest fashion. Tattine stood on the front porch and watched them in high glee, and not a bit afraid was she, though they were coming straight in her direction. When they reached her they considerately came to a sudden stop, else there is no doubt whatever but she would have been tumbled over.

"Well, you are a team," laughed Tattine, and they laughed back, "Yes, we know we are," and sat down on the step on either side of her. Of course, that would have been a remarkable thing for some teams to do, but not for this one, for, as you can guess, they were just two little people, Mabel and Rudolph, but they were a perfect team all the same; everybody said so, and what everybody meant was this—that whatever Rudolph "was up to," Mabel was "up to" also, and vice versa. They traveled together finely, right "up on the bit" all the time. It would have been easier for those who had charge of them if one or the other had held back now and then, and set a slower pace, but as that was not their nature and could not be helped, everybody tried to make the best of them, and everybody loved them. Tattine did not see how she could ever have lived without them, for they were almost as much a brother and sister to her as to each other. This morning hey had come over by invitation for what they called a Maple-wax morning, and that was exactly what it was, and if you have never had one of your own, wait till you read about this one of Tattine's, and then give your dear Mamma no peace until you have had one, either in your kitchen in town, or in the woods out of town, which is better. One thing is necessary to its

complete enjoyment, however: you must have a “sweet tooth,” but as most little people cut that particular tooth very early, probably you are among the fortunate number.

“Well, I don’t see what we are sitting here for,” said Mabel at last.

“Neither do I,” said Tattine; “I was only giving you a chance to get a little breath. You did not seem to have much left.”

“No more we had,” laughed Rudolph, who was still taking little swallows and drawing an occasional long breath, as people do when they have been exercising very vigorously. “But if everything is ready.” he added, “let us start.”

“Well, everything is ready,” said Tattine quite complacently, as she led the way to the back piazza, where “everything” was lying in a row. There was the maple sugar itself, two pounds of it on a plate, two large kitchen spoons, a china cup, two sheets of brown wrapping-paper, two or three newspapers, a box of matches, a pail of clear spring water, a hammer, an ice-pick, and last, and most important of all, a granite-ware kettle.

“Now if you’ll carry these,” explained Tattine, “I’ll run and tell Philip to bring the ice,” so Rudolph and Mabel “loaded up” and marched down to the camp, and Tattine disappeared in the direction of the ice-house. The camp was not far away, and consisted of a cosy little “A” tent, a hammock hung between two young chestnuts, and a fire-place made of a circle of stones on the ground, with a crane hanging above it. The crane was quite an elaborate contrivance, for which Joseph the gardener was to be thanked.

The long branch on which the pot hung was pivoted, if you know what that is, on an upright post fastened firmly in the ground, and in such a way that you could “higher it,” as Tattine said, or lower it, or swing it clear of the fire on either side. At the end of the branch away from the fire hung a chain, with a few blocks tied into it, for a weight, so that you lifted the weight with one hand when you wished to change the position of the branch with the other, and then let it rest on the ground again at the spot where you wanted the pole to stay. You see, the great advantage of this was that, when you wished to see how things were going on inside

of the kettle, or to stop its boiling instantly—you could just swing it away from the fire in no time, and not run the risk of burning face or hands, or petticoats, if you belong to the petticoat family.`

"Now," panted Tattine, for it was her turn to be breathless with running, "I'll break the sugar if you two will make the fire, but Rudolph's to light it and he's the only one who is to lean over it and put the wood on when it's needed. Mamma says there is to be a very strict rule about that, because skirts and fluffy hair like mine and Mabel's are very dangerous about a fire," and then Tattine proceeded to roll the maple sugar in the brown paper so as to have two or three thicknesses about it, and then, laying it upon a flat stone, began to pound and break it with the hammer.

"Yes," said Rudolph, on his knees on the ground, and making balls of newspaper for the foundation of the fire; "it's lucky for Mabel and me that fire is one thing about which we can be trusted."

"I shouldn't wonder if it's the only thing," laughed Tattine, whereupon Mabel toppled her over on the grass by way of punishment.

"No, but honest!" continued Rudolph, "I have just been trained and trained about fire. I know it's an awfully dangerous thing. It's just foolhardy to run any sort of risk with it, and it's wise when you make a fire in the open air like this, to stand on the same side as the wind comes from, even if you haven't any skirts or fluffy hair to catch."

"Here's some more wood, grandfather," said Mabel solemnly, dumping an armful down at his side; "I should think you were eighty to hear you talk," and then Mabel had her punishment by being chased down the path and plumped down rather hard in the veriest tangle of brambles and briars. It chanced, however, that her corduroy skirt furnished all the protection needed from the sharp little thorns, so that, like "Brer Rabbit," she called out exultingly, "'Born and bred in a briar-patch, Brer Rudolph, born and bred in a briar-patch,'" and could have sat there quite comfortably, no one`knows how long, but that she heard the maple sugar go tumbling into the kettle. And then she heard Tattine say, "A cup of water to two pounds, isn't it?" Then she heard the water go

splash on top of the maple sugar. Now she could stand it no longer, and, clearing the briars at one bound, was almost back at the camp with another.

