

# Miss Henderson's Thanksgiving Day

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THANKSGIVING day dawned clearly and frostily upon the little village of Castleton Hollow. The stage, which connected daily with the nearest railroad station—for as yet Castleton Hollow had not arrived at the dignity of one of its own—came fully freighted both inside and out. There were children and children's children, who, in the pursuit of fortune, had strayed away from the homes where they first saw the light, but who were now returning to revive around the old familiar hearth the associations and recollections of their early days.

Great were the preparations among the housewives of Castleton Hollow. That must indeed be a poor household which, on this occasion, could not boast its turkey and plum pudding, those well-established dishes, not to mention its long rows of pies—apple, mince and pumpkin—wherewith the Thanksgiving board is wont to be garnished.

But it is not of the households generally that I propose to speak. Let the reader accompany me in imagination to a rather prim-looking brick mansion, situated on the principal street, but at some distance back, being separated from it by a front yard. Between this yard and the fence, ran a prim-looking hedge of very formal cut, being cropped in the most careful manner, lest one twig should by chance have the presumption to grow higher than its kindred. It was a two story house, containing in each story one room on either side of the front door, making, of course, four in all.

If we go in, we shall find the outward primness well supported by the appearance of things within. In the front parlor—we may peep through the door, but it would be high treason in the present moistened state of our boots, to step within its sacred precincts—there are six high backed chairs standing in state, two at each window. One can easily see from the general arrangement of the furniture, that from romping children, unceremonious kittens, and unhallowed intruders generally, this room is most sacredly guarded.

Without speaking particularly of the other rooms, which, though not furnished in so stately a manner, bear a family resemblance to „the best room“, we will usher the reader into the opposite room, where he will find the owner and occupant of this prim-looking residence.

Courteous reader, Miss Hetty Henderson. Miss Hetty Henderson, let me make you acquainted with this lady (or gentleman), who is desirous of knowing you better.

Miss Hetty Henderson, with whom the reader has just passed through the ceremony of introduction, is a maiden of some thirty-five summers, attired in a sober-looking dress, of irreproachable neatness, but most formal cut. She is the only occupant of the house, of which likewise she is proprietor. Her father, who was the village physician, died some ten years since, leaving to Hetty, or perhaps I should give her full name, Henrietta, his only child, the house in which he lived, and some four thousand dollars in bank stock, on the income of which she lived very comfortably.

Somehow, Miss Hetty had never married, though, such is the mercenary nature of man, the rumor of her inheritance brought to her feet several suitors. But Miss Hetty had resolved never to marry—at least, this was her invariable answer to matrimonial offers, and so after a time it came to be understood that she was fixed for life—an old maid. What reasons impelled her to this course were not known, but possibly the reader will be furnished with a clue before he finishes this narrative.

Meanwhile, the invariable effect of a single and solitary life combined, attended Hetty. She grew precise, prim and methodical to a painful degree. It would have been quite a relish if one could have detected a stray thread even upon her well swept carpet, but such was never the case.

On this particular day—this Thanksgiving day of which we are speaking—Miss Hetty had completed her culinary preparations, that is, she had stuffed her turkey, and put it in the oven, and kneaded her pudding, for, though but one would be present at the dinner, and that herself, her conscience would not have acquitted her, if she had not made all the preparations to which she had been accustomed on such occasions.

This done, she sat down to her knitting, casting a glance every now and then at the oven to make sure that all was going on well. It was a quiet morning, and Miss Hetty began to think to the clicking of her knitting needles.

„After all,“ thought she, „it’s rather solitary taking dinner alone, and that on Thanksgiving day. I remember a long time ago, when my father was living, and my brothers and sisters, what a merry time we used to have round eth table. But they are all dead, and I—I alone am left!“

Miss Hetty sighed, but after a while the recollections of those old times returned. She tried to shake them off, but they had a fascination about them after all, and would not go at her bidding.

„There used to be another there,“ thought she, „Nick Anderson. He, too, I fear, is dead.“

Hetty heaved a thoughtful sigh, and a faint color came into her cheeks. She had reason. This Nicholas Anderson had been a medical student, apprenticed to her father, or rather placed with him to be prepared for his profession. He was, perhaps, a year older than Hetty, and had regarded her with more than ordinary warmth of affection. He had, in fact, proposed to her, and had been conditionally accepted, on a year’s probation. The trouble was, he was a little disposed to be wild, and being naturally of a lively and careless temperament, did not exercise sufficient discrimination in the choice of his associates. Hetty had loved him as warmly as one of her nature could love. She was not one who would be drawn away beyond the dictates of reason and judgment by the force of affection. Still it was not without a feeling of deep sorrow—deeper than her calm manner led him to suspect—that at the end of the year’s probation, she informed Anderson that the result of his trial was not favorable to his suit, and that henceforth he must give up all thoughts of her.

To his vehement asseverations, promises and protestations, she returned the same steady and inflexible answer, and, at the close of the interview, he left her, quite as full of indignation against her as of grief for his rejection.

