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PUSSY CATS GRUFF

2nd Edition

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PUSSY
CATS
GRUFF
2nd Edition

Phoenix McKnight

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Dedication

To my mother, the strongest person I know.

To all the pussy cats gruff I have known.

To God for His mercy and grace.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION: Escape from the Island of the Cats	1
THE CAT PRINCE	5
BLACKY AND THE BEANSTALK	11
RUMPELTILTSCAT	17
LITTLE RED RIDING CAT	27
GOLDICAT AND THE THREE BEARS	33
THE THREE LITTLE CATS	39
THE CAT PRINCESS AND THE PEA	53
XANITTY AND THE BEAST	61
THE GINGERBREAD CAT	83
THE TWELVE DANCING CAT PRINCESSES	89
CATSEL AND GRETELCAT	101
THE THREE FEATHERS	115
THE LITTLE SNOW KITTEN	125
SNOW WHITE CAT	133
CATNAPPING BEAUTY	149
THE PIED PIPER CAT OF HAMELIN	157
THE EMPEROR CAT'S NEW CLOTHES	167
THUMBCATELINA	181
THE THREE PUSSY CATS GRUFF	187
SHOD CLAUDE AND SHOD CLIVE	197
THE CAT WHO WISHED TO BE HUMAN	211

INTRODUCTION:

Escape from the Island of the Cats

It is not without risking my very life and limb that you hold this volume of Cat Fairy Tales in your hands.

I was sailing on a river near the British Isles when a dense fog rolled in from the sea. I am a modest sailor at best and a great fear washed over me that I may never see land again.

As it happened, my boat crashed into the shore of an island and I scrambled up from the beach. You can imagine my surprise when hundreds of cats emerged from the fog to meet me. I was even more amazed when these cats spoke to me, in human tongue! I thought that I must have died when my boat crashed but I was very much alive.

Pussy Cats Gruff

These cats treated me very well and I was led to their homes, a large rocky hill of catacombs by a pool of fresh water. I was provided with a bed of moss to sleep on and was given all the water and fish, which I had to cook for myself, that I could want.

The first night I spent on the island, which I have called the Island of the Cats, I was introduced to these very tales. As the fog disappeared I saw that the sun had set and a crescent moon shone in its place.

The cats brought out the ancient tome on the lid of a crate which they pulled using a rope. The eldest cat of the hundreds that lived in the catacombs flipped the cover open with his paw and began to read.

I listened to him read tales from a time of cats long gone by which greatly resemble our own fairy tales. Tales like Rumpelstiltskat, the Cat Prince, Blacky and the Beanstalk. I was spellbound by these stories and I felt that I must have them. So I did the unthinkable, I stole them.

While all the cats were asleep in their catacombs I jumped at the opportunity. I snuck into the elder cat's catacomb and snatched the book from the crate lid. The elder must have smelled me because he woke up as I was running out the cave.


"Thief!" He shouted, "The human has stolen the Book of Cat History!"

I barely made it to my boat with my skin. The cats attacked me so fiercely. Can you blame them? I was covered with scratches and bite marks when I finally pushed my boat into the water and climbed into it. The cats tried to follow me but had to retreat when the water became too deep for them.

There I was floating back to my home, bitten and wounded, but I had the book. That's when I realized what I had truly done. I have made this copy to share with my fellow humans. Now that I am done, I will return the original book back to its rightful owners on the Island of the Cats. I believe you will be as mesmerized by these charming tales as I was.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THE CAT PRINCE

nce upon a time there lived a King who had many beautiful daughters, but the most lovely of them was the youngest. Near the King's castle there was a large forest. In the center of this forest was a very large, old tree. Every day the youngest Princess went into this forest to play in the shade of the old tree. The Princess's favorite toy was a ball that she would toss into the air and catch when it came back down.

One day when the Princess was playing under the large, old tree she threw the ball up into the air. But this time it didn't come back down, the Princess had thrown the ball too high and it got caught in the tree's branches. The Princess jumped up and down trying to reach the ball, but it was no use.

Pussy Cats Gruff

Then the Princess tried to climb the tree. She gathered up her long skirts in one hand and planted one foot on the tree trunk. She pushed up with her other foot while reaching up with her free hand. Down to the ground the Princess slid from the tree. She tried this a few times, then gave up and instead shouted at the tree and kicked it. She was hopping up and down on one foot wincing and crying in pain when she heard a voice.

“Why are you crying, Princess?”

The Princess stopped hopping around and looked about to see who had spoken to her. Wiping the tears from her eyes, all she saw was a little ginger cat sitting about a yard away from her.

“Did you just say something?” she asked the cat.

“Yes, I asked you why you were crying.” “I threw my ball too high and it got stuck up in the tree and I cannot reach it.” The Princess pointed the ball out to the cat.

“I can get it down for you,” purred the cat. “But if I do, what will you give me in return?”

“Whatever you want, pussy cat. My crown, my jewels, or maybe you would like some fish

instead?" said the Princess, eager to get her ball back.

"A crown or jewels I have no use for," laughed the cat. "But the fish you suggest has given me an idea. Let me be a friend to you, to eat where you eat, to sleep where you sleep and I will get your ball."

"I promise to be your friend if you get me my ball," agreed the Princess.

With the flick of its tail up, up, up the tree went the ginger cat until he reached the branch where the ball had fallen. With a lazy swipe of his paw, the cat knocked the ball free and into the Princess's waiting hands. The Princess smiled and jumped with glee.

"Oh, thank you, dear cat, thank you!" The Princess began to run back home.

"Wait!" cried the cat. "Wait! I may have four legs but I won't catch up with you if you don't wait!" At that, the Princess ran away even faster. The ginger cat flicked his tail in annoyance when he got back to the ground.

"Oh, well. It doesn't pay to break your promises to a cat!" The ginger cat slowly sauntered toward the castle.

Pussy Cats Gruff

It was dinner time when the ginger cat arrived at the castle. He walked right by the guards with his tail in the air and followed his nose to the smell of fine food ready to be eaten. He stopped in front of a door and listened. Inside he heard the voices of a man and many young women. One voice in particular was familiar. He stepped back from the door, yowled with all his might and scratched the door with his sharp claws. The King himself opened the door.

“Here, now. What’s all this caterwauling about?”

“Treachery, Your Highness, treachery!” the cat cried. “Your youngest daughter promised to befriend me if I got her ball down from the large tree in the forest. I did so and she ran as fast as she could back here. See what kind of a friend she has been!”

The King turned to his daughter and asked, “Is this true?” The Princess nodded. “Then you must keep your promise and be this cat’s friend.” At this, the cat walked into the room and hopped on the Princess’s lap. He sniffed at the food on her plate.

“Filet mignons, mmmm, my favorite. Princess, please cut me a piece to eat.” The Princess didn’t

really want to share her dinner as it was her favorite too. A stern look from her father made her slice off a generous piece for the cat. When the cat had finished his filet mignons, he asked for a saucer of milk to drink. Dutifully the Princess put the milk on the table beside her plate.

When it came time to go to bed, the Princess was in ill-temper. She thought the cat was the most arrogant creature imaginable and that it had taken delight in making a joke of her in front of her sisters and her father. When the cat jumped on her bed to curl up to sleep, she whisked the cover off, sending both cat and cover tumbling to the floor. The cat recovered quickly.

“What did you do that for?”

“You miserable creature, I wish I had never met you! You made a joke of me in front of my family!” the Princess said.

The cat leaped back onto the bed and sat there regarding the Princess.

“I’m sorry if you don’t like being my friend. Maybe it is me your family is amused with, not you.” The Princess, who had not considered this, was still angry though not as much.

“You caused such a scene, yowling at the door like that.”

“You shouldn’t have run away on me, Princess. But I will go away and not bother you again if you wish. I only ask you do one thing.” “What’s that?”

“I have been enchanted by a witch who wished to teach me to not be so selfish and arrogant—”


“Well, you obviously haven’t learned your lesson,” the Princess said.

“I’m a cat, what do you expect? However, I would like to be a human again and the witch stated that I would have to be kissed by a Princess for that to happen.”