By this time the fire was blazing away finely, and the sugar, with the help of an occasional stirring from the long-handled spoon in Rudolph's hand, soon dissolved. Dissolving sometimes seems to be almost a day's journey from boiling, and the children were rather impatient for that stage to be reached. At last, however, Rudolph announced excitedly, "It boils, it boils! and now I mustn't leave it for a minute. More wood, Mabel! don't be so slow, and, Tattine, hurry Philip up with that ice," but Philip was seen at that moment bringing a large piece of ice in a wheelbarrow, so Tattine was saved that journey, and devoted the time instead to spreading out one of the pieces of wrapping-paper, to keep the ice from the ground, because of the dead leaves and "things" that were likely to cling to it.

"Now break off a good-sized piece, Tattine," Rudolph directed, "and put it on a piece of paper near the fire," but Tattine knew that was the next thing to do, so what was the use of Rudolph's telling her? It happens quite frequently that people who are giving directions give too many by far.

"Now, Mabel," continued the drum-major, "will you please bring some more wood, and will you please put your mind on it and keep bringing it? These little twigs that make the best fire burn out in a twinkling, please notice," but Mabel did not hurry so very much for the next armful; since she could see for herself there was no great need for haste. Rudolph was simply getting excited, but then the making of maple-wax is such a very responsible undertaking, he could not be blamed for that. You need to stop its boiling at precisely the right moment, else it suddenly reaches the point where, when you cool it, it grows brittle like "taffy," and then good-bye to maple-wax for that kettleful. So Rudolph, every half-minute, kept dripping little streams of the boiling sugar from the spoon upon the piece of ice, and Tattine and Mabel kept testing it with their fingers and tongues, until both at last exclaimed in one and

the same breath, “It’s done! it’s done! Lift it off the fire quickly; it’s just right.” Just right means when the sugar hardens in a few seconds, or in a little more than half a minute, into a delicious consistency like—well, just like maple-wax, for there is nothing else in the world that I know of with which to compare it. Then the children seated themselves around the great cake of ice, and Rudolph, with the kettle on the ground beside him, tipped against a log of wood at just the right angle, continued to be master of ceremonies, and dipped spoonful after spoonful of the syrup, and let it trickle over the ice in queer fantastic shapes or in little, thin round discs like griddle-cakes. The children ate and ate, and fortunately it seems for some reason, to be the most harmless sweet that can be indulged in by little people.

“Well, I’ve had enough,” remarked Rudolph at the expiration of say a quarter of an hour, “but isn’t it wonderful that anything so delicious can just trickle out of a tree?” his unmannerly little tongue the while making the circuit of his lips in search of any lingering traces of sweetness.

“Trickle out of a tree!” exclaimed astonished Tattine.

“Why, yes, don’t you know that’s the way they make maple sugar? In the spring, about April, when the sap begins to run up into the maple-trees, and often while the snow is still on the ground, they what they call tap the tree; they drive a sort of little spout right into the tree and soon the sap begins to ooze out and drop into buckets that are placed to catch it. Afterwards they boil it down in huge kettles made for the purpose. They call it sugaring off, and it must be great fun.”

“Not half so much fun, I should think, as sugaring down,” laughed Mabel, with her right hand placed significantly where stomachs are supposed to be.

“And now I am going to run up to the house,” explained Tattine, getting stiffly up from a rather cramped position, “for three or four plates, and Rudolph, you break off some pieces of ice the right size for them, and we will make a little plateful from what is left for each one up at the house, else I should say we were three little greedies. And Mabel, while I am gone you commence to clear up.”

“Well, you are rather cool, Tattine,” said Mabel, but she obediently set to work to gather things together.

As you and I cannot be a bit of help in that direction, and have many of a clearing-up of our own to do, I propose that we lose not a minute in running away from that little camp, particularly as we have not had so much as a taste of the delicious wax they’ve been making.

CHAPTER III. A SET OF SETTERS

It was a great bird-year at Oakdene. Never had there been so many. The same dear old Phoebe-birds were back, building under the eaves of both the front and back piazzas. The robins, as usual, were everywhere. The Maryland yellow-throats were nesting in great numbers in the young growth of woods on the hill of the ravine, and ringing out their hammer-like note in the merriest manner; a note that no one understood until Dr. Van Dyke told us, in his beautiful little poem, that it is "witchery, witchery, witchery," and now we wonder that we could have been so stupid as not to have discovered it was exactly that, long ago. But the glory of the summer were the orioles and the scarlet tanagers; the orioles with their marvellous notes, and the tanagers in their scarlet golfing coats glinting here and there in the sunshine. Nests everywhere, and Tattine on one long voyage of discovery, until she knew where at least twenty little bird families were going to crack-shell their way into life. But there was one little family of whose whereabouts she knew nothing, nor anyone else for that matter, until "Hark, what was that?"—Mabel and Rudolph and Tattine were running across the end of the porch, and it was Rudolph who brought them to a standstill.

