

The Nomad of the Nine Lives

A. Frances Friebe

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THE NOMAD OF THE NINE LIVES

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A. FRANCES FRIEBE

Illustrated by

Clara R. Atwood

To

Rev. Francis H. Howley

President S.P.C.A

Preface

"Uncle, why don't you write the story of your life?" So says my nephew Tom to me when he comes in and finds me sitting in a brown study before a comfortable fire. I have finally granted his request, for I have spent many an hour in relating my thrilling adventures to him and am sure that he has enjoyed them and even profited by them. Thus have I been persuaded to write this little book in the hope that it will be interesting to people as well as to cats.

Of course I am only a cat, but I have tried to be a good one, and I think that a good cat is of more use in the world than a bad human being. There is no doubt but that cats are important members of almost every household. What is home without a cat? Great is the comfort and companionship that have been brought by them into the lives of solitary spinsters; earnestly and faithfully have they slaved to free homes of destructive rats and mice, and have also protected the corn in the farmers' barns. When one reads of the terrible loss caused by these rodents, it is astonishing to think that their destroyers could ever be ill-used or abandoned. I shall quote as nearly as possible from a newspaper which I once heard my master reading, so you can see how a good many faithful cats are treated:

"There are probably few people in the city of Boston who realize that over 25,000 abandoned cats and 3,000 dogs are electrocuted each year by the Animal Rescue League, by means of a cage which is charged with a strong current of electricity. After entering and the door is closed, they die without pain or struggle. June is the time of year that people abandon dogs, cats and other pets, for at this time they move to the seashore and disregard their four-footed friends, leaving them to wander in the streets. It is the aim of the Animal Rescue League to procure and dispose of all animals thus abandoned and, whenever possible, they are provided with good homes. There were 27,607 cats rescued by the League in 1912 and each year the number increases."

Oh, the pity of it! This little story will, I hope, appeal to many, as it shows how keen are the sufferings of a pampered pet, thrown on its own resources and forced to wander day by day without food or water. Surely it may save some poor beast from misery, and I sincerely hope that it will

not have been written in vain.

CHAPTER I

The first thing I remember is that all was dark, but that I could feel a mother's loving caress and knew that there were other helpless things in the same box with me. After several days, something large and strong lifted us, box and all, and carried us up into a much more pleasant place; I can still remember how good it smelled. Upon opening my eyes the next day, I beheld the face of my mother and found that we were seven, and were comfortably settled at the rear of a provision store. Mother did not feel at all safe; that I could see by the uneasy manner in which she looked about her, and started and trembled as people came to look at us. Once, if I remember correctly, she tried to bite a small boy who would persist in picking me up by the tail. Her claws showed also and she took good care of us in many like emergencies. She continued to be uneasy, and one day when Mr. Carver, the butcher, had stepped out on business, she took us one by one in her mouth, lifting us carefully by the nape of the neck, and carried us back into the cellar again.

It was dark and cold and we did not like it very well, but mother cuddled us up in her warm embrace and tried to make us feel that it was best for us to be away from people. When Mr. Carver came back and saw the empty box he came down into the cellar and scolded poor mother, saying, "Now, old lady, I want you and the kittens to stay upstairs, for I am going to give them away; besides, I want you to kill the mice which are getting into everything up there. You may keep one of your children, however, for we need two cats here."

Mother looked worried, but followed as he carried us up again. We remained there after that and grew larger and more attractive, so that one by one my brothers and sisters were given away, with the exception of Tom's father (who stayed at home and lived on the fat of the land, to a good old age).

Our childhood was bright and happy, for mother taught us many things and brought us up well. I remember that there was a door leading from the rear of the store into a garden. Sunny days mother would take us out and give us lessons in natural history. She taught us not to kill or maim song-birds, but said that we could kill and eat field mice or little blind moles, although we never saw any of them. She warned us that bees and wasps were too heating to the blood, and not to eat them, but if very hungry, a grass-hopper was not to be sneezed at; positively no toads, however. How we played in the garden, chasing the elusive sunbeams, rolling over and over, and learning to box and jump! It all came to an end too soon, however, for one day a very neat little girl came in and said that her father, who was janitor in a grammar school, wanted a kitten, because the mice were getting the best of him.