“You want me to kiss that cold, wet nose?” “If you don’t, you’ll be stuck with this cat until the end of time,” the cat grinned at the Princess. She rolled her eyes.

“Oh, alright.” And she kissed the cat on his cold, wet nose. Instantly, as he said he would be, the cat changed into a very handsome, redheaded Prince. He smiled at the Princess and asked her to marry him. The Princess accepted and so they married and lived happily ever after.

BLACKY AND THE BEANSTALK

nce upon a time there lived a poor widow cat who had a kitten named Blacky. One day they discovered that there was no more food in the house to eat and there was nothing they could do but sell their cow. Blacky and his mother were sad to have to sell the cow, but they had nothing else to sell and they needed food. Blacky went off to sell the cow at the market.

Before Blacky reached the market, he met an old cat along the road.

“That’s a fine cow you have there, kit. Will you sell her to me for these magic beans?” the old cat asked. At first, Blacky snorted at the idea of selling the cow for some beans, but the old cat opened his paw and the beans shone in the sunlight. Now, no cat, especially not a kitten, can resist something shiny. Once Blacky saw the

magic beans he agreed to the trade and eagerly took them, giving the cow to the old cat. Blacky ran back home to show his mother the shiny beans.

“Beans!” she cried. “Beans! What good are they? At least with the cow we would have had some milk, now we have nothing! We shall starve!” The widow cat threw the beans out the window and sent Blacky straight to bed. Neither cat slept very well.

When Blacky woke up, his fur bristled in surprise to see giant leaves coming through his window. He jumped out of bed and ran outside. There in the backyard, where his mother had thrown the beans, was a beanstalk, twirling dizzily up through the clouds.

“Mother!” Blacky yelled. “Come and see what happened to those magic beans!” Blacky’s mother, who saw the leaves from her room, could guess what happened, but she ran out to join him in the backyard. They both looked up the giant beanstalk until their necks hurt. “I’m going to climb it!” Blacky said.

“Be careful, dear!” his mother called after him as he climbed up the beanstalk and into the clouds.

When Blacky reached the top of the beanstalk, he found himself in another land. Blacky saw fields and forests all around. To the west of the beanstalk he saw a great castle. He decided to go and see who lived in the castle. When he arrived, he saw that it was an even greater castle than he thought.

“What could possibly live in a castle this big?” Blacky thought. He knocked on the door and his tail bristled when the giantess cat opened the door. She squinted down at him.

“It’s about time you got here. I don’t pay you to frolic with the field mice. Get in here and help me get my husband’s dinner ready.” She plucked the kitten off the ground before he could protest.

When they finished getting the giant cat’s dinner ready, the giantess put Blacky in a cabinet to hide him. The giantess’s husband tromped into the room, sniffed the air and bellowed:

“Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishcat.
Let him be alive or let him be dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

"Sit down and stop bellowing, it's the lamb stew you smell." The giantess said. The giant ate the huge meal and after he was finished he ordered his wife to bring him his hen.

The giantess cat brought in the little hen and set it in front of the giant cat. Blacky peeked out of the cabinet to see what was going to happen.

"Lay!" The giant bellowed. The poor little hen then laid a shiny golden egg. Happy at the sight of the gold, the giant sat back and closed his eyes for a catnap.

Blacky pushed the cabinet door open a crack and started to squeeze his tiny body out. The giant cat let out a cough-like snort. Blacky zipped back into the darkness of the cabinet and listened. He waited and listened for what seemed like forever. But he wanted to see that amazing hen up close. The giant cat seemed to be in a deep catnap now so Blacky stepped out of the cabinet again.

"Shoo!" came a loud whisper that nearly frightened Blacky out of his fur. The giantess rushed into the room as quietly as she could and shoved Blacky back into the cabinet.

“Naughty little kitten! You come out when I say you come out. Now get back in before he wakes up.” Blacky sulked at his misfortune. Was he ever going to get near that hen? Why did he have to be so curious? The giant cat gave another one of his cough-snores and then all was quiet. Blacky panicked. What if the giantess had already taken the hen away?! He practically leaped out of the cabinet onto the floor. The hen was still there and it was looking at him a little funny, as though it had never seen a kitten pop out of a cabinet before.

“Hello,” Blacky whispered. “Do you like it here?” The hen shook its head 'no'. “I promise that my mother and I will take care of you and treat you good. We won’t bellow at you, honest. Would you like to come live with us?” The poor little hen was so excited at the idea of a nice master who wouldn’t yell at her that she let out a squawk and flapped her wings. The noise woke the giant cat up. Dazed, he looked down at his hen and saw the little black kitten.

Blacky quickly scooped up the hen and ran out of the castle. The giant cat sprang up from his chair and ran after them. Blacky climbed down


Pussy Cats Gruff

the beanstalk as fast as he could with the giant cat not far behind him.

“Mother!” he shouted. “Bring me the axe! Quickly!” His mother ran into the house and brought Blacky the axe. Blacky chopped down the beanstalk and the giant cat crashed down along with it. Blacky’s mother was so happy to see him home safely. She was even more delighted when Blacky politely asked the hen to lay and it laid two shiny golden eggs.

“See, mother, we will never starve again!” Blacky said. And they never did.

RUMPELSTILTSCAT

nce upon a time there was a poor miller cat who was hired by the Cat King. The miller cat was ashamed that he was poor and wanted to present himself as someone very important. His coat freshly groomed and shining, a smart cap over one pointy ear, the miller cat bowed to the King. The King did not seem to be impressed by the miller cat's skill or appearance. Alarmed at this the miller cat told the King that he had a beautiful daughter who could spin straw into gold. At this the Cat King raised his eye whiskers.

"I should like to see such an amazing skill. You simply must bring her in to see me."

"Y-yes, Sire," the poor miller cat stammered, bowing his way out of the courtroom.

Pussy Cats Gruff

The poor miller cat pondered his dilemma as he rode slowly home. How was he going to tell his daughter that she must spin straw into gold? What a laughing stalk he would be when it was found out that his daughter really could not spin straw into gold!?

The miller cat's daughter was not happy to hear that she was supposed to spin straw into gold for the Cat King.

"I don't even know how to spin!" she cried. The miller cat nodded and sighed.

"I don't know what else to do, we must see the Cat King, now that I have boasted about you."

That is how the next day the poor miller cat's daughter found herself standing in a small room which was full of straw all but for a spinning wheel in the corner. The Cat King pointed to the spinning wheel.

"Spin this straw into gold even if it takes until dawn." Then he left, closing the door behind him.

The poor daughter tried to loop the straw onto the spinning wheel. After several unsuccessful attempts, one of which she narrowly missed

catching her tail in the wheel, she sat down and wept.

The door opened a bit and in peered the most peculiar looking little gray cat. While it had the body and tail of a normal cat, this one's four legs were much shorter than any other cat's the daughter had ever seen.

"Why are you crying?" the little gray cat asked.

"I am supposed to spin all this straw into gold even if it takes until dawn and I don't know how to spin!" she cried.

"If I spin this straw into gold for you, what will you give me?"

"I will give you this catnip mouse," said the miller cat's daughter, pulling the mouse out of her purse.

The little gray cat took the catnip mouse then sat down at the spinning wheel. His gray little paws worked quickly and surely. He fed the straw into the wheel bobbin and gold coins fell to the floor. The more straw he fed into the wheel, the more gold coins fell onto the floor. On and on the little gray cat spun the straw until there was none left to spin and the room was filled with gold coins. The miller cat's daughter was delighted.

The Cat King was also delighted when he opened the door at dawn and found the straw gone and gold coins in its place.

“Very well done!” he exclaimed. “I shall have another room prepared and you can spin more gold for me.”

Another, larger room was prepared as the Cat King ordered. That night the miller cat’s daughter found herself once again all alone in a room full of straw and a spinning wheel in the corner.

“If I never see another spinning wheel, it will be too soon,” muttered the daughter. One room should have been enough, but the Cat King wanted more gold. She could only hope that the little gray cat that helped her the night before would return.