"It's puppies under the piazza, that's what it is," declared Tattine; "where ever did they come from, and how ever do you suppose they got there?"

"I think it's a good deal more important to know how you'll ever get them out," answered Rudolph, who was of a practical turn of mind.

"I'll tell you what," said Tattine thoughtfully, "shouldn't wonder if they belong to Betsy. I've seen her crowding herself through one of the air-holes under the piazza several times lately," whereupon the children hurried to peer through the air hole. Nothing was to be seen, however, for the piazza floor was not more than a foot and a half from the ground,

and it was filled with all sorts of weeds that flourished without sunshine. Still the little puppy cries were persistently wafted out from some remote corner, and, pulling off his jacket, Rudolph started to crawl in and investigate. It did not seem possible that he could make his way, for the place was not high enough for him even to crawl on his hands and knees, and he had rather to worm himself along on his elbows in quite indescribable fashion. Still, Tattine and Mabel were more than ready to have him try, and waited patiently, bending over with their hands upon their knees, and gazing in through the weed-grown hole in breathless, excited fashion.

"I believe I'll have to give it up," Rudolph called back; "the cries seem as far off as ever and I'm all but scratched to pieces." "Oh, don't! don't!" cried Tattine and Mabel, in one breath, and Mabel added, "We MUST know what they are and where they are. I shall go in myself if you come out."

"Well, you wouldn't go more than three feet then, I can tell you," and Rudolph was right about that. It was only because he hated to give the thing up, even more than the girls hated to have him, that made him persevere. "Well, here they are at last!" he cried exultingly, a few moments later; "one, two three, four of them, perfect little beauties too. And they must belong to Betsy; they're just like her."

"Bring one out, bring one out!" called both the children, and fairly dancing with delight.

"Bring out your grandmother! It's all I can manage to bring myself out, without holding on to a puppy."

"Very well," Tattine called back, with her usual instant acceptance of the inevitable, "but I know what," and then she was off in a flash, with Mabel following closely to find out what WHAT might be.

It was Joseph the gardener whom Tattine wanted, and she found him where she thought she would, killing potato-bugs in the kitchen-garden.

"What do you think, Joseph? Betsy has a beautiful set of little setters under the piazza. Come quick, please! and see how we can get them out."

Joseph followed obediently. “Guess we’ll have to let them stay there till they crawl out,” said Joseph; “Betsy’ll take as good care of them there as anywhere,” whereupon the children looked the picture of misery and despair. At this moment Rudolph emerged from the hole a mass of grass and dirt stains, and both Mabel and Tattine thought he had been pretty plucky, though quite too much preoccupied to tell him so, but Rudolph happily felt himself repaid for hardships endured, in the delight of his discovery.

“It will be a month before they’ll have sense enough to crawl out,” he remarked to Joseph, “and they’re wedged in between some old planks in very uncomfortable fashion. They look like fine little fellows too. I think we ought to manage in some way to get them out.”

“And it would be bad if any of them died there,” said Joseph, rubbing his head and still ruminating on the subject; “very bad. Well, we’ll have to see what we` can do about it.”

“Will you see right away?” urged Tattine eagerly.

“May as well, I reckon,” and Joseph walked off in the direction of the tool-house, but to Tattine’s regret evidently did not appreciate any need for extreme haste.

In a little while he was back again with Patrick, and both of them were carrying spades. “There’s only one way to do it,” he explained, as they set to work; “you see, the pillars of this porch rest on a stone foundation, so as to support the rooms above, and we’ll have to dig out three or four of the large stones and then dig a sort of trench to wherever the puppies are,” and Rudolph was able of course to indicate the exact spot to which the trench must lead. It was the work of an hour to excavate the foundation-stones, and an additional half-hour to dig the trench. Meantime Betsy appeared upon the scene, and, evidently appreciating what was going on, stood about and superintended matters with quite an important air. Rudolph clambered in and dug the last few feet of the trench, because it did not need to be as large for him as for Joseph and Patrick, and then one at a time he brought the dear little puppies out, and Mabel and Tattine took turns in appropriating them, while Betsy

eyed them proudly but withal a little anxiously. And they were dear; as prettily marked as their beautiful grandmother Tadjie, and too cunning for words.

"You have made us a great deal of trouble, Betsy," said Tattine, "but they are such beauties we forgive you," whereat Betsy looked up so affectionately that Tattine added, "and perhaps some day I'll forgive you about that rabbit, since Mamma says it's natural for you to hunt them." But Betsy, indifferent creature, did not care a fig about all that; her only care was to watch her little puppies stowed away one by one on fresh sweet-smelling straw, in the same kennel where Doctor and his brothers and sisters had enjoyed their puppy-hood, and then to snuggle up in a round ball close beside them. They were Betsy's puppies for a certainty. There had been no doubt of that from the first glimpse Rudolph gained of them in their dark little hole under the porch. But the next morning came and then what do you suppose happened? A very weak little puppy cry came from under the porch. Another puppy, that was what it meant, and Joseph was very much out of patience, for the trench had been filled up and the foundation-stones carefully replaced.