She picked me up and I knew at once that I should like her, as she was so gentle (some children are very rough and squeeze one so hard).

Mr. Carver parted with me unwillingly, for, as he expressed it, "I was the smartest one in the bunch." I said good-by to mother with tears in my eyes, for she had been very good to me.

Once she had even defied a dog who came into the store and ventured too near our box. I still remember how handsome she appeared with her eyes blazing, her arched back, and her open mouth, hissing and spitting at him. Her sharp claws could be seen outside of her velvet paws, while we, terribly frightened, crouched low and kept quiet. The dog ran away as fast as he could, and never returned to trouble us.

She had taught us how to catch and kill rats and mice in the stillness of the night, and had given us many an object lesson. Thus, when we left her we had a knowledge of these things and had also been warned not to steal, which, living as we did, in a meat market, had been a very hard task. She had likewise taught us to be careful of our appearance, and especially to keep clean. This latter she showed us by wetting her paw with her tongue and washing her face with it, and, moreover, had told us we need not go over our heads and back of our ears unless it looked like rain (so considerate of her, for cats, as well as boys, hate to have their ears washed). Of course she taught us to hate water and always to step over a puddle; to keep good company or none; and above all things not to stay out late at night, or walk on back fences. She did not approve of voice culture, either, but later I shall relate my sad experiences in that direction.

CHAPTER II

I was indeed glad to find that my ambition to have an education was to be realized. In my early days at the meat market I used to slip out on the sidewalk and try to spell out the words on the daily bulletin blackboards, such as "Spare ribs, 25 cents," "Best spring lamb, 30 cents," and "Best rump steak, 45 cents." I used to wait until some plump old lady with a market basket came along and read these signs. She often scolded, but I did not then know why. I have since learned that my childhood was in a time when the high cost of living was in everybody's mouth. As I had learned so much in that way, I felt that I was able to skip the primary grade, and so started in with a great deal of confidence to pick up an education. For instance, the fact that I was allowed to roam in the various rooms in the evenings permitted me to observe, among other things, how the earth revolved on its axis. I often proved this fact by tapping a large globe with my paw and watching Africa chase Asia and Asia in turn pursue America as it turned swiftly around.

The janitor had an office in the basement, and I was supposed to stay there during the school session, but I used to creep softly up the stairway and listen at the class-room doors. Often the door of a dressing-room chanced to be open and I could enter here and watch through the crack of the school-room door. I learned to read in this manner, and took up arithmetic, which was rather difficult, but I studied hard evenings and made good progress, until I came to vulgar fractions.

Remembering mother's dislike of anything unrefined, however, I closed the book and did not dare to go on. I fared very well, for the janitor's wife sent me bread and milk, and occasionally bits of fish and meat. I had the run of the school at night and consequently could learn a great many things while prowling around in quest of rats and mice; in fact, I always managed to catch a few and leave them where they could be seen (I did not care to eat them) before I settled down to hard study, and so revealed to the janitor that I was doing my duty. I used to find some choice tid-bits

in the desks, some of which opened at the end, and did not lift at the top; pieces of cake, numerous pickled limes (for which I did not care), and also plenty of cookies, and sometimes a sandwich.

I observed by the aid of a mirror standing on the floor in a teacher's closet that I was growing large and good-looking; my dark coat was smooth and glossy, my white shirt-front set off a well poised head, and I possessed as fine a pair of whiskers as ever graced a cat. Of these I was extremely proud, but used to keep my entire person well groomed as well as that particular portion of my features. I exercised in the school yard in order to keep in good form and also took boxing lessons from an acquaintance, who occasionally called. I soon began to tire of the school life and dull studies, however, and longed to go out somewhat during the evening, but the janitor was careful to lock me in the school at eight o'clock.