She groomed herself nervously as she waited and waited for the little gray cat. It was getting very late at night and the daughter didn’t know what she was going to tell the Cat King when he saw the room was still full of straw. Suddenly the door opened a bit and the little gray cat peered in at her.

“What will you give to me this time?” he asked.

“I will give you my fine collar!” The daughter removed her collar and handed it to the gray cat.

Once again, the little gray cat’s paws fed straw into the spinning wheel and gold coins fell to the floor. The spinning wheel whirled and whirled and whirled, and the gold coins kept falling and falling and falling. By the time dawn came there was not a single piece of straw to be found in the room.

The Cat King was very excited at seeing all the gold in the room. He turned to the miller cat’s daughter and told her; “If you spin all of the straw in the last room I have prepared for you, I will make you my Queen!”

The miller cat’s daughter was dismayed at having to spin more straw into gold, but being the Cat Queen was something she would never have dreamed of. It made her happy to think that if she could just get through this last room, she would never have to see another spinning wheel again.

Still, she had to hold back a piteous mew when she saw the size of the last room. This room could hold the first two rooms twice over! She sat down at the spinning wheel and waited for the little gray cat to appear.

The little gray cat did not disappoint the miller cat's daughter. He showed up much quicker than he had the nights before. "What will you give me tonight to do this work for you?" he asked. The daughter looked all about and declared in horror; "I have nothing to give you!" She burst into tears.

"No, don't cry! Only promise me that you will give me the first male kitten of your first litter and I will spin for you." The daughter decided she had no choice if she wanted to become the Cat Queen so she agreed. The little cat sat down at the spinning wheel and did not leave until the entire room was filled with gold coins instead of straw.

When the Cat King saw the enormous room shining with gold, he immediately called for a royal wedding. That same day the poor miller cat's daughter became the Cat Queen.

One year later the Queen gave birth to her first litter, three females and two males. She was so delighted at her little brood that she forgot all about the little gray cat and the promise she made to him. That is, until the little gray cat appeared in her room and pointed at her two male kittens.

“Remember your promise, O Queen, and give me your first born male kitten!”

The Queen could not bear the thought of being separated from any of her kittens. She begged the gray cat to take anything he wanted except her kittens. The little gray cat felt a bit sorry for her.

“I won’t take your kitten if you can guess my name within three days,” he said. At that the Cat Queen said every name that came to her mind, but none of them were correct. The little gray cat left, promising to return the next day to see if she could guess his name.

The gray cat presented himself to the Queen the next day and she read out a list of hundreds of names. The little gray cat made faces and laughed at the names but told her that she still hadn’t guessed correctly.

“You have one day left, O Queen, then you must give me the kitten as you promised,” the gray cat said as he left the castle.

The Cat Queen sent her most loyal servant to travel around and collect any name that was not on the list. The servant returned with bad news.

“There is no known name that you haven’t tried, my Queen. But I did see a strange thing as I

Pussy Cats Gruff

passed through the forest. There was a little cat dancing around on its little legs. It was singing a song—how did it go? Oh, something like this:

Due to the careless promises, we all make,
A little male kitten I shall take;
For the Cat Queen can only guess in vain,
That Rumpelstiltskat is my name!”

“That’s it!” cried the Cat Queen. She grabbed the fore paws of her servant and danced around the room with him. The poor servant thought that the stress of the search must have gotten to his Queen but he kept that to himself.

The third day came and the little gray cat appeared again.

“O, Queen, can you guess my name?” The Cat Queen could not resist toying with the little gray cat so she guessed some other names first. “Is your name Connard?”

“No!” laughed the little gray cat.

“Is your name Jareth?”

“Oh, no!” groaned the gray cat.

“Oh, then it must be Rumpelstiltskat!”


Phoenix McKnight

“A witch-cat told you that! A witch-cat told you that!” the little gray cat howled and stomped in his fury.

He stomped so hard that he went right through the floor and out of sight. No one has ever heard from Rumpelstiltskat since.

Pussy Cats Gruff

LITTLE RED RIDING CAT

nce upon a time there was a little girl cat who lived in a forest cottage with her mother and father. Just inside the forest there was another cottage in which the little girl cat's grandmother lived. This little girl cat always wore a riding hood and cloak that were bright red. Because she wore these everywhere she went, the other cats called her Red Riding Cat.

One morning Red Riding Cat's mother told her that her grandmother was ill. She gave Red Riding Cat a basket full of sweet cream and freshly baked fish cakes, telling her to take them to her grandmother as a gift. Red Riding Cat's whiskers curled with pleasure as she sniffed the delicious aroma of fish cakes and cream.

“This is the perfect gift to make Grandma feel better,” she purred. She skipped away down the path toward her grandmother’s cottage. Red Riding Cat had not gone very far when a wolf strolled up beside her.

“Hello, Red Riding Cat. Where are you going with that delicious smelling basket?” asked the wolf.

“I’m going to see my grandmother. She is not well. This cream and these fish cakes should help her to feel better.”

“I’m sorry to hear that your grandmother is ill. Would it be alright if I came along with you to wish her well?” said the wolf.

“That is very kind of you. She doesn’t live very far from here so if you are going down this path it is on your way.” Red Riding Cat pointed to the forest path on the left side of the woods. The wolf grinned at the little girl cat.

“I know just the thing that would make your grandmother even happier. Flowers! If you keep going straight, you will find yourself in the middle of a great garden filled with pretty flowers that you can pick to give your grandmother.”

“Oh, yes, that would be nice. Will you come and pick some with me?” asked Red Riding Cat. The wolf shook his head.

“I’m sorry Red Riding Cat. I really must be on my way. But please do give your grandmother my wishes.”

The wolf watched as Red Riding Cat hurried along the path to pick flowers for her grandmother. When she was out of sight he ran as fast as he could down the path to the grandmother’s cottage.

When the wolf reached the cottage, he knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” asked the grandmother cat.

“It’s me, little Red Riding Cat!” shrilled the wolf in his best girl cat voice.

“Just turn the knob and walk right in,” called the grandmother cat.

The wolf turned the knob and bounded into the room. One look at the wolf and the grandmother cat leaped out of bed and out the back door. The wolf thought about chasing the grandmother cat but decided to wait for Red Riding Cat instead. He opened up the grandmother cat’s closet to find a disguise.

Pussy Cats Gruff

The first nightgown the wolf tried to put on ripped as he pulled it down over his head. He threw the garment away in disgust. Then he tried on a larger nightgown and it just barely fit. When he bent down to put on the grandmother cat's slippers, the nightgown split at the back. The wolf held back a howl as he tore the garment off. Looking in the closet, the wolf found a corset, squeezed into it and tied it up. "I'd better not try to huff or puff with this thing on." To the great relief of the wolf, the corset allowed him to fit into another nightgown. This time when he bent down to put on the slippers, although the corset made it a bit hard, the nightgown didn't rip. "Success!" cried the wolf as he fit a bonnet over his head to cover his ears as best he could. A knock came at the door, causing the wolf to whirl around with a start.

"Uh—oh," he said as he shuffled toward the grandmother cat's bed in his disguise. "Just a minute!" The wolf tried to lie down in the bed, but the corset made it difficult to bend and he fell over the other side of the bed with a thump.

"Are you alright Grandma?" asked Red Riding Cat, concerned at the loud thump.

"Oh—I'm alright—I—just—need—a—minute,"

the wolf replied as he finally got himself into the bed. "Who is it?"

"It's Red Riding Cat. I brought you some flowers and cream and fish cakes."

"Well, just turn the knob and walk right in," called the disguised wolf.

Red Riding Cat went into the cottage and sat herself and her basket on the bed. She peered at her grandmother. Grandma really doesn't look herself, thought Red Riding Cat.

"Grandma, what great arms you have!" she said.

"All the better to hug you with, my dear!" replied the wolf.

"Grandma, what great legs you have!" said Red Riding Cat.

"All the better to run with, my dear!"

"Grandma, what great eyes you have!"

"All the better to see you with, my dear!" said the wolf.

"Grandma, what great ears you have!" That made the wolf reach up and pat his head in disappointment. He was sure that ugly bonnet would hide his ears!