"Rudolph ought to have made sure how many there were," he said rather growlily.

"But, Joseph, this puppy cry comes from another place way over here, it seems to me," and Tattine ran to a spot on the porch several yards from that under which the others had been found. "I believe it must have been a cleverer little puppy than the others, and crawled away by itself to see what the world was like, and that is why Rudolph missed finding it."

Joseph put his hand to his ear and, listening carefully, concluded that Tattine was right. "Now I'll tell you what I am going to do," he said; "I can make just a little hole, large enough for a puppy to get through, without taking out a foundation-stone, and I'm going to make it here, near where the cry seems to come from. Then I am going to tie Betsy to this pillar of the porch, and I believe she'll have sense enough to try and coax the little fellow out, and if the is such an enterprising little chap as you think he'll have sense enough to come out."

It seemed a good plan. Betsy was brought, and Tattine sat down to listen and watch. Betsy, hearing the little cries, began at once to coax, giving little sharp barks at regular intervals, and trying to make the hole larger with her paws.

Tattine's ears, which were dear little shells of ears to look at, and very sharp little ears to hear with, thought the cries sounded a little nearer, and now a little nearer; then she was sure of it, and Betsy and she, both growing more excited every minute, kept pushing each other away from the hole the better to look into it, until at last two little beads of eyes glared out at them, and then it was an easy thing for Tattine to reach in and draw out the prettiest puppy of all.

"Why didn't you tell us there were five, Betsy, and save us all this extra trouble?" and Tattine hurried away to deposit number five in the kennel; but Betsy looked up with the most reproachful look imaginable as though to say, "How much talking could you do if you had to do it all with your eyes and a tail?"

CHAPTER IV. MORE TROUBLES

Patrick Kirk was raking the gravel on the road into pretty criss-cross patterns, and Tattine was pretending to help him with her own garden rake. Patrick was one of Tattine's best friends and she loved to work with him and to talk to him. Patrick was a fine old Irishman, there was no doubt whatever about that, faithful and conscientious to the last degree. Every morning he would drive over in his old buggy from his little farm in the Raritan Valley, in abundant time to begin work on the minute of seven, and not until the minute of six would he lay aside spade or hoe and turn his steps towards his old horse tied under the tree, behind the barn. But the most attractive thing about Patrick was his genial kindly smile, a smile that said as plainly as words, that he had found life very comfortable and pleasant, and that he was still more than content with it notwithstanding that his back was bowed with work month in and month out, and the years were hurrying him fast on into old age.

And so Tattine was fond of Patrick, for what (child though she was) she knew him to be, and they spent many a delightful hour in each other's company.

"Patrick," said Tattine, on this particular morning, when they were raking away side by side, "does Mrs. Kirk ever have a day at home?" and she glanced at Patrick a little mischievously, doubting if he would know just what she meant.

"Shure she has all her days at home, Miss Tattine, save on a holiday, when we go for a day's drive to some of our neighbors', but I doubt if I'm catching just what you're maning."

"Oh! I mean does she have a day sometimes when she gets ready for company and expects to have people come and see her, the way ladies do in town?"

“Well, no, miss; she don’t do that, for, tin to one, nobody’d come if she did. We belongs to the workin’ classes, Molly and I, and we has no time for the doing of the loikes of city people.”

“I’m sorry she hasn’t a day,” said Tattine, “because—because—”

“If ye’re maning that you’d like to give us a call, miss,” said Patrick, beginning to take in the situation, “shure she could have a day at home as aisy as the foinest lady, and proud indeed she’d be to have it with your little self for the guest of honor.”

“I would like to bring Rudolph and Mabel, Patrick.”

“And what should hinder, miss?”

“And I’d like to have it an all-day-at-home, say from eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon, and not make just a little call, Patrick.”

“Of course, miss, a regular long day, with your donkey put into a stall in the barn, and yourselves and the donkey biding for the best dinner we can give ye.”

“And I’d like to have you there, Patrick, because we might not feel AT HOME just with Mrs. Kirk.”

“Well, I don’t know, miss; do you suppose your Father could spare me?” and Patrick thought a little regretfully of the dollar and a half he would insist upon foregoing if he took a day off, but at the same moment he berated himself soundly for having such an ungenerous thought. “Indade, miss, if you’ll manage for me to have the day I’ll gladly stay to home to make ye welcome.”

“Then it’s settled, Patrick, and we’ll make it the very first day Papa can spare you.” They had raked down, while they had been having this conversation, to close proximity to two pretty rows of apple-trees that had been left on the front lawn, a reminder of the farm that “used to be,” and the sight of the trees brought a troubled look into Tattine’s face. “Patrick,” she said ruefully, “do you know that some of the nests in these trees have been robbed of their eggs? Four or five of them are empty now. Have you an idea who could do such a thing?”

