

Ham Hocks and Turnip Greens

(an Untethered Tale)

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The most recent addition to this Untethered Tale was made on Friday, September 10, 2004. The Untethered Tale was never completed.

This document is approximately 2,173 words long.

Additional stories are available on my personal website.

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She sat down at the dining room table, placed her fingertips firmly on the keys of her old Underwood, and started typing.

*It had rained for 40 days and 40 nights. Well, you can't say for sure if it rained at night because of being asleep, but at least for 40 days. Of course, some days it might not have rained absolutely **all** day, maybe just part of the day. So if you figured on how many hours it actually rained it might only add up to less than 40 days, maybe 20 in all, but that's still a lot of rain. Then again, maybe some days it didn't rain completely full speed, like maybe just showers or sprinkling or maybe even just some mist so maybe, if you figure the actual amount of water per hour, all in all it only added up to maybe five or ten days at most. Of course, with only five days out of 40 days, it might be a little hard to remember just how many there really were, especially if some of them only had rain for a few minutes or so, it would be easy to miss that so you could really honestly only say that it might have rained a day or two and with so little rain in 40 days it's pretty hard to remember for sure. Actually, maybe it was more than 40 days ago, that last rainy day, and if you say you're talking about it raining for 40 days then you really mean the last, most recent 40 days, so maybe it didn't rain at all during the last 40 days.*

That would sure explain why the yard is so darned dry. Dry heck. Parched. Dust puffs up when you walk across it. Worse yet, the whole darned neighborhood is blistered from the heat and dry weather. They even said on the radio that the Governor was going to declare the whole darned state to be a disaster area because of the

She ripped the sheet of paper out of the typewriter, wadded it into a little ball, and threw it onto the big pile of wadded paper under which her trash can was deeply buried.

"Dammit!" she muttered, getting up. "This ain't doin' me no good at all! I might as well **just** be a cat, for all that I've accomplished. At least they have an excuse; no opposable thumbs!" She got up and headed for the kitchen. Writing always gave her an appetite. About the time she had rattled the first pan, Plumpkin came in and started meowing. "I want some, Mommie! I want some!" she said. "Sweetie, you don't even know what I'm making. You might not like it," the woman told her. "But I want some," said Plumpkin. "Well, Little One, its not ready. You'll just have to wait." "Okay," said the kitty, "brush me while I wait." The woman felt exasperated, and started to try to explain to the silly little animal that it would be impossible to both brush her and make the meal at the same time, but before she had a chance to begin the pointless lesson, the phone rang. It didn't occur to her to wonder until much later, why, after all these years, the cat had suddenly started talking. She had always just assumed that if cats *could* talk, they *wouldn't*. She reached for the phone, "Hello?"

"Meeooow?"

"Pluuuuumpkiiiiin," she called, "It's for yooouuuuu!"

She pressed the speakerphone button and went back into the kitchen, passing Plumpkin as she strolled passed her toward the hallway telephone.

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In the kitchen, she wondered what to fix. “Hmmm. Ah!” she thought. “Just the thing! Ham hocks and turnip greens! I have a big bowl of leftovers. That’ll do!”

While she was preparing her meal, it crept back into her mind. She tried not to think about it.

Just as a little extra treat for herself, she also got out her fancy tea pot, the white one with the pretty bluebonnets painted on it.

“Ah,” she said mimicking a British accent, “a spot of tea!” She put the teapot over medium heat.

She thought of it again, and forced herself to think of something else.

“Biscuits! Ham hocks, turnip greens, tea, and biscuits!”

She was still thinking of it. No use. She could stuff herself until she was a blimp and she’d still think of it. While the tea water was heating, she went back into the dining room, drawn as if by a string. She couldn’t not do it. The pull was too strong. Yes, there it was, on the table. The flier.

Stupid Story Contest!

Write the Stupidest Story and win a Free \$50 gift certificate to Blandford’s Books and Things!

5000 Words Or Less!

Deadline, December 20!

Everything else forgotten, she sat down at the dining room table, placed her fingertips firmly on the keys of her old Underwood, and started typing.

“A turnip and an olive were sitting next to each other on a bus...”

“Oh, Jeeeeezzzzz!” she mumbled under her breath, and ripped the page from the typewriter. It, too, joined the growing heap. She tapped her nails on the table, thinking. After a few moments, she noticed that the meowing in the hallway had become, well, quite loud. Heated. They seemed to be arguing. She went to check.

Plumpkin was still at the phone, and now Whirly-Gig had joined the conversation. She saw his fluffy grey tail slapping the floor in anger before both cats noticed her presence and went silent. She stared at them. They stared back. Pointedly. “What’s going on in here?” she inquired. Neither one answered. They seemed to be waiting for her to leave. “Sorry. I didn’t realize it was a private conversation!” she said sarcastically as she turned back toward dining room. When the meowing resumed, it was at much lower volume. “Good, now I can concentrate!”