“All the better to hear you with, my dear!” said the wolf with a pout.


“Grandma, what great teeth you have!” cried Red Riding Cat.

“All the better to eat you with, my dear!” growled the wolf.

Red Riding Cat gave a mew of surprise and sprang off the bed and out the door. The wolf tried to leap after her but the corset slowed him down and he tripped on the hem of the nightgown. Out of the grandmother cat’s cottage tumbled the wolf, head over heels. The wolf was so embarrassed! He ran into the forest, presumably to get rid of the constraining clothes, and never looked back.

Both Red Riding Cat and her grandmother saw the wolf tumble out of the cottage. They came out of hiding, hugged each other and went into the cottage to have a nice meal of sweet cream and freshly baked fish cakes.

GOLDICAT AND THE THREE BEARS

nce upon a time there were three bears who lived in a cottage that was in the middle of the forest. They were called Papa Bear, Mama Bear and Baby Bear. One fine morning the three bears sat down at the kitchen table to eat their breakfast. The three bears found their porridge to be too hot to eat right away so they decided to go for a walk to let it cool.

As it should happen, a little girl cat named Goldicat decided to go for a walk in the forest that morning as well. This little girl cat was called Goldicat because she was an unusual cat indeed. Her fur was more yellow than any other cat's fur. She was a beautiful and strange little cat so it was not odd that, when she came upon the three bears' cottage that fine morning, curiosity got the better

of her. She walked up to the front window and jumped up onto the sill.

“No one is home. What a nice looking house. I wonder who lives here?” Goldicat asked herself as she looked at the table with the three bowls of porridge on it. “I am a bit hungry from all that walking.”

Goldicat leaped down from the window sill and went to the door. She turned the handle of the door and, to her surprise, found that it was unlocked.

Goldicat walked into the little house and hopped up onto one of the three stools sitting around the kitchen table. She cautiously sniffed the porridge, then she took a bite of it.

“Yeow!! This porridge is too hot!!!” Goldicat yowled as she fanned her burning little pink tongue with her paw. Ears back in disgust at the porridge, Goldicat moved on to the next stool and the next bowl of porridge.

“Yuck!” Goldicat spat out the lump of porridge she had bitten off. “This porridge is too cold. It tastes awful.” She shook herself from head to tail and decided to try the last bowl of porridge.

“Yumm! This porridge is perfect!” said Goldicat and she licked the little bowl clean.

After eating the bowl of porridge, Goldicat looked around for a place to sit so she could groom herself. She spotted three chairs in the next room.

She bounded over to the largest chair. This chair's cushion was so hard that when Goldicat leaped up to sit on it, she was bounced right back off. Determined to give herself a proper grooming, Goldicat tried the medium-sized chair. The chair was soooo soft that Goldicat could not move without sinking into the cushion. Off the medium-sized chair she leaped and onto the small chair. It was just right for her. She was in the middle of cleaning her little furry face when—CREAK! SNAP!

"What the—!!!" Goldicat cried as she tumbled onto the floor. She looked at the little chair. One of the legs had broken and the chair was now lopsided.

"The glue must have been old." She sniffed at the chair then looked around the room. She saw a staircase that went up to the second floor.

"Maybe I can find a place to groom myself up there," she said.

So Goldicat went up the stairs. The first room she came upon was a bedroom. Inside the

bedroom there were three beds of three different sizes. A large bed, a medium-sized bed and a small bed.

“Aha!” Goldicat said, nose in the air. “I am much too clever a cat to fall for that more than twice! I shall catnap on the small bed.” So Goldicat curled up on the small bed and fell fast asleep.

While Goldicat curled up to sleep, the three bears were returning home from their walk. They were a little alarmed at finding the door open. Papa Bear bravely stepped into the house first and looked around. He went over to the kitchen table and looked at his bowl of porridge.

“Someone has been eating my porridge!” Papa Bear roared. This brought Mama Bear and Baby Bear running into the house and over to the table. Mama Bear looked down at her bowl and saw some of the porridge was spattered over the table.

“Someone has been eating my porridge!” Mama Bear gasped. Baby Bear tipped his bowl over and saw that it was empty.

“Someone ate all my porridge!” Baby Bear cried.

Papa Bear was about to storm upstairs when he noticed the chairs in the living room.

“Hey! Someone has been sitting on my chair!” he growled. Mama Bear looked at the lumps on her chair.

“Someone has been sitting on my chair!” she declared. Baby Bear let out a shout of shock when he looked at his little chair.

“Someone has been sitting on my chair too! And they broke it!”

Papa Bear was very angry at having his family’s breakfast eaten and his son’s chair broken by someone. He stormed up the stairs, with his family close behind him, to see what other damage the intruder had done.

They looked in the bedroom, but they saw that Papa Bear’s and Mama Bear’s beds had not been disturbed.

“Maybe they didn’t come upstairs, dear.” Mama Bear suggested. Baby Bear went over to his bed to make sure it was alright too.


“Papa! Mama! Someone is sleeping in my bed!” he cried.

Goldicat sat bolt upright at the sound of the little bear’s voice. She looked around and saw the

Pussy Cats Gruff

unhappy Papa and Mama Bears. She bolted through their legs and out the bedroom door. She was down the stairs and outside before the bears collected themselves and ran after her. It is said that Goldicat now avoids forests as much as possible.

THE THREE LITTLE CATS

nce upon a time there were three little kittens. While they were still kittens these three little felines lost their mittens, but that is another story. When these three little kittens became cats, one of them decided to leave his mother and his brothers and make his mark in the world.

“Be very careful,” his mother told him. “And whatever you do, don’t forget your mittens.”

As for his brothers, they were very much in awe of his decision to go out into the great big world.

“Don’t worry, when my paw print is well known and I have a great house to live in, you can come and stay with me,” said the cat. The little cat dressed himself in his best clothes and bundled up his personal belongings. He waved goodbye to

his mother and brothers and went on his way, purring a merry tune.

The first little cat had not walked very far when he realized that soon he would need a place to sleep and maybe to live. He continued walking along the path he chose and came upon a little farm. When he was passing by, the farmer's wife came running out of the house, screaming and making quite a fuss.

"A mouse! A mouse is in the kitchen!" The woman danced around in front of the house. The little cat's ears perked up at this and he went up to the frantic woman.

"Show me the way to your kitchen and I will get rid of the mouse for you," he said. So the farmer's wife showed the little cat the way to the kitchen and in a few minutes, out came the little cat licking his lips.

"There you are, the mouse is no more," he said.

"Oh, you dear little cat! Thank you! How did you come to be traveling on this road?"

"I have left my mother and my brothers to find my own place in this world."

“For your help, please stay at our farm tonight and you can continue on your way tomorrow,” the farmer’s wife said. The little cat thanked the woman and went to sleep in the barn.

In the morning, the farmer asked the first little cat if there was anything else he needed.

“Well,” the little cat said. “I should like to build a house of my own to live in. Could you tell me what I should use and where I should build?”

The farmer scratched his head, this cat was different from any cat he had ever met. He looked at the pile of hay left over from what they had used to roof their house.

“How about if I give you that hay over there to build your house with?” the farmer asked. The little cat was skeptical at first, but if the farmer used the hay for his roof, why couldn’t it be used for his whole house?

“Thank you. Yes, I would like that. But where would be a good place for me to build my house?”

Again the farmer scratched his head. “There’s a spot by the river with a forest behind it and the meadow beside it. That would be a good place for a cat, don’t you think?” asked the farmer. The little cat agreed. Thanking the farmer and his wife

again, the first little cat set out with a big bundle of straw to the spot the by the river.

The first little cat spent the day building his straw house. By sundown it was finished. The cat stood back with his paws on his haunches, quite proud of himself.

“Not bad if I do say so myself. Soon I will have to invite my mother and my brothers here to see how quickly I have settled in!”

Meanwhile, the next little cat was setting out into the world to show everyone that he could be brave and adventurous too! If his brother could do it then so could he. With much bravado to make himself seem better than the first little cat, he waved goodbye to his mother and brother and went down a different road.