One evening I found that a window on the ground floor had been left open. It was but the matter of a moment to vault out and I found myself on the street alone at night for the first time in my life.

I remembered mother's advice, but thought that she was rather too particular; indeed I felt that I could come to no harm, so walked down the street, keeping an eye out for dogs, as mother had warned me to do.

I soon perceived that the broad highway was too much exposed for my traveling, and so I proceeded into a back yard, jumped a fence, and found myself on a back road, where market men deliver their goods. It was really quite attractive and sociable, for I came upon a group who seemed to be serenading some mutual acquaintance. I had listened to the children singing at school, and had looked over the song books, and had even practised a few scales. In this way I discovered that I had a very clear tenor voice, so I immediately joined the group. They did not seem particularly anxious to have me do so, and as I now look back, I can see how young and fresh I was.

Jumping upon a fence, I at once threw out my chest and proceeded to give them a tenor solo. I was wholly unprepared for what followed.

In an instant they all charged at me, howling, spitting, and finally succeeded in knocking me from my high position. Down on the ground we rolled and struggled. Fur flew! Oh, how they scratched and kicked and pummeled me. One bit pieces out of my ears, another gave me a black eye. In my agony I thought of mother and that her warnings were right after all. I found out afterwards that the object of their serenade was a lady, and my fine appearance and good voice made them wild with jealousy. I could have put up a good fight against one or two enemies, but an army of five proved too much for me. However, I got in a few savage bites and scratches, which I think they remembered for some time.

During this terrible battle we all gave vocal selections in different keys, which could hardly be called pleasing to the ear, and were rewarded by a shower of empty bottles, old shoes, hair brushes, and finally some unkind person threw a pitcher of ice-water at us, from a window above. This last offering served to break up the encounter, as well as the pitcher.

Upon being invited behind the scenes of a theatre some weeks later, and peeping from the wings, I noticed that a young girl (who gave a song and dance) was showered with roses, violets and other beautiful flowers. I

could not understand this great difference as her voice did not sound any better than mine, I thought, although it may sound conceited in me to say this.

I finally escaped with the remains of my ninth life and when I got away from my new friends (?) I limped painfully back to the school house, thinking how glad I should be to clamber in again and nurse my wounds. When I reached there and looked for the open window I found to my horror that it was closed. What should I do? Too weak to run from an offensive dog, must I lie helpless in an open school yard? It was not to be thought of.

CHAPTER III

I rested awhile and felt a little better. No bones were broken. I could walk slowly, and as mother's provision store was not far away, I decided to take the risk of finding a cellar window open there. So, painfully limping along back streets and resting in dark corners, I arrived at my destination at midnight, and found that a window had been left open. It was a brave task to jump down but better than staying out all night, so I set my teeth and leaped softly in. I was greeted with a snarl and hiss which sounded like a bunch of fire-crackers going off, and there was mother on guard, standing with arched back in front of a box of newly-born kittens in a dark corner. I crept toward her and with a cry of delight she recognized me. I told my pitiful story while she gently led me to another corner and bade me lie down on some carpeting, near which stood a saucer of milk. She lapped my wounds and comforted me with kind words. She said she was afraid at first that I was a bad quarrelsome cat, and that it almost broke her heart. Judging from remarks that she dropped and as she had such sad eyes and sighed so often, I am sadly afraid that father himself was not exactly a Sunday-school model. I was stiff and sore the next day and stayed in my corner. Mother brought part of her dinner to me, but I could not bear to take the food from a nursing mother. The cries of the kittens wore on my nerves to such an extent that I wondered if I could ever settle down to a domestic life.

As soon as I felt able to go out into the world I did so, for I knew that it made extra work for mother to have me there. I therefore took my departure, deciding that I should not go back to the school (for after all it was a dull place). It is needless to state that I thanked mother for her kindness. Notwithstanding my first experience, I was anxious to see life so set out with a brave heart, but without friends and no prospects of a place to lay my head. Fortunately as it was summer and the nights were warm, one could sleep out quite comfortably. I did not look quite up to the mark, but knew that time alone would cover the bald places, and restore my former agility. In the daytime I did not venture forth, but slept most of the time in a quiet nook in a back yard where the people had gone away for the summer. At night I came out, and a few uncovered garbage pails helped me wonderfully, although it hurt my pride to eat this sort of food. I was young and healthy, however, and enjoyed the free life in the open air.

