



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Turkey for the Stuffing

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It always made Ben feel solemn to watch the river in a storm. Today it was grey and rough and loud. The few boats heading down toward Lake Huron pitched so hard that their decks tilted first one way, then the other, their sides crusted with ice.

"Gran, what day is it?" he asked at last, turning from the window to their warm little room.

"Wednesday, Benny," said the small old woman bent over the stove.

"Then tomorrow's Thanksgiving, and the Rosses are having a turkey!" Ben said. "What are we having, Gran?"

Mrs. Moxon looked over her glasses at her grandson, small and thin in his patched, faded clothes, his face bright and eager.

"Sonny, what do you think Gran has?" she asked gently.

The hope drained out of his face. He blinked hard so the tears wouldn't spill. He didn't need to be told how bare the cupboard was, because he had carried in everything on its shelves himself: bacon and smoked fish enough for the winter, flour, potatoes, a few other vegetables.

Once he had bravely put the first disappointment away, he begged, "Tell me about a real Thanksgiving dinner." Mrs. Moxon took off her spectacles and leaned back carefully in her broken-rockered chair.

"I remember one Thanksgiving when your pa was alive. A dinner fit for a king. A ten-pound turkey with bread stuffing. I put in the sage and onions with my own hands."

"We could have stuffing," Ben broke in.

"So we could, sonny. So we could. It takes you to think of things." She patted his small hand on her knee. "It never would have come to me that we could have turkey stuffing without any turkey."

Ben glowed. "What else was there, Gran?"

"Land, child. Turnips, mashed potatoes, mince pie. And your pa bought two pounds of grapes, though grapes cost a fortune that time of year. Nobody could

ask for a better dinner."

"We could have one just like it," said Ben hopefully, "all but the turkey and the mince pie and the grapes."

"So we can, and we will," said the old woman. "Trust you to make the best of things." And they smiled at each other.

Next morning Ben watched his grandmother stir an egg, some sage, and chopped onion into a bowl of dry bread, pour boiling water over it, and slide it into the oven.

"Your father said I made the best stuffing he ever ate," she said. "We'll see how it comes out, Benny."

"I can hardly wait!" Ben said, skipping. "I'll go down to the beach and pick up driftwood till it's ready. Call me when everything's nearly done."

Yesterday's storm had left plenty of boards and log ends on the beach, just right for Gran's stove. Ben worked so hard that he never noticed the big barge coming slowly down the river, towing two boats behind it, until a voice called:

"Hullo, kid! What are you working so hard for on Thanksgiving?"

He straightened up. The captain stood by the pilot house, shouting through a great trumpet.



"I'm waiting for dinner to cook!" Ben answered in his piping voice.

"Can't hear you!" the captain roared. "Run and get your horn and talk to me!"

Ben ran up the hill to Mrs. Ross's and borrowed her tin megaphone. Every house along the St. Mary's has one, because the people on the boats and the people on shore like to call "How do you do?" to each other. It was nearly as long as Ben, and he could barely hold it straight.

"I'm waiting for dinner to cook!" he shouted again, and this time the captain heard.

"Turkey, I suppose?"

"No, but we're having turkey stuffing!" Ben said proudly.

"Turkey stuffing and no turkey! That's the best I've heard all year!" The captain dropped his trumpet and doubled over laughing. Luckily, Ben couldn't hear. "What else?" the captain called, once he had his breath. "Mince pie with no mince?"

"No, sir!" Ben's voice was shrill but clear. "My father had mince pie one Thanksgiving, though."

"Did he, now?" The captain lowered his trumpet again. "That boy's all right," he told the first mate. "Too plucky to laugh at. Morgan, tell the cook to get ready half a turkey and a mince pie, and a small basket of grapes. We'll tie them to a plank and float them ashore. Tell him to hurry, or we'll be too far downstream." Then he raised the trumpet.

"Say, kid, can you row that boat tied to your dock?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then get out on the river. I'm sending you something for your Thanksgiving. You're going to have turkey for that stuffing."

Ben shoved the rowboat off in no time, and soon the end of a plank came bobbing toward him over the water, loaded with good things. How he smacked his lips as he lifted them into the boat, and how pleased he was for Gran!

"First the stuffing, then the turkey!" he said. "My, ain't I lucky?"

He didn't know the captain had called him plucky, or that luck has a way of following pluck.

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