This little cat, for all his attitude, was quite a smart and brave cat. While he was walking through the forest, he heard a knocking noise. The knocking noise would start, then it would stop for a few minutes, start again and stop again for a few minutes. This made the little cat curious and he veered off the path to see what the knocking noise was.

He did not go far before he saw a wood cutter at the base of a big tree. The tree had only a bit cut into it and the wood cutter had a few bumps on his head. The little cat watched as the wood cutter swung back his axe and began to cut the tree. Suddenly a chattering could be heard and, from a hole some ways up the tree, a big gray squirrel popped out. It hurled down a bunch of hard shelled nuts at the wood cutter's head. The wood cutter yelled at the squirrel and ran for cover. The little cat laughed at the sight, but felt sorry for the woodcutter.

"I can chase the squirrel away for you if you would like," said the cat.

"You can?! Please do so. I need to cut down this tree to finish building my house," said the wood cutter.

The little cat climbed up the tree and frightened the squirrel away. When he climbed back down, the thankful wood cutter said; "Little cat, how can I thank you for your help?"

"I am looking to build a house of my own to make a place for myself in the world. If you can tell me what I should build my house with and where I should build it that would be all the thanks I need."

Pussy Cats Gruff

The wood cutter knew exactly how to help the little cat but did not answer his question. Instead he invited him to stay overnight in his house once it was finished. The little cat would not stay unless he was allowed to help the wood cutter finish his house.

“You are a very good cat. I think you will do very well in the world on your own,” said the wood cutter after they finished building his house. “Tomorrow I will give you the logs we have left over to build your own house. I will also tell you the best place to build.” With these happy thoughts the little cat went to sleep.

The next day, as promised, the wood cutter told the little cat to build his house just inside the edge of the forest. The little cat thanked him for the logs and the location and set out to build his own house. When he was finished, he stood back and admired his work.

“This is a nice, sturdy house. Won’t my mother and my brothers be surprised to see how well I have made out on my own?!” said the little cat, proudly.

In the meantime, the third little cat was feeling lonely without his brothers around. After a great deal of thought, decided that he too should set out into the world to make his mark. His mother made a great fuss as he was the last kitten left in the house. In the end she agreed that if his brothers could go out into the world, so should he. With tears from both the mother and the third little cat, he set off on a path different from his brothers.

The third little cat thought, "I must settle into a nice house quickly and invite my mother and my brothers to visit me!" So he went down his chosen path looking specifically for a house. He had not walked very far when he came across a brick house along the road that was for sale. He went up to the house and knocked on the door. An elderly lady answered the door.

"Yes, what would you like?" she asked.

"I see that you are selling your house, how much are you asking for it?"

"Well, I'm going to live with my son and his family in the new house he just built. I am no longer able to live by myself. I don't really need much money, what can you give me in return?" The little cat smiled as he reached into his little bundle.

“My best friend is Blacky. But I’m not a cat that doesn’t pull my own weight. I worked for him in the summer and saved up what he paid me. Would these two golden eggs be okay?” The elderly woman’s eyes bulged as she looked at the golden eggs. She grabbed them eagerly.

“I will need today and tonight to get ready, but you can move in tomorrow. Why don’t you stay overnight at my son’s house? He lives not too far from here, down the next path.”

When the third little cat went down to the house of the son of the elderly lady, he was surprised to hear that his brother had helped. He was happy to hear that his brother had settled into his own house. The little cat asked about his eldest brother but the lady’s son, the wood cutter, did not know about him.

The wood cutter’s mother arrived early the next morning and gave the little cat the keys to the brick house. He thanked the lady and her son for their kindness and skipped along the road happily. When he was settled into his fine new house, he wondered how his eldest brother was doing.

The lone wolf walked down the road muttering to himself about the inhospitality of some people. He was cold and hungry and wanted a place to sleep. He came upon a straw house by the river beside the meadow that he didn't remember being there before. He went up to the house and sniffed around. It smelled like a cat lived there. The wolf didn't like cats, but he was desperate.

"Little cat, little cat, let me come in!" howled the wolf. This sudden howl startled the poor cat out of his wits. The first little cat didn't like canines and he wasn't about to invite one into his new house.

"No! Not by the whiskers on my chinny-chin-chin!" he cried.

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" So the wolf HUFFED and he PUFFED and away blew the straw house with the little cat tumbling after. The little cat ran away quickly and the wolf could not catch him.

The sun had now set and the night grew colder. The wolf was very upset that the first little cat had not let him in. The only thing that made the wolf feel better was the fact that the little cat was cold and had nowhere to sleep, just like him.

The wolf continued on his way, trying to keep warm when he came upon another house he hadn't seen before. This house was made of logs and had a thin line of smoke coming out of the chimney. This house also smelled of a cat. The wolf grumbled some more, he hadn't had any luck with the first cat. He shrugged. He may as well try.

"Little cat, little cat, let me come in!" howled the wolf. The little cat's fur was bristled from head to toe with surprise. He had been catnapping when the wolf's howling woke him up.

"No! Not by the whiskers on my chinny-chin-chin! What are you doing going around howling this time of night?" the little cat said, crossly.

"You won't let me in to get warm by your fire?" asked the wolf.

"No!"

"Then I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" The wolf HUFFED and he PUFFED and HUFFED and PUFFED and HUFFED until, down crashed the log house. The little cat, frightened even more, ran away as fast as he could. The wolf threw back his head and howled again in his frustration.

The next day, the third little cat was surprised to be visited by his brothers. They told him how impressed they were with his new home and he invited them to stay with him for a while. His brothers accepted his invitation without hesitation. He chuckled a little and when they asked him why he replied, "It's just so funny that you two would pick today to come and see me. I invited mother to come and stay. She will be arriving later today." The three little cats danced around the room, they would have a happy reunion that day.

The mother cat arrived an hour before supper would be ready. The three little cats had prepared a grand feast of turkey, potatoes, turnips, milk, bread and butter.

"What a wonderful time we will have!" exclaimed Mother cat. "Now you must tell me all about what you have done since you moved out."

So the first little cat told his tale of the mouse and the farmer. The next little cat told his tale of the wood cutter and the squirrel. Both little cats were careful not to mention what had happened to them the night before. The third little cat was in the middle of his tale about the elderly lady and

the wood cutter when there came a howl at the door.

“Little cat, little cat, let me come in!” It was the wolf. He could smell all the fine food the cats had prepared and he was quite starved and cold. Ignoring his brothers’ silent protests not to, the third little cat went to the door. He opened the door a crack.

“What is it that you want?”

“Please, little cat, all I want is to come in from the cold and, if you have anything to spare, maybe something to eat,” the wolf looked at the cat hopefully. The little cat glanced back at his mother and his brothers and he saw all the food on the table. He turned back to the wolf.

“Come in, we have enough food and there is room at the table,” the little cat opened the door to the wolf.

The wolf’s smile disappeared when he saw the little cat’s two brothers.

“You!!!” he growled. The brothers were startled and looked at each other.

“Boys,” Mother cat said. “Do you know this wolf?”

“Well, not exactly. I mean. Well. He. I. Oh, he asked to come in and I didn’t let him so he blew

my house down.” Both cats said at the same time. The cats all looked at the wolf.

“Yes, I blew their houses down. I was cold and angry. No one lets me in. At least, no one did until tonight,” said the wolf.

“Boys, I’m ashamed of you. The farmer and the woodcutter were kind to you and gave you a place to stay. Why didn’t you do the same for the wolf?”

“I was afraid of him,” said the first little cat, looking down at the floor.

“I was angry at him for scaring me and waking me up,” said the second little cat.

Then he said to the wolf, “I’m sorry.” The wolf’s mouth just hung open, he had never been treated like this in his entire life. No one ever said they were sorry.

“Yes. I’m sorry too,” said the first little cat.


“I—um. I—I guess I’m sorry too. I guess I shouldn’t have blown your houses down,” said the wolf.

“I guess it’s okay,” said the second little cat. “If you hadn’t, we wouldn’t be here today and would’ve missed seeing our mother.”