“Yes, I have an idea,” and Patrick rested his hands upon the handle of his rake and looked significantly towards the barn; “somebody who lives in the barn, I’m thinkin’.”

“Why, Joseph would not do it, nor Philip the groom, and little Joey is too small to climb these trees.”

“It’s something smaller than Joey, miss. Whisht now, and see if she’s not up to mischief this minute.”

Tattine’s little black-and-white kitten, whose home was in the barn, had been frisking about her feet during all the raking, but as the raking came under the apple-trees, other thoughts came into her little black-and-white head, and there she was stealthily clawing her way up the nearest tree. Tattine stood aghast, but Patrick’s “whisht” kept her still for a moment, while the cat made its way along one of the branches. Tattine knowing well the particular nest she was seeking, made one bound for her with her rake, and with such a scream as certainly to scare little Black-and-white out of at least one of the nine lives to which she is supposed to be entitled. But pussy was too swift and swiftly scrambled to the very topmost twig that would hold her weight, while Tattine danced about in helpless rage on the grass beneath the tree. “Tattine is having a fit,” thought little Black-and-white, scared half to death and quite ready to have a little fit of her own, to judge from her wild eyes and bristling tail.

Tattine’s futile rage was followed in a few minutes by, “Oh, Patrick, I never dreamt it was Kittie. Has SHE been TRAINED to do it, do you think?”

“Oh. no, miss; it just comes natural to cats and kittens to prey upon birds and birds’ nests.”

“Patrick,” said Tattine solemnly, “there is not going to be any four-legged thing left for me to love. I am done with Betsy and Doctor, and now I’m done with Black-and-white. I wonder if Mamma can make it seem any better,” and then she turned her steps to the house in search of comfort, but she had gone only half-way when the coachman, who was waiting at the door with the little grey mare and the phaeton, motioned

to her to come quietly. Tattine saw at a glance what had happened, and sped swiftly back to Patrick. “Keep Black-and-white up the tree,” she said, in a breathless whisper; “don’t let her go near the nest, and don’t let her come down for the world. The little Phoebe-birds have lit.”

“All right, miss,” not at all understanding the situation, but more than willing to obey orders. Tattine was in such haste to get back to the house that she hardly heard his answer. What she had tried to tell him was that the five little fledglings, crowded into the tiny nest under the eaves of the porch, had taken it into their heads to try their first flight at that precise moment, and there they were perched on the shafts of the phaeton, lighting, as it seemed, on the first thing they came to, while the father and mother birds were flying about in frantic anxiety to see them in such a perilous situation. How could those tiny little untrained claws keep their hold on that big round, slippery shaft, and if the carriage started down they would surely go under the wheels or under the feet of that merciless little grey mare. But the little fledglings were in better hands than they knew, for, with the exceptions of Betsy, Doctor, and Black-and-white, every living thing at Oakdene was kind to every other living thing.

“Whoa, girlie; whoa, girlie,” had been Patrick’s quieting words to Lizzie, and then when Tattine came hurrying that way he had motioned her to come quietly for fear of frightening them. Then, as you know, Tattine flew to make sure that treacherous Black-and-white was kept close guarded, and then back she flew again to the aid of the little birds themselves. Softly she drew nearer and nearer, saying over gently, “Whoa, Lizzie! dear little birdies!” until she came very near and then she put out one hand towards them. That was enough for the fledglings. Refreshed by their rest on the shafts, they flapped their tiny wings and fluttered up to the anxious mother bird on the branches above them, wholly unconscious that they had been in any peril whatsoever.

“And Black-and-white would have killed them, every one, if she had had the chance,” thought Tattine; “oh, if I only knew how to teach her a lesson!”

CHAPTER V. THE KIRKS AT HOME

Barney the donkey was harnessed, and Tattine sat in the little donkey-cart waiting, and as she waited she was saying aloud, “What, Grandma Luty? Yes, Grandma Luty. No, Grandma Luty. What did you say, Grandma Luty?” and this she said in the most polite little tone imaginable. Meantime Rudolph and Mabel, discovering that Tattine did not see them, came stealing along under cover of the apple-trees.

“Whatever is Tattine doing, talking to herself like that?” whispered Mabel, and then they came near enough to hear what she was saying.

“She’s out of her head,” said Rudolph, when they had listened some moments, and then Tattine turned round and saw them.

“No, I’m not out of my head at all,” she laughed; “I was just practicing a little while I waited for you.”

“Practicing your GRANDMOTHER,” which as you have observed was a pet expression with Rudolph, whenever he wished to intimate that he considered your remarks to be simply absurd.

“Yes, that’s exactly it,” Tattine answered good-naturedly. “I am practicing my Grandmother. Grandma Luty, that’s Mamma’s mother, has come to make us a visit, and Mamma has discovered that I’m not very polite to old people. Children used to be taught, you know, to say, ‘Yes’m,’ and ‘Yes, sir,’ but now that is not considered nice at all, and you must always say the name of the person you are speaking to, especially if they are older people, to whom you ought to be respectful,” and Tattine sounded quite like a little grandmother herself as she talked.

