

The Free Press Short Story

THE MIRACLE IN THE OVEN

ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL

"A BEELS kind of all-onesome!" admitted Glory, as she was on her knees piling birch sticks beside the fireplace. She made them into a beautiful symmetrical heap before she sat back on her heels to survey her work. Already she had made coals and fasted bread over the coals. She had unpacked her suitcase upstairs and set the picture of the Dears on the dresser to smile at her; that was the best they could do at welcoming her home since they were on the other side of the Atlantic.

An hour had Glory been here in the old place. Of course she had expected to meet Hannah Ann at the junction and the two of them come on together. That had been the long-distance plan of the Dears for her and her beloved twin's Thanksgiving vacation. Hannah Ann, the maid, had had gone to her sister's when her master and mistress left for their year abroad, had apparently failed Glory, but the beloved twin, whose other name was Jerry, would not, for he was coming Thanksgiving morning. "We'll have a glorious time!" she had written.

"What's a Hannah Ann more or less!" laughed Glory as she busied herself with her piling again. "Guess we can cook a Thanksgiving dinner—guess I can." She was glad there was plenty to do to pass the time until Jerry came. There were plenty of birch sticks to warm the time! Cookies come first, she would make a crockful. She would make pies, stuff the turkey, cook vegetables, and Thanksgiving Day, after the stage brought Jerry, she would sweep him a bow and say, "Dinner is served."

This was a joke, being here alone—if you were inclined to call it a joke; Glory called it that. Hannah Ann or no, Hannah Ann, there was going to be a Thanksgiving dinner—the "Folks"—the twins' little child version of the original name, the Oaks. There was going to be a turkey weighing eleven pounds, yes sir! Glory had already bought it "on the hoof" as the farmer put it humorously, and it was to be delivered to-day dressed and ready for the oven, Glory's oven.

"Glad I stopped at the farm on the way up, and I am glad Hannah Ann taught me to cook—thank you, Hannah Ann!" She was glad about so many things, this Glory person. Gladdest of all that Jerry, the beloved, was so near. What was the use of being twins if you did not get together for a gorgeous reunion, and this was going to be it!

"Wonder who the next-door people are this time?" Glory had time to think as she flew about the big warm kitchen gathering her tools for the coming assemblage. That next-door family was never the same when the twins came home for vacations. Sometimes the tiny house was full, sometimes only a man and woman. It was full, it was a children's wonderland, it was a feast. One little larger child, seemed to be in a whirl of excitement of some sort. She was whirling distractedly but you could see joyously, issuing orders to a little smaller ones. Glory's window was open to the mid October air and an order or two drifted in. The next-door house was so terribly neat door.

"Don't shake the rugs so close up to her window, Ellie; take them to the other side of the house. Don't you see her kitchen window's open? Her goodness, if children aren't the unnotic'nest! Sarahbelle, you mind the twins while I dress the turkey, we are going to call him a turkey, too! It's his other name—chickens just his everyday name! Wished he had more room inside to stuff."

A new little voice piped, "Wished he had four legs or five legs!" "Aren't two legs something to thanksgiving for? And a crock and a neck and wings—and giblets! I wonder, did any of you see her? When she went in, I mean? Weren't they a living soul with her? You saw her, Sarahbelle?"

A voice which must be Sarahbelle's replied, "Just her alone in a furry big cloak. What of her I saw under her hat was simply lovely!" "Oh, lovely—what's lovely and lovely! Poor thing! I know what! If nobody except she is there Thanksgiving, we'll invite her to dinner with us. That's what mother if she's home from the hospital'd do. Now all of you clear out so my mind can be empty of everything but stuffing."

Glory, at her window, suddenly made a queer sound and whether it was a laugh or a sob would be hard to tell. The voices had been so distinct and sweet. For the first time in her life she was glad the little house-lugged the big one so closely, and she was glad the two windows were open. She went on about her baking with a warm feeling of company close by—one, two, three, five companies! She counted them on her fingers—Ellie, Sarahbelle, the twins and the cook!

eleven-pound turkey and she put in her evening stuffing it, as she had seen Hannah Ann do it. With lamps lighted in a row, the warm kitchen was a pleasant place even to be alone in. It was beginning to smell Thanksgiving!

At bedtime Glory experienced her first loneliness. For company she slept in the room nearest the little house of voices. It was quite dark over there but she was sure she heard a little voice singing. Wrapping herself in a quilt, Glory raised her window, wider and frankly listened. It was a lullaby song and she pictured one of the twins wakened and being lulled by that darling voice, because "mother" was at a "noddle." The oddly warm night was full of stars and country noises and that little singing voice. "Who's lonesome?" scoffed Glory, hopping into bed.

The next day, which was the day before Thanksgiving, was full to the brim of happy, warm, good-smelling work, and Glory sang as she hustled about. It was hard having the Dears a whole ocean away—hard to be quite so thankful at Thanksgiving time—and Hannah Ann's failure to appear was too provoking, but the sun-shine and the birch sticks smacked and Jerry was on his way to her; so why not sing? "Tra, la-la, la-la," sang Glory.