With that being said, all of them, including the wolf, sat down at the table and enjoyed a good meal.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THE CAT PRINCESS AND THE PEA

nce upon a time there was a handsome Cat Prince who lived in a very rich kingdom with his father, the Cat King, and his mother, the Cat Queen.

The Cat Prince, being an only kitten, was very lonely and thought it would be nice to be married. The Cat Prince told his father and mother that he wanted to marry a real Princess.

His parents were very reluctant to have their only kitten married and move away. They wanted him to stay with them as long as he could.

The Cat King and Cat Queen knew of many princesses in the land and they sent the Cat Prince off on his way in search of a real princess. They were certain that their kitten would not find a real princess in the kingdom.

Pussy Cats Gruff

A few days later the Cat Prince came back, without the princess he went to see.

“She was not a real princess!” he said. The Cat King and Cat Queen pretended to be as disappointed as their son. And they consoled him by suggesting that he go out the next week and visit another princess.

“Surely, she will turn out to be a real princess,” they said.

So the next week the Cat Prince set off to visit the princess his parents had suggested to him. He came back a few days later, again, without the princess.

“She was not a real princess,” he said.

Soon the Cat Prince had visited all the princesses known to his family. None of them were true princesses! He began to despair of ever finding a real princess to marry.

One night a miserable storm that reflected the Cat Prince’s mood came up. The thunder roared and the lightning flashed, causing the cats’ fur to stand on end from the electricity in the air. In the midst of the storm there came a loud scratching at the castle’s door. The Cat King opened the door

and found, standing there in the pouring rain, a very pretty girl cat.

Her fur was dripping wet and her clothes were soaked all the way through. She shivered with cold.

"I am a Princess," she said. "My coach has broken down. My paw-cats have scattered and I cannot find them anywhere. Have they, by any chance, sought shelter here?"

"No," answered the Cat King. "No one has come to the castle this night except you."

"Oh, dear!" said the Princess in dismay. "Then, would you be so good as to let me have shelter for the night?"

"Are you a real Princess?" asked the Cat Prince.

"Of course I am," said the Princess as she stepped into the castle. "What a fright I must look! I positively detest water!" The Princess began to clean herself.

"She doesn't look like a Princess," thought the Cat Queen. "I know how to find out if she really is one."

The Cat Queen went to the bedroom that was being prepared for the unexpected guest.

"Take the sheets off the bed!" ordered the Queen. When the servants took the sheets off the bed, the Queen daintily placed a dried pea near the head of the mattress.

"There! Now, get twenty, no twenty-five more mattresses! Place them on top of this one."

The poor servant cats struggled and huffed and puffed their way up and down the four flights of stairs. Finally, after seeing how unsuccessful their attempts were, the head catress had a brilliant idea. She corralled all the servants she could and lined them all the way up the four flights of stairs and up to the bed. This made getting all of the mattresses out of storage easier. This plan worked very well until they had piled ten mattresses upon the dried pea.

"We need a ladder!" cried the poor servant who had the job of placing the mattresses upon the bed. The cry of "We need a ladder," went down the line of cats to the head catress who was supervising.

She sent the servant closest to her off to get a ladder and when he brought it back, it was sent up the line just like the mattresses. Now having a ladder, the servants managed to pile up the remaining fifteen mattresses. An hour later, the

cats proudly displayed their work to the head catress. Quickly she arranged the pillows and covers for their guest to sleep on.

“Excellent!” said the Cat Queen when she came in to see if the room was ready. She knew how hard the servants had worked to get the room done so quickly.

“You’ve all worked so hard, go to bed yourselves and tomorrow, when you wake up, you can enjoy the day off.” All the servant cats hurrayed and thanked the Queen and then scooted off to bed.

The Cat Queen escorted her guest into the room.

“Oh, my! What a lot of mattresses!” cried the Princess when she saw the bed. “Thank you for your kindness, Your Highness. I’m sure I will sleep very well on this bed.”

“Yes, I’m sure you will, too,” purred the Cat Queen as she watched the Princess climb up the ladder to the top of the bed.

“Good night,” said the Princess.

“Good night,” said the Queen and she closed the door.

The next morning, the Cat Queen sat at the breakfast table eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Princess. The Princess arrived a short while later. She looked awful, her eyes drooped heavily.

“Good morning, my dear,” said the Cat Queen. “How did you sleep?”

“Terribly!” answered the Princess, suddenly energized at the opportunity to vocalize her misery. “I’ve never had a worse night in all my nine lives! I tossed and turned and I could not get comfortable at all. It felt as if I was lying on a stone!”

The Cat Queen was excited at first, she was a real princess, no cat but a princess had such sensitive fur. Then she remembered that her son would want to marry the Princess and maybe leave. Still, she would reveal the truth and she turned to her son, saying: “Here is your real Princess, my kitten.”

The Cat Prince leaped up from his chair in excitement.

“Finally, a real Princess!” He went over to where the Princess was seated. “I’ve searched all over the land for a real Princess without success. Then, just when I was ready to give up, a storm

blows one right onto the castle doorstep! Would you be my bride?"

"All the mattresses . . . they were just a test, then? You don't do that for all of your guests?" asked the Princess, confused.

"Heavens, no! True, it was a test. I would do anything to make sure my only kitten is happy," answered the Queen.


"I see," said the Princess, considering the events.

She turned to the Cat Prince and said:

"Alright, yes, I will marry you." And so the Cat Prince finally married a real Princess.

Pussy Cats Gruff

XANITTY AND THE BEAST

nce upon a time in a far off land, there was a very rich merchant cat. He had six boy kittens and six girl kittens who were used to getting everything that they wanted. Because of this the merchant cat was just rich enough to spoil them.

One day disaster struck. Their house caught fire and it burned to the ground. All of their furniture, books, pictures, clothes and other possessions were destroyed in the fire. Soon afterward the merchant cat lost all of his ships. One was attacked by pirates, another was said to have been shipwrecked and the last was destroyed by fire just like his house. Because of these disasters, the merchant cat and his kittens found themselves living in poverty.

The merchant and his family were forced to live in a cottage that was in the middle of a forest.

Pussy Cats Gruff

They could no longer afford servants so the kittens had to work hard. The kittens never stopped moaning over their miserable life. The itchy clothes they had to wear! Having to scrub the floor! Getting the pads of their paws all cracked and dry from washing the dishes! The clods of dirt in the pads of their paws from working the fields! Only the youngest kitten, Xanitty, tried to make the best of the simple life forced upon them. Because she wasn't as miserable as they were, Xanitty's siblings teased and taunted her.

After two years of this way of life, the merchant cat got news that the ship he thought was wrecked at sea had come into port. All the kittens instantly thought their misfortune was over. The father calmed them down and declared that he would go to town by himself to investigate the news.

Despite their father's cautious actions, the kittens began to rhyme off a list of things they had been thinking up over the past two years. Only Xanitty didn't ask for him to bring something back.

"What would you like?" her father asked.

“Only that you return safely, father.” This annoyed her siblings to no end, but before they could say anything about it, their father urged Xanitty to choose something for him to bring back.

“Oh, father, you know that I am fond of catmint, we haven’t had any since we moved here.” With the optimism of his kittens’ wish lists, the merchant cat set off to town.

When he reached the port, he found that the ship’s crew had searched around for him and, finding that he hadn’t been seen in town for two years, believed that he was dead. Thinking that he was dead, the ship’s crew had split the cargo amongst themselves and parted ways.

After six months of searching for even one member of the ship’s crew, the merchant cat headed home. His journey was slowed by a terrible snowstorm. He was only a few miles from his home but he was cold and tired.

The sun was setting as the merchant cat entered the forest that his cottage was in. At nightfall he found it was too cold to continue. He discovered a hollow tree trunk and curled up

there, covering his nose with the tip of his gray tail and flattening his ears to keep warm.