I made a few good friends, some of whom I have kept to this day. I remember that I learned to shun boys, for they were apt to throw stones. How they can be so cruel I cannot understand. If they realized how the stones cut and sting, they would never use them for missiles and us for

targets. I nursed a wound on my hip bone for weeks, which was very painful and was caused by a boy hitting me with a sharp stone. What satisfaction can it be to them? Harming a defenseless animal can surely give none, but it always seems a great temptation to them to do so. Once I saw a group of small boys stoning a kitten which they had tied to a raft. I was glad when a big policeman caught them at it. Dogs and boys were the only drawback to what was otherwise a perfect life, and a lazily lounging about one; first a feast and then a famine.

No matter how intense were the pangs of hunger, I followed mother's advice and never ate sparrows or any other birds.

About this time I made the acquaintance of a cat who lived in a theatre and one night he invited me to go behind the scenes with him. My eyes were opened that night. Strange looking girls in stranger looking costumes came upon the stage and attempted to dance and sing. The like of this I had never seen before (nor, I hope, will I ever again). When their gowns were not too short, they were much too loud for my taste, but, nevertheless, it seems that people sit for hours watching them rave, dance, and scream. These peculiar people were kind to me, though, for I ambled about with considerable interest. One young female called out, "Larry, pipe the new cat!"

Now I had seen Mr. Carver smoke a pipe and sometimes he would pick me up and playfully blow rings of smoke in my face and laugh at me so I scurried away for fear I should have to take one of those nasty things in my mouth. As I was leaving the theatre one man called out to me to "beat it," and, as I could not understand their language, which was not in the text books at school, I made good my escape with the kindly help of an old shoe, which accompanied me part way. "That is no place for a self-respecting cat," I thought, so went out into the night. I was a homeless wanderer, but managed to find a quiet corner in a dark alley and soon went to sleep.

I awoke much refreshed, but very hungry as my friend of the theatre had neglected to treat me to anything more substantial than a chance to look on. Oh, how I longed for a drink of milk or water! I was sorely tempted and fell. On a door-step a short distance away was a jar of milk. It was a moment's work to tip it over and remove the paper top with a sharp claw. I lapped my fill and left some in the bottle for the family. That theft was bad enough, but I fell still lower. One day I was very hungry, and happened long just as some masons had ceased working, in order to eat their lunches. One of the men took the cover from his dinner pail and, leaving it open on the ground, walked away for a few minutes. I darted quickly to the pail and, to my delight, saw a large slice of corned beef. It was quick work to snatch it and run away, and how good it tasted! I ate it so fast that I remember I suffered afterwards from indigestion,--or perhaps it was a bad conscience.

CHAPTER IV

Things were going from bad to worse and I was becoming tired of my present life, but there did not seem to be any way out of it. When I went back to my dark alley I fell asleep, but tossed and turned and was very uneasy. At midnight I was aware of hearing hoarse voices whispering together; alert and listening I heard two men talking about "lifting some swag." I did not know what that was but kept still. One said that he would watch outside

while the other forced a dining-room window.

"If the job is done quietly," said one, "we can get all the silver without waking the family." I then understood the expression, "It takes a thief to catch a thief," for after the milk and corned beef episodes I felt like a branded criminal. They started out to do their dishonest work and I followed, my velvet paws making no noise. They were so intent with watching out for policemen that they did not notice me and when they looked back I dodged behind trees or posts. I soon found that we were getting into a very refined neighborhood, for it had a wide street with a park between the sidewalks.