"Nice brown on that mince pie—congratulate you, Cook! Nice stuffing for the Turk; Jerry'll love it. Nobody can say I'm not an apt pupil of Hannah Ann. I will put the next-door cookies in this big crock—no, I won't eat another one! When shall I take them over?" She began to wish they were over there and done with; she dreamed bursting in with: "Here's some cookies for your Thanksgiving." If they were as dainty children as their voices sounded, she decided, "I'll go this afternoon when my work is done." They would probably be more cleared up and ready for company. The little-older voice had sounded as if it would rather be cleared up for strangers. You can hear pride in voices if you have a good listening ear, this Glory person reflected sagely. She went on with her working and singing and thanksgiving.

The mail at the Oaks was brought by a Rural Route-delivery man—in a noisy little car. Glory heard her letters rattling way down the road. With a coat and her shoulders she ran to the gate to meet it. Of course there would not be another letter from the Dears after yesterday's, but the noise was certainly getting ready to stop, so there must be some mail! Even a circular or a newspaper would be company. "Two!" cried Glory. "Real letters—no, one's a dispatch!"

"Yes, I told the telegraph boy I could get it here sooner than he could on bicycle, for I didn't have many hops to make this time. I guess your telephone isn't on the job; they tried but couldn't get anybody."

"No—no, it doesn't go," said Glory absently. She was gazing at the yellow envelope that might so easily carry bad news. Of course not, for in these days people telegraphed for you to shut the windows or to wish you a merry Thanksgiving!

It was bad news. "Not," as Glory said soberly, "bad news; not so bad as that, but bad enough." Jerry was not coming. Not coming to her dinner that was almost cooked. The message repeated itself tollingly, like a sad bell in her heart. For the first minutes it seemed to the disappointed girl as if nothing could be worse, then she caught at her courage with both hands, and actually managed a pale laugh. Actually joked with fate: "All right, then, I'll have both legs and neck and wings—and giblets!" The picture of her lone self sitting down to the table to-morrow with a whole Thanksgiving dinner to eat, and no jolly twin brother opposite to help—a desolate day with a desolate week-end to come—was a little too much to ask even of a gallant courage. Glory turned back to the house with tears, running down her cheeks in spite of her.

"She's a-crying," one little voice told another. "Seems as if I'm going to cry, Sarahbelle, you get me a clean handkerchief. Wish I could comfort her—"

"Aid me!" "Wished I could, too!" The telegram read: "Invited to Ted Moffitt for Thanksgiving Great Fun Six fellows Jerry." Young Moffitt was Jerry's chum. Six fellows meant the boys would have great fun together.

"No, I won't be hurt! I'll want him to have great fun! I'll have fun; nobody shall stop me!" She was so dreadfully hurt, nevertheless, for being twins somehow made the disappointment worse. Glory dropped into a chair and rocked violently. It seemed to help and by and by the chair rocked more gently, rocked very gently, stopped.

"There, I feel better! I've rocked the meanness out of me I hope. Glory, you listen to me! Stop looking as if you'd lost your last friend. Jerry is still a friend! Of course six fellows are greater fun than one sister!" At the end of rather a difficult hour she was herself again, and she insisted upon the singing. "Tra, la-la, la-la," she filled in a high clear key. She did not dare to stop. She decided it was safer to tra-la the rest of the week!

cookies. Nothing like tea and cookies for a tonic, even at eighteen. The all-alone lady sipped and nibbled with the gravity and deliberation of three that age and the process was distinctly comforting. Afterward she set her kitchen to right, put on more birch sticks, and proceeded to write the Dears. No lovelier way in the world to make time pass.

"Dear Dears," she wrote. "Here I am at the 'Folks.' Come into the pantry and I'll show you the Thanksgiving dinner in a row! Ever see a plumber Turk in your lives? Eleven pounds on the hoof! He is all ready except a thorough heating to-morrow—nothing like being ready! Of course she couldn't wait till Thanksgiving morning to cook him! one of you is saving to the other of you. That child, Glory, never could wait! Well, what if?" The letter proceeded gaily, page after page. No word in it of Hannah Ann's defection appeared, and no word of Jerry's. Why trouble Dears who were thirty-five hundred miles off? Just skipping Hannah Ann and Jerry was kinder. Just talking about the weather and the turkey and the little next-door voices, that was better. It was surprising how many pages she could write about weather and turkey and voices!

Thanksgiving morning the sun woke Glory and she lay for a startled moment remembering things that hurt. A long day stretched before her and she wondered how she could sing a whole long day through! "Get up, all-alone lady, you lazy creature, and pipe up!" she fairly shouted. "Sing, 'Glory, Glory, hallelujah, this day goes marching on.' It will march on. Go downstairs and set it marching. Hark, somebody's knocking at the kitchen door!"