That night his clothing was packed up, and lowered from the window, and when the next morning dawned it was found that he had left the house, and as was intimated in a slight note pencilled and left on the table in his room, never to return again.

While Miss Henderson’s mind was far back in the past, she had not observed the approach of a man, shabbily attired, accompanied by a little girl, apparently some eight years of age. The man’s face bore the impress of many cares and hardships. The little girl was of delicate appearance, and an occasional shiver showed that her garments were too thin to protect her sufficiently from the inclemency of the weather.

„This is the place, Henrietta,“ said the traveller at length, pausing at the head of the gravelled walk which led up to the front door of the prim-looking brick house.

Together they entered, and a moment afterwards, just as Miss Hetty was preparing to lay the cloth for dinner, a knock sounded through the house.

„Goodness!“ said Miss Hetty, fluttered, „who can it be that wants to see me at this hour?“

Smoothing down her apron, and giving a look at the glass to make sure that her hair was in order, she hastened to the door.

„Will it be asking too much, madam, to request a seat by your fire for myself and little girl for a few moments? It is very cold.“

Miss Hetty could feel that it was cold. Somehow, too, the appealing expression of the little girl’s face touched her, so she threw the door wide open, and bade them enter.

Miss Hetty went on preparing the table for dinner. A most delightful odor issued from the oven, one door of which was open, lest the turkey should overdo. Miss Hetty could not help observing the wistful glance cast by that little girl towards the tempting dish as she placed it on the table.

„Poor little creature,“ thought she, „I suppose it is a long time since she has had a good dinner.“

Then the thought struck her: „Here I am alone to eat all this. There is plenty enough for half a dozen. How much these poor people would relish it.“

By this time the table was arranged.

„Sir,“ said she, turning to the traveller, „you look as if you were hungry as well as cold. If you and your little daughter would like to sit up, I should be happy to have you.“

„Thank you, madam,“ was the grateful reply. „We are hungry, and shall be much indebted to your kindness.“

It was rather a novel situation for Miss Hetty, sitting at the head of the table, dispensing food to others beside herself. There was something rather agreeable about it.

„Will you have some of the dressing, little girl—I have to call you that, for I don't know your name,“ she added, in an inquiring tone.

„Her name is Henrietta, but I generally call her Hetty,“ said the traveller.

„What!“ said Miss Hetty, dropping the spoon in surprise.

„She was named after a very dear friend of mine,“ said he, sighing.

„May I ask,“ said Miss Hetty, with excusable curiosity, „what was the name of this friend. I begin to feel quite an interest in your little girl,“ she added, half apologetically.

„Her name was Henrietta Henderson,“ said the stranger.

„Why, that is my name,“ ejaculated Miss Hetty.

„And she was named after you,“ said the stranger, composedly.

„Why, who in the world are you?“ she asked, her heart beginning to beat unwontedly fast.

„Then you don't remember me?“ said he, rising, and looking steadily at Miss Hetty. „Yet you knew me well in bygone days—none better. At one time it was thought you would have joined your destiny to mine—“

„Nick Anderson!“ said Miss Hetty, rising in confusion.

„You are right. You rejected me, because you did not feel secure of my principles. The next day, in despair at your refusal, I left the house, and, ere forty-eight hours had passed, was on my way to India. I had not formed the design of going to India in particular, but in my then state of mind I cared not whither I went. One resolution I formed, that I would prove by my conduct that your apprehensions were ill-founded. I got into a profitable business. In time I married—not that I had forgotten you, but that I was solitary and needed companionship. I had ceased to hope for yours. By-and-by a daughter was born. True to my old love, I named her Hetty, and pleased myself with the thought that she bore some resemblance to you. Since then, my wife has died, misfortunes have come upon me, and I found myself deprived of all my property. Then came yearnings for my native soil. I have returned, as you see, not as I departed, but poor and careworn.“

While Nicholas was speaking, Miss Hetty's mind was filled with conflicting emotions. At length, extending her hand frankly, she said:

„I feel that I was too hasty, Nicholas. I should have tried you longer. But at least I may repair my injustice. I have enough for us all. You shall come and live with me.“

„I can only accept your generous offer on one condition,“ said Nicholas.

„And what is that?“

„That you will be my wife!“

A vivid blush came over Miss Hetty's countenance. She couldn't think of such a thing, she said. Nevertheless, an hour afterwards the two united lovers had fixed upon the marriage day.

The house does not look so prim as it used to do. The yard is redolent with many fragrant flowers; the front door is half open, revealing a little girl playing with a kitten.

„Hetty,“ says a matronly lady, „you have got the ball of yarn all over the floor. What would your father say if he should see it?“

„Never mind, mother, it was only kitty that did it.“

Marriage has filled up a void in the heart of Miss Hetty. Though not so prim, or perhaps careful, as she used to be, she is a good deal happier. Three hearts are filled with thankfulness at every return of MISS HENDERSON'S THANKSGIVING DAY.