When the merchant cat woke in the morning, he found the wind had died down, but it was still snowing. All the paths between the trees were hidden by the thick blanket of snow, he didn't know which way to go. Finally, he picked one to his left and slipped and tumbled through the ice and snow along the way. After one particularly nasty tumble, the merchant cat was amazed when he shook the fur of his head and saw a lane with green vines before him. There was no snow on the vines, which were heavy with grapes. Beyond the lane stood a magnificent castle. The merchant cat let out a delighted mew and hurried to the castle.

Everything was pleasant and warm in this strange place. It was like spring had come early, while the rest of the land was covered with snow. As the merchant cat wondered about the castle, eh hoped to find out who lived in such a wonderful place. Instead he found a little room with a fire burning in the fireplace with a big, overstuffed chair sitting in front of it. The merchant cat leaped onto the chair and sat down, waiting to greet the owner of the castle.

“Oh dear!” cried the merchant cat some time later. He looked about. “I must have fallen asleep.” His belly growled with hunger. The cause of the growl was found just in front of him, on a little table that must have been brought in while he catnapped. Fish cakes, cream, chicken livers, even a few mice were on the table. The merchant cat had not seen such splendid food in over two and a half years.

After such a good meal, the merchant cat was more determined than ever to thank the mysterious owner for their hospitality. Having found no sign of anyone but himself inside the castle, the merchant took his search out into the gardens. He searched them without success and decided not to overstay his welcome. While he was walking down the path back to the lane of vines he had come in by, he noticed that he was surrounded by catmint. The cool smell brought Xanitty’s request to his mind. He stopped and picked a large sprig from a plant. A strangled growl sounded behind me and caused the merchant to jump and spin around.

A large dark brown creature towered over the merchant cat. The creature was lean, with a sleek fur and a tail that looked like a cat’s, even its head

looked like a cat's, but its smell was that of a dog. What is this creature? the merchant thought as he cowered against the catmint plants.

"Who said you could pick my catmint!?" the Beast rasped. "This is how you thank me for giving you food and shelter, by stealing from me? You shall pay for such ingratitude with your life!"

"Oh, please, sir, you don't understand! I did not mean to seem ungrateful. I have not been in the presence of such wealth for years now, it was more than enough. I only wished to bring back from my terrible journey this cat mint for my daughter Xanitty-" the merchant cat went on to explain to the Beast all that had befallen his family. "Sir, I cannot undo what I have done. Please, spare my life."

"Very well, I will forgive you only on one condition. You will give me one of your daughters."

"To save my skin by giving you one of my daughters! How could I do such a thing?"

"Your daughter must come willingly or you will belong to me. We will see if any of your daughters are brave enough to save you. You seem to be an honest cat, so you may go home and tell them of our arrangement yourself. In a

month's time I expect to see you back here, with or without one of your daughters. If you fail to keep your promise I will come and get you myself!" said the Beast. "Now, go. Take the catmint to Xanitty."

The merchant scurried off, taking the costly catmint with him. He wondered how he was going to tell his kittens about the Beast and the promise he had made. It seemed like their situation just kept getting worse and worse.

The kittens were happy to see their father, but they were so disappointed by the fact that they were still poor, the merchant couldn't bring himself to tell them the worse news of the Beast. He only gave the catmint to Xanitty with a sad little smile. This puzzled her as she was very happy to receive her simple gift.

His promise weighed on the merchant cat like a heavy rock, so the next morning he finally told his kittens. They all were stunned and could not believe how badly life was treating them. Xanitty's sisters turned on her, their fur ruffled up and ears back.

“This is all your fault!” they hissed. “If you had only asked for a fine dress of a jeweled collar, none of this would have happened.”

“Father, surely none of our sisters can go live with that creature and you shall not go back either!” said the oldest son.

“My kit, it is not that simple. I gave my word. If none of your sisters will go live with the Beast, I must go, never to return,” said the merchant.

“No! We will kill it if it tries to take you from us. We number thirteen, the Beast is one. Let it try to take you away,” replied the son.

“No!” said Xanitty, horrified. “I didn’t know asking for catmint would cause such trouble, but it has. It is not worth killing the Beast over or having any harm coming to you if it comes to take Father away. I will go and live with the Beast.”

The merchant and Xanitty’s siblings were shocked by the logic of her words. There was a determined look on her face which let them know they would not change her mind. They got everything ready for Xanitty and their father to return to the Beast. The last few days the family spent together were the most peaceful and argument-free they had that they could remember.

Xanitty and her father went into the forest and wandered about in the snow and cold wind to find the path that led back to the Beast's castle. Night came and they were about to give up when they were startled nearly out of their skin by a number of fireworks being set off. The forest was changed into a rainbow of colors as the snow reflected the sparks in the sky. The cats felt warm and saw that by following the fireworks, they had reached the lane of grapevines. The castle beyond the vines was lit completely and the sound of music drifted to their ears.

Xanitty was nervous but she could not help wonder at the beauty of everything. The merchant himself wondered anew as he walked back through the castle, taking Xanitty into the little room he had eaten in. There they found a table with food laid out for them to eat.

Xanitty was quite hungry and they sat down to eat. She became less nervous as they had wandered through most of the castle without a trace of the Beast. However, when the cats were finished eating, the claws of the Beast's hind feet could be heard tapping along the smooth marble floors toward the room they were seated in. The merchant shrank back into his chair with fear and

Xanitty's tail bristled under the skirt of her plain dress. When the Beast appeared, she tried to act normal-this seem to calm the creature. It visibly relaxed as it entered the room, filling it with his dark brown presence.

"Good evening, old cat. Good evening, Xanitty," it said in a voice which was meant to take away their fear yet was unsuccessful as it remained a growl. The merchant cat tried to shrink further into the chair but Xanitty returned the Beast's greeting.

"Did you come willingly? Will you wish to stay after your father has returned home?"

"Yes," said Xanitty.

"Good! This fulfills your father's promise. You may stay here with me. Tomorrow you shall bid each other farewell. Go into the next room. You will find two chests. Fill them as full as you can with gifts for your siblings, take your father to help you. It is only fair that they receive something for losing their sister. When the bell rings, it will be time for your father to leave." With an awkward bow, the Beast left the room.

Xanitty and her father went into the next room thinking about the fact that they would not see each other after this. Their gloomy thoughts

vanished completely at the sight of all the finery that the room contained. Xanitty picked out clothing that could be considered fit for royalty to give to her siblings. She also picked out some fine collars for them all. The merchant was dazzled by all the things Xanitty was packing into the chests.

“They will be happy but it is not ever going to fill the hole left in our family when you stay here. Xanitty, are you sure you want to go through with this?”

“They need you more than they need me, father. I will be fine. It is spring here. It-will-be-fine” Xanitty didn’t want to think too much about spending the rest of her lives with the Beast. Opening a large box that was in the corner of the room, she found it was full of gold coins.

“Father, I think that the gold in this box is more than enough to buy the things we’ve already put into the two chests. Let’s take the clothes and collars out and fill the chests with this gold.” The merchant wasn’t going to argue with her. They were surprised to find that the chests seemed to have more than enough room for the items already in them and all the gold coins they found in the box. There was still room to spare in the two

chests, but when the two cats tried to lift them, they were too heavy to move.

The merchant cat was angry and anxious over how he was ever going to take the chests back home to his other kittens.

“Let’s get them ready to be moved and wait to see what happens. There must be a way to move them.” Xanitty went about closing and securing the chests. When she and her father went back into the little room they were surprised to find that their breakfast was waiting for them.

“Is it really morning, already? It didn’t seem like we were in the other room that long,” said the merchant.

They were just finishing their breakfast when the bell rang. They got up quickly to go the courtyard. Neither Xanitty nor her father spoke, they were lost in their own thoughts. He was thinking the Beast might let him return to visit Xanitty; she was sure she would never see her father or her sisters and brothers again.

A carriage led by two horses was waiting in the courtyard. Inside the carriage were the two chests. The merchant was to drive the carriage to this home. The merchant said goodbye to Xanitty and

got onto the driver's seat of the carriage. As soon as he had the reins in his paws, the horses went off and the carriage sped out of sight.