The men did not walk on the main street but resorted to the alley in the rear of the block. They finally stopped and looking up and down, cautiously unfastened the gate with a few twists, for it had been locked. They were now inside of an enclosure, surrounded by a high fence, and where the light did not shine upon this house as on some of the others. I sneaked in when the gate was opened and following in the darkness found myself under the coping watching one lift the other so that he could reach in and unlock a window. Slowly and quietly he raised the sash and stepped in while the man below watched, ready to give the alarm if anybody should come along. I immediately followed the burglar into the house.

Here indeed was a new experience, thought I, as I hid under the dining-room table and watched. My mind acted quickly and I decided to take a chance, run upstairs and give the alarm. Dodging out of the dining-room, I ran into the hall and swiftly up a long stairway and found the master And mistress sound asleep in a large room. I went up to the bed, gave the Bed clothes a quick tug, uttered a low cry and stepped back out of sight. The master jumped up exclaiming, "What was that?" At the same time he touched a button on the wall and flooded the house with light. He listened intently and hearing a noise downstairs rushed down. I followed in time to see the man jump out of the window, leaving on the floor a large sack, which was filled with silver.

The master rushed to the telephone and almost before one could turn around, several policemen were in the house. I heard him tell them about the strange cat who cried out and woke them up, saying that he wanted to find me and as I had saved the silver, he would keep me henceforth and give me a home. Hearing this made me happy, but I realized that such a beautiful house was no place for me, especially in my present condition, as I was more of a slum cat than one to grace such a position. I quietly slipped out into the night, feeling more hopeless and homeless than ever before.

Hungry and forlorn, wishing that I was someone's pet, I wandered along, looking at the fine houses, wishing that I had a home there, for I did not at the time really know what a "square meal" was like, nor did I know what a home meant. Neither a provision store nor a school is really a home. In fact I have heard of cats who slept on beds and some who had bassinets; who sat by open fires and dined on the fat of the land. What is more, during my recent wanderings, I met one of these aristocratic animals who had lost his way, and he told me great tales of wealth, what his folks did, how he went to the seashore every summer, even going in a motor car. Oh, how important he felt! He said that he slept in a basket lined with down, and, as he wore a very expensive collar, I had no reason to doubt him. He had roamed from home and I afterwards heard that a reward had been offered for him.

He was a regular "sissy" and cried and sniffled when he was obliged to stay out all night. I offered him some of my picked up food but he turned up his aristocratic nose and said that he always had liver for breakfast, cooked to order. Upon asking him what his name was, he proudly replied, "Lord Roberts." Two friends of mine (street cats) who were listening, turned aside to snicker, and when I looked fiercely around pretended that they were only sneezing. One ventured to ask him if he had his coat-of-arms engraved on his collar and the other offered to exchange visiting cards. He saw that they were making fun of him and it hurt his feelings, for I saw him turn away and wipe his eye with one paw, as he had evidently left his lace handkerchief at home. They stepped on his toes and pushed him about with the intention of picking a fight with him, but he had no fighting blood, so they finally let him alone. I tried to assist him to find his home, but the majesty of the law intervened, and he was carried away in the arms of a stalwart policeman who knew, probably, of the reward.

This incident opened my eyes to the possibility of a home and made me long for one, but my affairs became worse instead of better. I soon reached the lowest ebb of despair and if it had not been that I had only one remaining life, I should have been tempted to end my existence.

I was sitting down by the docks one day looking at the dirty green water, which, by the way, did not appeal to me for suicidal purposes, when I was accosted by a kind faced lady who held out her hand to me saying, "You poor homeless creature, come with me." Could it be possible that anyone wanted me? I could not believe my senses. She drew nearer. I crouched, as everyone who had spoken to me recently had either kicked or sworn at me or ordered me away in language more forcible than elegant. Consequently I was rather doubtful, not knowing whether the hand held out to me would strike or caress.

I looked into her face once more, and seeing peace and happiness there, allowed her to take me up gently and place a bag over my wasted body. She carried me in her arms to an electric car, which she entered. After we had gone some distance, she alighted at a quiet street and stopped before a sort of shop over which was a sign which read "Animal Rescue League." Oh, joy and happiness! A home at last. It was too good to be true. Once inside I was bathed with some queer smelling substance, fed in small amounts at a time, and put to bed in a comfortable clean place, in a row with a number of other cats.