At the window Glory could see a little group of bundled figures. The little-larger bundled figure was knocking. Glory leaned out of the window. "Yes! I'm not dressed, you see, may I answer out of the window?"

"Oh, oh, yes'm. We're the folks next door and we kind o' thought perhaps maybe you would baste our turk—turkey—firmly—while we went to our mother's hospitable to—thanksgiving. It's visiting day and they's a bus close and she'll be surprised. We want to surprise her. We have to leave the turkey roasting and Sarahbelle thought perhaps you would. Sarahbelle's the greatest suggester! The basting spoon is right there and there is plenty of water to baste with."

"Of course, oh, I'd love to. You go right along and don't think of turkeys till you get back. I hope your mother is getting better."

"Yes'm, we hope." Glory dressed swiftly. The day had taken on a keen interest. She would go over before she ate breakfast. Their turkey should be basted and browned beautifully! She slipped across the yard and found the door opened into a small, hot kitchen full of a disturbing odor. Glory sniffed and darted to the stove.

The turkey was a chicken, a little chicken. A pathetic "turkey" that had indeed been basted with water and burned a little between bastings. It was enough to make you cry. Glory crouched before the "turkey" and cried. "The poor dear! So you are their Thanksgiving dinner, are you? Oh, aren't you ashamed of yourself?" The chicken was scraggy and knobby with some sort of stuffing. Glory shuddered and it only had two legs! It takes but a flash of time to have a beautiful thought while sitting on the floor before the skinny little chicken masquerading gallantly as a turkey. When Glory arose to her feet, she knew what was going to happen in that oven and laughed with delight. That chicken was going to grow to be a turkey!

Exactly what happened in the next-door house when the children arrived, Glory never knew, for something happened at the "Folks" too. Jerry, the beloved twin, and Hannah Ann came together and appeared before the innocent and busy Glory at her oven door. "Jerry! Hannah Ann!"

"Of course Jerry, didn't you know what train I was coming on? My, but it is good to see you again!" "But you said in your telegram—"

"In my what?" "In my telegram. You said you had been invited to your chum's, six of you, and were going to have great fun."

"First I've heard of any telegram. Hold on! Ted threatened to send one, but I thought he was joking. He was set on my going, but Glory, you don't mean to say you believed I'd do it?"

"I'm sorry—oh, no, I'm not! All my room is taken up being glad! Oh, Jerry, Jerry, where's Hannah Ann? Was it her ghost I thought came in with you?" Hannah Ann's voice came from above. "I'm changing my dress. Be right down and get some kind of dinner. Wasn't real messes after all. When they un-quarantined me, I started hot foot. Was no time to write."

him up somehow; there's ways. And I'll mix up a pudding about all raisins! When dinner is ready, I'll blow the old dinner, horn for you!"

In the little house next door she miracle in the oven had been discovered and all the voices were running at once. Pandemonium reigned, for mother was getting better and now a regular turkey had replaced the make-believe.

"All of you that can, wash your faces and hands. I'll scrub the rest. We're going and thank her in procession. Ellie, you can speak your piece, and Sarahbelle can sing. 'Darling, I Am Growing Old,' and me and the twins'll just stand by. Unless—" the voice a little older than the rest rose ecstatically—"unless I have to kiss her."

"The world that day was full of thanksgiving. Some had turkeys, some scraggy little chickens that did their best, but none, none at all, could have been 'thankfuler' than this brother and sister who sat side by side.

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NINETEEN DAYS HAD SEPTEMBER

September had only nineteen days in the year 1752, as you will see if you visit the British Museum Reading Room and ask for a copy of Riecher's "British Meridia" for that year. The British Meridia was Whitaker's Almanack of that time.

All this happened for a rather curious reason. Until 1752 Great Britain used the Julian Calendar. The compiler of this calendar many centuries before had not been able to measure quite accurately the length of a year. The result was that as time went on the error grew and grew, and if some change had not been made we should eventually have been skating when it was mid-summer, according to the almanack and sun-bathing at official Christmas-time.

Something had to be done, and it was decided to cut eleven days out of September in 1752, and then to adopt a new calendar which would render errors impossible in the future.

This step produced tremendous agitation. Many people thought they had been robbed of eleven days of their lives, and there were hostile demonstrations in many parts of the country.

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Did You Ever Stop to Think?

By EDSON R. WAITE, Shawnee, Oklahoma

H. R. Young, Advertising Director of the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch, says:

"To my notion a well known newspaper publisher has made a correct diagnosis of why business conditions are what they are to-day. He says, 'The minds of too many men are confused. There are too many leaders standing still, arguing, apparently waiting for some one to produce a magic formula which will restore conditions to a sound basis.'

"In every previous depression it was the survival of the fittest and so it will be to-day. I have before me quite a list of outstanding manufacturers, department stores and national advertisers—who reported greatly increased earnings in 1931 as compared to 1930 and these were all outstanding advertisers during 1931.

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"You must make people see your advertisement, then you must make them read it, understand it and believe it and last you must make them want what you have to sell."

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