“Yes, we know, and it’s an awful bother,” sighed Rudolph. “We’re fairly nagged about it, Mabel and I, but Mother says she’s going to keep it up until we always do it. Perhaps we would get on faster if we practised by

ourselves as you do, but really, Tattine, it did sound as though you were out of your head, to hear you saying all those sentences over to yourself."

While the children were having this little talk about politeness, Rudolph and Mabel had climbed into the wagon, and the donkey, acting upon a suggestion from Tattine's whip, had started down the roadway. The trio were off for Patrick's, for this was to be the day of the Kirks' "At Home," and, dressed in kis Sunday-best, Patrick that very minute was waiting at his door to receive them.

Full two miles lay ahead of the children, and though Barney fortunately seemed to be in the mood for doing his best, Patrick would still have a full half-hour to wait. At last the donkey-cart drew up at the Kirks' door and two happy old people welcomed three happy little people into their comfortable little home. It would take another book, the size of this one, to tell you all the doings of that August day. First they went into the house and laid their wraps on the white coverlid of the great high feather-bed in the little spare room, and then Mrs. Kirk sat them down to three little blue bowls of bread-and-milk, remarking, "shure you must be after being hungry from your long drive," and the children ate it with far more relish than home bread-and-milk was ever eaten.

"Now I'm doubting," said Patrick, standing with his back to the cooking-stove and with a corn-cob pipe in his mouth, "if it's the style to have bread-and-milk at 'At Homes' in the city."

"Patrick," answered Tattine seriously, "we do not want this to be a city 'At Home.' I don't care for them at all. Everybody stays for just a little while, and everybody talks at once, and as loudly as they can, and at some of them they only have tea and a little cake or something like that to eat," and Tattine glanced at the kitchen-table over by the window with a smile and a shake of the head, as though very much better pleased with what she saw there. A pair of chickens lay ready for broiling on a blue china platter. Several ears of corn were husked ready for the pot they were to be boiled in. A plate of cold potatoes looked as though waiting for the frying-pan, and from the depths of a glass fruit-dish a beautiful pile of Fall-pippins towered up to a huge red apple at the top.

“Indade, thin, but we’ll do our best,” said Mrs. Kirk, “to make it as different from what you be calling a city ‘At Home’ as possible, and now suppose you let Patrick take you over our bit of a farm, and see what you foind to interest you, and I’m going wid yer, while ye have a look at my geese, for there’s not the loike of my geese at any of the big gentlemin’s farms within tin miles of us.”

And so, nothing loth, the little party filed out of the house, and after all hands had assisted in unharnessing Barney and tying him into his stall, with a manger-full of sweet, crisp hay for his dinner, they followed Mrs. Kirk’s lead to the little pond at the foot of the apple-orchard. And then what did they see! but a truly beautiful great flock of white geese. Some were sailing gracefully around the pond, some were pluming their snowy breasts on the shore beside it, and three, the finest of them all, and each with a bow of ribbon tied round its long neck, were confined within a little picket-fence apart from the others.

“Why, what beauties, Mrs. Kirk!” exclaimed Tattine, the minute she spied them, “and what are the ribbons for? Do they mean they have taken a prize at some show or other? And why do they each have a different color?”

“They mane,” said Mrs. Kirk proudly, standing with her hands upon her hips and her face fairly beaming, “they mane as how they’re to be presinted to you three children. The red is for Master Rudolph, the white is for Miss Mabel, and the blue is for you, Miss Tattine.”

“Oh, Mrs. Kirk!” the three children exclaimed, with delight, and Mabel added politely, “But do you really think you can spare them, Mrs. Kirk?”

“Why, of course she can! can’t you, Mrs. Kirk?” cut in Rudolph warmly, for the idea of relinquishing such a splendid gift was not for a moment to be thought of. “I wonder how we can get them home,” he added, by way of settling the matter.

“Indade, thin, and I have this foine crate ready to go right in the back of your cart,” and there, to be sure, was a fine sort of cage with a board top and bottom and laths at the sides, while other laths were lying ready to be nailed into place after the geese should have been stowed away

within it. The children were simply wild over this addition to their separate little sets of live-stock, and although the whole day was delightful, there was all the while an almost impatient looking forward to the supreme moment when they should start for home with those beautiful geese in their keeping. And at last it came.

"I wonder if my goose will be a little lonely," said Tattine, as they all stood about, watching Patrick nail on the laths.

"Faith and it will thin," said Mrs. Kirk. "It never came to my moind that they wouldn't all three be together. Here's little Grey-wing to keep Blue-ribbon company," and Mrs. Kirk seized one of the smaller geese that happened to be near her, and squeezed it into the cage through the small opening that was left.