CHAPTER V

You may imagine how fond I became of my rescuer. It may seem hard to believe, but once she actually patted me on the head and stroked my fur with her gentle hands. No one had ever done that before. It made me feel like crying. Such kindness made life worth living, and, thanks to good care, good food, and a contented mind, I was getting better every day. One day I heard her say that I was improving and must have once been a handsome cat. I wanted to tell her of my wonderful voice, but did not do so, and compromised by squaring my shoulders and combing out my whiskers with my claws, for I had saved them and felt that they were still a credit to me. (I think she admired them also.)

Hearing occasional barkings, I soon found that there were dogs of all

descriptions there also, but in another room where they could not molest us. Oh, what a beautiful place it seemed after all my wanderings and hardships. Time went on and from remarks I overheard, I knew that I had regained my former excellent appearance. People frequently came in and looked at us, and occasionally some man or woman would take one of the cats or dogs away, never to be seen at the League again.

One day a motor car stopped at the door and an attractively dressed woman entered and said that she was seeking a good cat to take home. She looked carefully at each one of us and my heart almost stopped beating when she paused before my cage and said, "I like his looks best of all; may I have him?" The kind lady replied, "Well, he is such a dear good thing that I hate to part with him, but I want to get him in a good home, so you may take him along."

I did not like to leave her, but trusted that she knew my welfare best and so putting my mute thanks into my eyes I gave her a long last look and was hurried into the motor car. I thought of Lord Roberts, but was even more delighted when we stopped on the very same avenue where I had followed the burglars. To my surprise and pleasure I found that it was the very house of my adventure, as I recognized the hall and carpets. Later on I happened to look out of one of the dining-room windows and if you will believe me, there was Lord Roberts sitting out in the next yard sunning himself. As he got up and paced around in a dignified manner I tapped with my paw on the glass, but he would not deign to look up.

The next day I was allowed to go out for a walk and since he was in his yard, and our adjoining gate was open, I made bold to walk in and attempt to renew our acquaintanceship. He proved to be a snob, but did not recognize me as his alley friend when in need. Of course I understood that it was not my place to call first because he was very haughty and showed that he was unwilling to make my acquaintance.

However, I wore a collar which was newer and more expensive than his, and he knew that my people belonged to the "four hundred," so he finally condescended to notice me and asked me a few questions concerning my pedigree. I told him that my ancestors came over in the Mayflower, for was not Carver a name of which to be proud? He said that he belonged to the English aristocracy, but soon discovered that my education was better than his, for he had learned his letters only from playing around on the nursery floor and seeing them on blocks. His lessons of life had been acquired from a Mother Goose book when the children babbled, "Hi diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon," or some other such silly jumble of nonsense. He put on a great many airs, but knew nothing. I had acquired a little style myself, and finding he knew so little, took the upper hand and patronized him shamefully. If he had remembered my picking him out a choice bone from a garbage box and his dignified refusal, all would have been lost, but he didn't.

My looks had undergone a great change, I was sleek and glossy, for one of the maids had used some hair brilliantine belonging to the mistress on my coat. Accordingly Lord Roberts asked me to call again and I thanked him, saying that I should be pleased to do so. We saw each other quite frequently after that and became firm friends, for he soon found discretion to be the better part of valor, as my time spent in the slums had not been in vain in one respect,--I knew how to fight.

CHAPTER VI

My owners finally recognized me as the cat who had saved their silver. It happened as follows: One night in the winter a nurse was up with one of the children, who was ill. She gently soothed it and carrying some damp clothing into the sitting-room, placed it before the open fire to dry. She returned to the child and I lay down by the fire. I must have slept for some time when I was awakened by a suffocating sensation. To my horror I saw that the clothes had caught fire and that the wood-work around the fireplace was burning also.