“Clackity, clackity, clack. Zing! Clackity, clackity, clackity, clackity,” the typewriter said. “Now we’re making some progress,” she thought. Soon a small furry paw gently tapped her arm twice. “What is it, Plumpky?” “I’m done on the phone, Mommie. You

can hang it up now. What are you writing?" "A Stupid Story." "Well, if you don't like it, Mommie, don't write it anymore," Plumpky chided. "No, Sweetie. What I mean is it's supposed to be a stupid story. It's a Stupid Story Contest." She hung up the phone, and they walked back to the typewriter together.

"It's not as easy as it sounds, you know." "I don't think it sounds easy at all!" said the kitty. "I can't even type! But if it's so hard, why do it? Why don't you just take a nap? That's what I'd do." "I know you would, Little One, but I need to do it. Its like how sometimes you have to pretend something scary is chasing you, even though there's nothing there. Why do you do that?" "Gosh, Mommie, I don't know, but if that's how you feel, you should definitely do it. You can't hold THAT in!" Plumpkin paused, seemingly lost in thought. Then she looked up and asked, "Why don't you write a story about me and Whirly-Gig?" "Because that would be a Sweet Story, Sweetie, not a Stupid one." Plumpkin heaved a big sigh and got up to leave. "Well, then you could just write about Whirly-Gig, then. He's pretty stupid."

The woman ignored her last comment and looked back over what she had typed. "Now, where was I?" The top of the page read;

"Qkdiit ik tollwke kehthl,sowken. Dvfadfk;dkie thels! Koem thej,sndkowhe.fj..."

She ripped the sheet of paper out of the typewriter, wadded it into a little ball, and threw it onto the big pile of wadded paper under which her trash can was deeply buried.

"Oh!" she yelped. "My ham hocks and turnip greens!"

She got up and headed for the kitchen just as the door bell rang.

"Dammit!" she muttered, heading for the door.

When she got there, it was Santa Claus in a Brown Suit — the UPS man.

"Hi!", she said.

"You Wanda Yolanda Knott?"

"If I'm not, then I wanda why not!" she said.

"Sign here."

She signed the electronic receipt and said, "Where's my box?"

"In the truck. I'll get it"

Wanda waited for a few moments and then was astonished to see the UPS man backing a fork lift out of his truck. She'd never seen a UPS truck with a fork lift. How weird. And the box! It was as big as two, no, three refrigerators!

"Where ya want this, ma'am?"

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She broke out of her stare, and quickly said, “ Uh, the, uh, the only place it'll fit is in the garage! In the garage! What in the world is it?”

“Don't know ma'am. I just deliver 'em.”

Wanda turned to go open the garage door, and almost tripped and fell flat on her face. Both cats were at her feet, looking out the front door with big, round eyes. She stopped at the kitchen stove to turn off her now mushy ham hocks and turnip greens before proceeding to the garage. When she got to the door leading out to the garage, again, both cats were right in her way. “Stay here!” she commanded them.

After the enormous, inexplicable and frankly overwhelming box was safely stowed, Wanda decided she would deal with it later. She was hungry and getting to be just a little grumpy, what with the story not going so well, oh hell, lets be honest, it wasn't going at all, and the cats were really behaving strangely, though she couldn't quite put her finger on what was different, but I'm telling you, something about their behavior was new and different and just not quite right, and then the delivery and she never did get to... “Oh My Gosh ... My Ham Hocks And Turnip Greens!!!”

She went to the kitchen. Dejected, she served herself some severely overcooked dinner and went to watch some TV while she ate.

Wanda woke up to an infomercial touting the money-making magic of producing infomercials. She checked her watch; 3:13 am, and looked around. Every time she fell asleep on the sofa, for the last 600+ times that she fell asleep on the sofa, she always woke up under a pile of cats. This time, no cats. She went looking for them.

It only took a second for her to find the door to the garage standing wide open, and the gigantic wooden crate torn open. It did not hold three refrigerators. It held Plumpkin, Whirly-Gig and a shimmering — **thing, structure, contraption. There were ramps, and towers, and posts, and catwalks, and... And catwalks? Catwalks?**

“What the Hell!?!?”

Plumpkin and Whirly-Gig tried not to look smug. Plumpkin was at the top of the tallest post, laying on a very soft looking pillow on a platform. Whirly-Gig was happily running up and down the various posts and pedestals. There was an artificial mouse suspended from a bungy cord, and Wanda caught a distinct whiff of catnip. Plumpkin lazily reached over and pressed a pedal by a little cup, and a small amount of something dropped into it from a box. Wanda got a distinct odor of tuna.

“Plumpkin, get down here right now! Did you order this thing?!? How did you pay for it?!? My credit card! My missing credit card! You pest! You rascal! You took my credit card and ordered this, this, WHATEVERTHEHELLITIS!?!?”

Plumpkin, nibbling delicately at her tuna-flavored snack, ignored Wanda.

“Well,” muttered Wanda, “I'll just put a stop to this, right now!” and she walked across the garage to where the thing was plugged into an electrical outlet and yanked the wire. The lights on the thing went out and the shimmer disappeared. The cats didn't seem to care. When did a cat ever need light?

“Now what?” wondered Wanda.

(To be continued)

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