"Well, if you can spare it, I think that is better, Mrs. Kirk, because everything has a companion over at our place. We have two cats, two pairs of puppies, two little bay horses, and two greys, and two everything, but as there's only one of me I am friends with them all—"

"Bless your heart, but I'm glad you thought to mintion it," and then Patrick and Mrs. Kirk gave each little extended hand a hearty shake, and the children—declaring over and over that "they had a lovely time and were so much obliged for the geese"—climbed into the cart and set off for home.

"I'd go the short cut by the ford," advised Patrick; "it looks like we might get a shower by sunset."

"Yes, I think we would better," said Rudolph, glancing toward the clouds in the west Rudolph prided himself on his ability to forecast the weather, and was generally able to tell correctly when a shower was pretty sure to come and when it was likely to "go round."

So Barney was coaxed into a good gait, which he was ready as a rule to take towards home, and the little ford by way of a farm-lane, and which saved a good mile on the road home, was soon reached. Barney knew the place well and, always enjoying it, picked his way carefully to the middle

of the ford, and then he took it into his stubborn little head to stand stock still, and to plant his four hoofs firmly in the nice soft mud at the bottom of the stream.

"Go on," urged Tattine; "Go on," urged Mabel, and Rudolph applied his sapling whip with might and main, but all to no effect. Meantime some geese from a neighboring farm had come sailing out into the ford, to have a look at their friends in the crate, and the geese in the crate, wild to be out on the water with their comrades, craned their long necks far out between the laths, and set up a tremendous squawking. It was rather a comical situation, and the children laughed till their sides ached, but after a while it ceased to be so funny. The clouds were rolling up blacker, and there was an occasional flash of lightning far off in the distance, but Barney stood still obdurate and unmoved, simply revelling in the sensation of the cool water, running down-stream against his four little donkey-legs. At last Rudolph was at his wits' end, for what did Tattine and Mabel do but commence to cry. Great drops of rain were falling now, and they COULD NOT BEAR THE THOUGHT of being mid-way in that stream with the storm breaking right above their heads, and when girls, little or big, young or old, cannot bear the thought of things they cry. It does not always help matters; it frequently makes them more difficult, but then again sometimes it does help a little, and this appeared to be one of those things, for when the girls' crying put Rudolph to his wits' end, he realized that there was just one thing left to try, and that was to jump overboard and try and pull Barney to land, since Barney would not pull him. So into the water he jumped, keeping the reins in his hand, and then, getting a little ahead of Barney, he began to walk and pull. Now fortunately, there is nothing like the force of example, which simply means that when Barney saw Rudolph walking and pulling he began to walk and pull too.

Meantime, while Patrick and his wife were thinking that the children had had plenty of time to reach home before the storm, there was great anxiety in the two homes where those three dear children lived. Patrick the coachman and Philip the groom had been sent with the wagonette by

the main road to Patrick Kirk's—Patrick to bring the children and Philip to take charge of Barney, but as the children were coming home, or rather trying to come home, by the ford, of course they missed them.

All the while the storm was growing in violence, and suddenly for about five minutes great hailstones came beating down till the lawn was fairly white with them, and the panes of glass in the green-house roof at Oakdene cracked and broke beneath them. "And those three blessed children are probably out in it all," thought Tattine's Mother, standing pale and trembling at her window, and watching the road which the wagonette would have to come. And then what did she see but Barney, trotting bravely up the hill, with the geese still craning their necks through the laths of the cage, but the reins dragging through the mud of the roadway, and with no children in the little cart. Close behind him came the wagonette, which Barney was cleverly managing to keep well ahead of, but Mrs. Gerald soon discovered that neither were the children in that either. In an instant she was down the stairs and out on the porch to meet Patrick at the door.

"It isn't possible you have no word of the children?" she cried excitedly.

"Patrick Kirk says they started home by the ford in time to reach here an hour before the storm," gasped Patrick, "but we came back by the ford ourselves and not a sign have we seen of them, till Barney ran out of the woods ahead of us five minutes ago."

And then a dreadful thought flashed through her mind. Could it be possible they had been drowned in the ford? But that moment her eyes saw something that made her heart leap for joy, something that looked drowned enough, but wasn't. Rudolph was running up the hill as fast as his soaking clothing would let him, and, reaching the door breathless enough, he sank down on the floor of the porch.

"Oh, Mrs. Gerald," he said, as soon as he could catch his breath, "Mabel and Tattine are all right; they're safe in the log play-house at the Cornwells', but we've had an awful fright. Is Barney home? When the

hail came I tied him to a tree and we ran into the log house, but he broke away the next minute and took to his heels and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. Barney's an awful fraud, Mrs. Gerald."

But Mrs. Gerald had no time just then to give heed to Barney's misdoings. Seizing a wrap from the hall, she ordered Rudolph into the house and to bed, as quickly as he could be gotten there, sent Philip to Rudolph's Mother with the word that the children were safe, and then started off in the wagonette to bring Mabel and Tattine home.

"Mamma," said Tattine, snuggling her wet little self close to her Mother's side in the carriage, "Rudolph was just splendid, the way he hauled Barney and us and the cart out of the water, but Mamma, I am done with Barney now too. He's not to be trusted either."