What should I do? Oh, how my eyes smarted! I had a hard task to find my way to the door and was very glad to find it not quite closed. I crept through the small opening, rushed to my master's room and stood by his side, giving the same cry of warning that I did when the house was entered. He jumped up and touching the button exclaimed, "That is the same cat who gave the alarm before!" At the same instant he smelled smoke and made his way out into the hall where he found the fire. All was confusion at first, but as the chemical engine was just around the corner, the firemen were soon in the house and had the fire quickly extinguished. One of them said that if master had not waked as soon as he did, all would have been burned in their beds.

Perhaps I was not a hero! No one could do enough for me. I had an entire chop for breakfast (I thought of Lord Roberts and his liver). I did wish that mother and my nephew Tom, who, I had heard, was helping mother keep the mice away from the store, could see me now.

They called me "Hero," I who had never had a name before! After the fire the master and mistress did not want me out of their sight and I heard master say, "Emily, don't you think we ought to get another cat for the heavy work down stairs, such as killing the rats and mice?" She said, "Yes." My heart gave a great bound for I thought of Tom, my nephew, who was a fine young cat.

The next day I took a walk, unknown to the household. My collar gave me prestige and no one dared molest me. I made my way to the old provision store and found mother, who was getting quite stout, dozing in the garden.

She was pleased to hear of my prosperity and thought I looked extremely well. I told her about the chance for another cat at our house, and suggested Tom, whom I knew she had labored to bring up to be a credit to us all. I explained to her how I had the run of the library and could direct his education; this made her see what a great advantage it would be to him. She said that my brother Teddy had grown fat and lazy and was not very valuable to her, thus making it harder to spare Tom, but that she would not stand in his way. So Tom went in and spruced up a bit and I took him home with me. The cook took a liking to him at once, and that meant a good deal for his future welfare. The master and mistress liked his looks and were satisfied with my choice, and the cook allowed me to take him upstairs, whenever our people were out. Thus I taught him many things, so that when I passed away he could take my place in the household.

I began to settle down into a calm middle age, happy and contented; my working days were over and I felt that I had earned a rest.

Lord Roberts' people went to the same seashore resort that ours did and, to my delight, I was to go also, leaving Tom with the caretaker to protect

the house from rats and mice in our absence. I enjoyed myself every summer by going down to the beach and watching the children in bathing and then sunning myself on the piazza. I did not have much to do, but an occasional mouse would find to his sorrow that I slept with one eye open. We did not remain very late in the fall, but one summer, as Lord Roberts' family wished to make a longer season, we stayed also. I had noticed that after the houses were closed there were many cats about. Some would come to the back door and our cook, who was tender-hearted, would throw food out to them. I did not understand this at first but soon found out what it meant. Their owners had returned to the city and had left them to look out for themselves; the only excuse was that it was too much trouble to carry them back or, very possibly they were forgotten in the moving. Oh, what a hungry horde we saw them become as we stayed through October! Their gaunt bodies and hollow eyes which glowed like coals of fire, would have been a reproach to the ones who had left them.

Our people finally began to pack up and word was given that the next day we should all go back to the city. I was pleased for it did seem good to think of returning to my beautiful home. Lord Roberts announced that his people were going the same day, and was as pleased over it as I was. While the things were being put on express teams I went out to say good-by to some of my friends, as I had made the acquaintance of a number of cats during my stay at the shore. It astonished me to find them in such a pitiable condition, and to find that they had given up hopes that their people would ever return for them. I could not understand this state of things and spent some time trying to console and cheer them. They paced wildly up and down, their thin bodies and hungry faces revealing their inward sufferings and they now began to realize that cold weather was approaching. Their plight was a serious thing to me and the time passed on for I hated to leave them to their misery, going back as I was to a comfortable home. When at last I hurried back, what was my horror to find that the family had gone and that the house was boarded up.

I walked around the house several times but no one was there. I became frenzied with fear. The wind was North and it was getting colder with the approach of night. I thought of Lord Roberts and proceeded to his house where I found that not only had his people gone but that he had been left locked up in the house.

