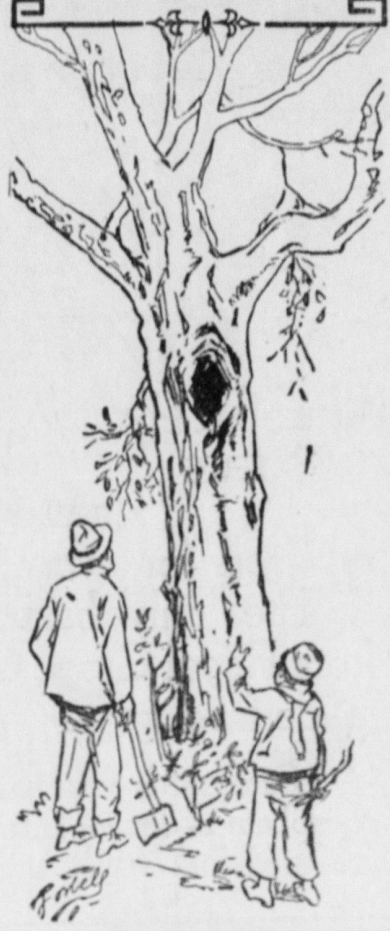


FOUR LEGGED TURKEY

BY FRANK R. SWEET

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"See, it's hollow!"



"WHY, mother, if tomorrow ain't Thanksgiving!" said Jacob Bennett, broaching the subject as if it had just occurred to him, though one might have known by the troubled expression of his kindly face that it had been for some time under silent consideration.

He was putting the finishing touches of keenness with a whetstone to an ax that he held on his knee.

Looking at Jacob with indifferent interest was a boy of fourteen years, who sat curved to a restful attitude with his feet on the round of the low, splint-bottomed chair, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his hand, thankful that the labor of turning the grindstone was accomplished.

At one of the two windows which lighted the room, stooping a little, with her hands on its ledge, stood the middle-aged woman whom Jacob addressed.

"Why, so 'tis Thanksgiving, father!" she exclaimed, her tone dissembling surprise more artfully than her face, which she did not yet venture to turn to him, for she knew that there were tears on her cheeks.

Since she and Jacob were married all their Thanksgivings had been spent in the homely comfort of the "old place," as they always called their late home on the hundred acre farm. Almost a year ago they were forced to give it up because Jacob had signed the notes of a speculating friend. House, farm and stock went to pay another man's debts, and Jacob was left penniless on the verge of old age, with a wife as old as he, an invalid daughter and a son scarcely old enough to earn his own living. It did not console him to remember Bently's assurance as the speculator set forth with unabated faith in quest of fresh fields.

"Never you fear, Jacob, o' man. I'll fix things all right yet," Bently had said.

Jacob bore his changed fortune patiently and set himself to earn what he could by day labor for the support of his family. He was faithfully aided by his wife and their invalid daughter, who was cunning with her needle. More than by aught else he was cheered by the brave spirit with which his wife bore their misfortune, never offering him the cold consolation of "I told you so."

She covertly wiped her cheeks with the corner of her apron and turned from the window.

"Yes, it sartinly is, an' I hain't got anything ready for't, only some pumpkin pies."

"Waal," said Jacob, "pumpkin pies is jest the thing for Thanksgiving."

"Of course they be, but they kinder want somethin' to help 'em out, seem's though. An' we hain't got a thing pervid, only pork an' potatoes."

"An' onions," Jacob suggested.

"Why," said the daughter, lifting her pale, patient face, lighted with a smile, from her sewing, "with pork fried as mother fries it, an' such potatoes as we've got, an' onions an' pumpkin pies, I don't know what better anybody need ask for. I'm sure we can be thankful with it an' for it."

"You're always thankful," said her mother, "Thankful by name an' thankful by nature. We named you well."

"Why can't we have a turkey, same's we used to?" asked the boy without changing his position or diverting his gaze from his father's occupation.

"Turkeys costs money, said his father, "when you don't raise 'em."

"An' that we hain't done," said the mother, "ner yet a chicken, which I'm glad we hain't, for they'd scratch up the hull garden, it bein' so close to the house. A garden's wuth more'n chickens to eat. Still, I wish we had one for Thanksgiving. But we'll try to be thankful for what we've got, as Thankful says."

"An' that's consid'able compared to what some's got," Jacob said. "We've got a good ruff over our heads, an' me an' bub's earnin' money 'nough to pay the rent on't for six months to come. We chop an' put up our two cord a day. I tell you, bub's gettin' to be a master hand with his ax. An' now 'at he's got a chance to do chores for his board an' go to school he's fixed complete for winter."

"An' Squire Bascom says I c'n come home every Sunday!" cried bub.

"An' I'm glad to get such lots of sewin'," said Thankful. "I can earn a dollar every week."

"An' we're all t'able well." But, looking over at his daughter, the father supplemented his remark with, "That is, we hain't no wus."

"An' best of all is we've got one mother," said his wife.

"That's so, Mahaly," he said fervently. "Waal, my little fall chicken," addressing the boy as he arose and laid the whetstone on the crowded mantelpiece, "if mother's got our dinner put up we'll be off."

The tin dinner pail was ready at hand, and, shouldering their axes, the father and son trudged across the fields, making a new brown path through the sprinkled whiteness.

"I'm afraid father misses his old fashioned Thanksgiving dinner turri-

and, barely dodging the blow that Isaac aimed at him, came scrambling out with more speed than his short legs would seem to warrant. A snerf blow from the more deliberate hand of Jacob prevented his escape.

With a stout of triumph at the unexpected sight, Isaac lifted the limp form by the hind leg and heaved it across the fallen trunk.