Mrs. Gerald thought of two or three things that might be urged in Barney's favor, but it did not seem kind even to attempt to reason with two such tired and soaking little specimens, so she only said, "Well, Barney can never again be trusted in the ford, that's one sure thing."

"No, indeed," said Mabel warmly; "I would not give fifty cents for him."

"You can have him for nothing," said Tattine, with a wan little smile; "after this he can never be trusted in anything."

CHAPTER VI. “IT IS THEIR NATURE TO.”

Tattine was getting on beautifully with her attempt to use Grandma Luty’s name at the proper time, and in the proper place, and she was getting on beautifully with grandma herself as well. She loved everything about her, and wished it need not be so very long till she could be a grandma herself, have white hair and wear snowy caps atop of it, and kerchiefs around her neck, and use gold eye-glasses and a knitting-basket. Grandma Luty, you see, was one of the dear, old-fashioned grandmothers. There are not many of them nowadays. Most of them seem to like to dress so you cannot tell a grandmother from just an ordinary everyday mother. If you have a grandmother—a nice old one, I mean—see if you cannot get her into the cap and kerchief, and then show her how lovely she looks in them. But what I was going to tell you was that Grandma Luty’s visit was all a joy to Tattine, and so when, just at daylight one morning, the setter puppies in their kennel at the back of the house commenced a prodigious barking, Tattine’s first thought was for Grandma.

“It’s a perfect shame to have them wake her up,” she said to herself, “and I know a way to stop them,” so, quiet as a mouse, she stole out of bed, slipped into her bed-slippers and her nurse’s wrapper, that was lying across a chair, and then just as noiselessly stole downstairs, and unlocking the door leading to the back porch, hurried to open the gate of the kennel, for simply to let the puppies run she knew would stop their barking. Tattine was right about that, but just as she swung the gate open, a happy thought struck those four little puppies’ minds, and as she started to run back to the house, all four of them buried their sharp little teeth in the frill of Priscilla’s wrapper.

Still Tattine succeeded in making her way across the lawn back to the door, although she had four puppies in tow and was almost weak from laughing.

She knew perfectly well what a funny picture she must make, with the wrapper that was so much too large for her, only kept in place by the big puff sleeves: and with the puppies pulling away for dear life, it the train. When she reached the screen door, she had a tussle with them, one by one, taking a sort of reef in the trailing skirt as each puppy was successfully disposed of, until all of it was clear of the sharp little teeth, and she could bang the door to between them.

I do not believe Grandma Luty ever laughed harder than when Tattine told her all about it as they sat together in the porch that morning after breakfast. She even laughed her cap way over on one side, so that Tattine had to take out the gold pins and put them in again to straighten it.

“But Grandma,” said Tattine, when they had sobered down, “those puppies, cunning as they are now, will just be cruel setters when they grow up, killing everything they come across, birds and rabbits and chipmunks.”

“Tattine,” said Grandma Luty, with her dear, kindly smile “your Mother has told me how disappointed you have been this summer in Betsy and Doctor and little Black-and-white, and that now Barney has fallen into disgrace, since he kept you so long in the ford the other day, but I want to tell you something. You must not stop loving them at all because they do what you call cruel things. You have heard the old rhyme:—

“Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
  For God has made them so:
Let bears and lions growl and fight,
  For ‘tis their nature to.”

“Oh, yes, I know that,” said Tattine, “and I don’t think it’s all quite true; our dogs don’t bite (I suppose it means biting people), bad as they are.”

“No; I’ve always thought myself that line was not quite fair to the dogs either, but the verses mean that we mustn’t blame animals for doing things that it is their nature to do.”

“And yet, Grandma, I am not allowed to do naughty things because it is my nature to.”

“Ah, but, Tattine, there lies the beautiful difference. You can be reasoned with, and made to understand things, so that you can change your nature—I mean the part of you that makes you sometimes love to do naughty things.

“There’s another part of your nature that is dear and good and sweet, and doesn’t need to be changed at all. But Betsy and Doctor can only be trained in a few ways, and never to really change their nature.

“Setters have hunted rabbits always, kittens have preyed upon birds, and donkeys, as a rule, have stood still whenever they wanted to.”

“But why, I wonder, were they made so?”

“You nor I nor nobody knows, Tattine, but isn’t it fine that for some reason we are made differently? If we will only be reasonable and try hard enough and in the right way, we can overcome anything.”

“It’s a little like a sermon, Grandma Luty.”

“It’s a little bit of a one then, for it’s over, but you go this minute and give Betsy and Doctor a good hard hug, and tell them you forgive them.”

And Tattine did as she was bid, and Doctor and Betsy, who had sadly missed her petting, were wild with delight.

“But don’t even you yourselves wish,” she said, looking down at them ruefully, “that it was not your nature to kill dear little baby rabbits?”

And Tattine thought they looked as though they really were very sorry indeed.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TATTINE ***

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