CHAPTER VII

I tried to be brave, but when I heard the pitiful cries of Lord Roberts, I broke down and almost gave up in despair. This, then, was the end of my dreams of a happy life during my old age. Oh, human beings! Could you realize how dependent we are upon your kindness, you would never forget us in a time like this. I wished that I was a human being possessed of a soul, and could pray to God for deliverance from such misery as I had witnessed, when suddenly I remembered that I had heard a teacher in one of the class-rooms read from the Bible one morning that not even a sparrow could fall to the ground and He not heed. It gave me courage for I thought if He could care for a sparrow, He would surely protect us from harm. I felt better and saying words of encouragement to Lord Roberts, went back to the house where I crawled under the piazza and remained there throughout the dreary night.

What a cruel awakening, no fire and nothing to eat. I dragged myself to

Lord Roberts and found that he had fared somewhat better, for he had discovered a pan of water under the ice-chest, and (he hated to admit it) had caught and eaten a mouse (I thought again of his liver for breakfast). He said that he knew they would come back for us and I really thought myself that they would as soon as they found that we were missing. It had not rained for some time and, as I walked down to the beach, I saw some of the cats who had been left go down and try to lap up the salt water. It seemed to make them more frantic and miserable than ever.

Some of these cats had been kept alive by eating such things as they could find in the refuse left by the summer people. A few rats and mice had helped to keep them alive, and one poor creature had been so hungry that he had pushed his head into an empty tomato can, and as he could not get it out was rushing wildly about, shaking the can with much violence. He got to be a horror to us all, but we could not help him and he finally smothered to death. Oh, peaceful release from torture! Such maddening thirst and not a drop of water to be had. I went around to see how Lord Roberts was getting along and found him discouraged and heart broken. He said, "It can not be possible that our people have abandoned us, it must be some horrible mistake." I went every day to the main road and watched for motor cars, which never came. I grew thinner and thinner. There were no city streets to get a living from, no milk jars; nothing but a barren waste, over which the wind howled like a lost soul, and the cruel sea, with its waste of water, but none to drink. What torments we all suffered! Yet it was all so needless. How could our people eat, drink, and be merry while we were starving? I got so hungry that I became delirious with fever. In the long watches of the quiet nights I dreamed of my mother and my childhood. Soon in my vision I was wandering without a home, then came to my new people and my bountiful home. I awoke with parched mouth, weak from hunger and thirst.

The next morning I dragged myself to the front path and feebly lay down in despair. When suddenly "What was that I heard?" I started up--surely a dream--No! a reality!!

The welcome sound of a motor car!!! In a few minutes a car came thundering up the drive. It was our own--my own--and I was saved. They all jumped out and lifted me tenderly up and I saw tears in the eyes of my mistress. It seemed that they thought I had been lost from the car and had given me up until one of the family said, "Perhaps we did not take him on at all. Let us go back and see." Business, however, had kept the master so tied up that he could not spare the car. After my rescue they tried to make me comfortable but I thought of poor Lord Roberts and tried to tell them of his plight, and when the car was slowly nearing his house I flung myself out and crept to his window and when they followed, his cry of despair made them understand, and Lord Roberts was saved!

How happy I was when we reached home and how grateful when the mistress went to the telephone and called up the kind lady of the Animal Rescue League. She told her that there were a dozen or more abandoned cats at the shore and giving directions to her begged her to go, or send at once to see that, if they could not be saved, they would be put out of their misery. A happy, peaceful life with dear Tom for a companion followed from then on. Everyone is so kind and considerate to me now in my old age that I plead for the others, the less fortunate ones of my species--and I also pray that all who read these simple annals of my life will find it in their hearts to remember their faithful feline friends and never under any circumstances be tempted to ill-use or abandon them.

And as I sit in the gentle glow of the firelight, the light of my life growing dimmer day by day, waiting to join the great majority, I thank the God of my master, that I am no longer a nomad, a wanderer, and my heart goes out to those who are. Shall ye wilfully abandon His creatures, ye shall not enjoy peace in the hereafter!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, THE NOMAD OF THE NINE LIVES ***

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