"Sakes alive, father, he's as heavy as a pig. You just heft him."

"Well, he is a good one—fifteen pounds or upward," said Jacob after careful and deliberate hand weighing. "An' just feel o' the fur—as thick as wool! I reckon his pelt 'll fetch half a dollar, an' you shall have it all. Now let's skin him fore he gets cold."

"It looks good enough to eat," said the boy when the skinned carcass was laid along the trunk. "Ain't coons good to eat?"

"Some folks does eat 'em an' allows they're as good as roast pig."

"Say, father, why can't we have it for Thanksgiving?"

"Sho, bub, your mother wouldn't touch it. She spleens agin all wild meat ever sence your Uncle Isaac blowed off his fingers bustin' a gun a-shootin' a partridge. I don't believe she'd cook it, to say nothin' of eatin' of it."

"It looks just as good as a pig, an' I don't see why it ain't," persisted Isaac, with wistful eyes upon the game. Then, inspired by a naughty thought, he said, "Say, father, why can't we tell mother it is a pig?"

"Sho, bub; that 'ould be lyin'," said his father in mild reproof as he cut off the feet and long, bony tail. "But," he said at last, smiling quizzically on the boy, "I don't know as we're obliged to tell a body exactly what it is. We'll carry it home an' see. Now we'll go down to the brook an' wash our hands, an' then we'll go to work."

As Isaac dabbled in the clear cold water his wandering glances caught the gleam of scarlet far up the brook, and he presently returned from a tour of investigation with several clusters of bright red berries.

"Cramberries!" he exclaimed. "And there's s'nags of 'em!"

"Good!" said his father. "They make just as good sass as low bush cranberries, only seedier. We'll carry home some on 'em, an' they'll go prime with

the mouth, Mahaly. Mebbe they wanted the skin and mebbe that's their way o' dressin' 'em. Just look at the cranberries bub's fetched. He found 'em in the woods, an' ain't they nice ones?"

While the attention of the mother and daughter was diverted to the birch bark basket of berries, he, with some qualms of conscience, bore his prize to the cellar.

As the next forenoon advanced the little kitchen was filled with a savory odor of baking meat and boiling onions that, whenever the door was opened, escaped abroad in appetizing whiffs that made Isaac's mouth water.

The old clock never before ticked off the seconds as deliberately and its hands never lagged along their circular path so slowly as on this day. But at last the hour hand arrived at the figure 2, the minute hand again reached 12, the long, purring note of preparation sounded. As the second hour was struck the little family gathered around the bountiful board and waited with bowed heads while the father devoutly thanked the Giver of all blessings.

"Now, mother, what part of the—ah—critter will you try?" Jacob asked as he skillfully carved the inviting roast.

"A leetle of the brownest, please, Jacob, an' not but a mite. I've been over it so much I don't seem to hanker after it."

No one but Jacob noticed that she tasted it cautiously and experimentally. His fears were soon relieved by seeing that her appetite grew with what it fed upon and were quite dispelled when she permitted him to help her again.

When the dessert of pumpkin pie was being served Jacob beamed a complacent smile upon his family and said, "Now 'at we've eat our Thanksgivin' meat I'm goin' to make bold to ask you one an' all if it wa'n't good?"

With one voice they assented.

"An' now, not to be desalful, I'm a-goin' to tell you what you've been eatin' of."

"You needn't tell me, Jacob," said his wife, shaking with laughter. "It was coon!"

"How on irth did you know, Mahaly?"

"Why, I s'mised at first you was a-foolin' an' when I see a great long black and white hair into the mea I knew it wa'n't no pig that it ever grew on, an' when I come to find the ring tailed skin under a barrel in the wood shed it was all plain."

"An' you went right on an' cooked it an' eat of it just to please me an' the children? Waal, I say for it, Mahaly Bennett, you be a good woman!"

She poured out a second cup of tea, cleared her throat and began with hesitating words:

"I kind of forgot—an'—kind of hated to tell you what Mis' Barker said yesterday, Jacob."

He looked at her inquiringly with a piece of pumpkin pie within an inch of his open mouth.

"Mis' Barker's cousin 'at has been out west they see Abram Bently, an' the land he bought out there ten years ago for most nothin' has riz so on ac-

count of a big town growin' up 'long side of it 'at it's made him rich."

"You don't say?" Jacob laid down his knife. "Well, I'm glad on't for his sake an' for ours. He'll come back an' pay up every cent he owes if he's able."

"That's what she says he says he'll do, but I shall believe it when I see it," and she shook her head. "It's hard payin' for a dead horse."

"He'll do it, Mahaly," said Jacob, loyal to his absent friend. "He sartinly will if he's able. Oh, Mahaly! It most takes my breath away to think of livin' at the of place again. I can finish my dinner with a thank fuler heart just for the hope of it."

He was not disappointed, and their next Thanksgiving was in their old home.



"WHERE IN THE LIVIN' EARTH DID YOU GET THAT PIG?"

our roast pig or four legged turkey or whatever it is. An' now he's get to choppin', for we've got to put up our two cord afore night."

This they accomplished and at night fall bore homeward their forest trophy.

"There, mother, see what we fetched you!" cried Jacob, holding up his prize before his wife.

"Where in the livin' earth did you get that pig, Jacob? It is a pig, ain't it?" she asked, scanning it with admiring eyes and poking its fat ribs with a cautious forefinger.

"It was give to me, an' you ain't to ask no questions," he answered.

"How come they to skin it? I don't know as I ever see a pig skinned an' the feet cut off but it does look real nice."

"You mustn't look a gift horse in

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