Xanitty knew it was silly to cry because it wouldn't help her situation. Nonetheless, as she made her way back into the Beast's castle, she began to cry. Whether it was from the long trip, the sad departure of her father or some magic of the castle, Xanitty found herself getting more and more tired. When she reached the room the Beast had prepared for her, her sleepy eyes fell upon the bed. The instant she curled up on the bed she began to catnap.

While she catnapped, Xanitty had a strange dream: She found herself walking by a fountain encircled by trees and thinking of her sad fate. A voice sounded from behind her and she whirled around to find a young male cat that was so handsome she hardly paid attention to what he was saying.

"Xanitty, you're not as bad off as you think. In this place your true heart and kindness will be rewarded. Everything you wish for will be yours. I love you dearly, no matter how I may appear, try to understand me."

“Understand you? How do I do that?” asked Xanitty, ignoring that this cat seemed to know more about her than she did of him.

“Don’t trust what you see with your eyes. Only by seeing me through your heart will you save me from my misery.”

After the young male cat (which Xanitty took to be a prince of some sort) spoke this last, the dream faded and she woke at the sound of the clock chiming the dinner hour. Xanitty got up and found her dinner waiting for her in the room next to the bedroom. She found she was hungry. She ate quickly in case the Beast tried to join her. Having finished her dinner, she went over to the window and pondered her dream.

“It seems to me,” Xanitty said to herself. “That the Beast keep the Prince a prisoner. How can I save him? But, even though it seemed so real, it was only a dream.” Coming to this conclusion, she decided to leave the dining room and explore the castle.

Xanitty wandered aimlessly through the maze of halls and rooms in the huge building. She found it odd that she never meet another cat through out the place. She turned down a hall and let out a small chirp of surprise. There in front of

her, stood the Prince from her dream. As she moved forward, Xanitty realized it was not the Prince but a life-size painting of him. As Xanitty walked back to her room, she knew that her meeting the Prince had been more than a mere dream. "He must have been the owner of this place," she thought. "Then that Beast came and locked him away, taking over the castle."

She found her supper waiting for her and as she ate it, she continued thinking about the Prince and the Beast. Presently, she heard the Beast nearing the door to her room. His entrance was slow and deliberate, as if not to startle her.

"Good evening, Xanitty," the Beast said.

"Good evening," Xanitty replied. The Beast was polite and asked her about her day and she tried to answer him as best she could. The Beast seemed to be satisfied by her responses and rose to leave her room.

"Do you love me, Xanitty? Will you marry me?"

Xanitty was panic-stricken at these questions. No, she did not love the Beast, but would he no longer be so pleasant to her if she told him so?

"You can speak your true feelings," the Beast seemed to have read her mind.

“No, Beast,” Xanitty said, not daring to look at him. She heard the Beast say good night and the soft click of the door as it closed behind him. She got up from the table and went to bed. When she went to sleep, she had the same dream as she had that afternoon.

The days passed quickly in much the same way as her first full day at the castle. The castle was so large, Xanitty sometimes wondered if there truly was an end to it. There seemed to be endless things to explore for her amusement. Each evening she got to know the Beast a little better. Even so, she dreaded the end of the evening, for, without fail, the Beast asked her to marry him. She was a kind-hearted kitty and she didn't like having to keep telling the Beast 'no'. Every night passed the same way, with a dream about the Prince whose likeness was hanging in the hall of the castle.

Soon, Xanitty began to miss her siblings and her father so much, that her normally upbeat personality was quite downcast. The Beast could not help but notice the change in her and asked her what was the matter. Since she had gotten to

know the Beast, Xanitty no longer feared him. She answered him truthfully.

“Is it because you hate me? Is that why you wish to leave? Have I not given you everything?” the Beast asked in a low voice.

“I could never hate you. I don’t want to leave forever. I know the promise I made. I just wish to visit my family for a month. I promise to come back,” Xanitty said.

The Beast let out a deep sigh before speaking again. “I will not deny you this, even though it will cost me my life. Take the boxes in the room next to your own and fill them as you did before your father returned to his house. Remember to return to me when the month is over. If you don’t you will find that I am dead. You won’t need the carriage to bring you back,” the Beast handed Xanitty a shining gold collar with a beautiful golden mouse charm. “Simply grasp the charm with your paw and say ‘I wish to see my Beast again.’ Goodnight, Xanitty. Sleep well, soon you will see your family again.”

“Thank you, Beast. Thank you so much. You know I will come back,” Xanitty said, putting on the lovely collar.

After the Beast left, Xanitty filled the boxes as he instructed. Then she curled up on her bed to catnap. Soon she began to dream and was surprised to find her Prince sprawled out on the bank of the pond similar to the one in the castle garden.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“What do you care? You are leaving me here, to die, perhaps, and you dare to ask me what’s wrong?!”

“Don’t be so high and mighty! I’m only going to see my family for one month. I want to ease their fears of the Beast, to let them know I am safe. I will come back, I promised the Beast I would. He would die if I broke my promise.”

“What does it matter to you whether the Beast lives or dies?”

“I would die to save him from pain. He is a kind Beast, it is not his fault that he looks like a monster!” Xanitty said, angry at the sudden change in her normally kind and patience Prince. He had no chance to reply. Xanitty woke with a start to a sound she had not heard for nearly a year: other cats talking.

Xanitty looked around her and found that she was not in the Beast’s castle. She got up and saw

the boxes she packed were all in the room with her. Then she heard the sound of her father's voice and she rushed out to greet him. Her father and her siblings were shocked to see her. She explained her sudden appearance telling them that the Beast had let her go home for a month.

Xanitty told her father about her dreams and anxieties. She asked him what he thought she should do. The merchant considered what his daughter had told him and suggested that the Prince wanted Xanitty to understand that she should make the Beast happy by doing the only thing he asked of her: to marry him. Xanitty thought this was probably true but she didn't want to marry the Beast, not when she had a chance to free the Prince and marry him instead.

With her questions about her dream out of the way, Xanitty set about enjoying her visit. Her sisters quickly forgot the lovely gifts she brought home for them and started to get annoyed with her. Her brothers and father enjoyed having her back and she felt very sad about leaving them again when the time came.

Xanitty did not say goodbye when the month ended, nor did she wish on the golden mouse charm.

“What will one more day hurt? Surely the Beast will understand,” Xanitty said to herself night after night. This continued until one night when she had a horrible dream.

This time, there was no Prince, but to Xanitty’s own surprise, she found that he was not who she was looking for. She wandered down paths in the castle gardens until she heard a groan. She ran toward the sound and found the Beast where the Prince would have been. He was lying on his side, dying. His bright yellow eyes were glazed over and he had a hard time focusing them on her. When he finally did see her, he stretched out a now feeble, yet accusing, paw toward her.

The dream scared Xanitty, so much so that as soon as she woke up, she grasped the golden mouse charm in her paws and said: “I wish to see my Beast again.”

Instantly, she was back at the Beast’s castle. She burst out of the room she had appeared in and rushed out to the spot in the garden she’d seen in her dream. There, at the very same spot by the pond, Xanitty found the Beast. He was lying

quite still now. Xanitty went over to him to see if he was alive. She put an ear close to the Beast's face and she heard a rattling breath escape him.

"He's alive!" Xanitty let out a mew of delight. She scooped up some of the pond water in her little paws and splashed the Beast's face with it. She did this a few times before the shock of the cold water revived the Beast. He looked quite angry at being soaked but before he could let out a growl, Xanitty gave him a big hug.

"You're okay! I was never so afraid in all my nine lives! I thought you were dead! I didn't know how much I loved you until I thought I might never see you again."

The Beast was surprised by her words and actions. He looked more shocked now than he had when Xanitty had splashed him with the water.

"This—does this mean that you will marry me, Xanitty?"

"Yes, Beast."

As the words left her mouth, the entire garden, along with the place, was blaze with light. When the slits of her green eyes had adjusted to the light of the changing surroundings, Xanitty found that the Beast had disappeared. In his place stood the Prince from her dreams.

“Is this a dream?” Xanitty blinked, confused.


“No,” the Prince shook his head. “The dreams were the only way I could talk to you in my true form. I could only return to this form when someone who loved me for me, no matter what my appearance and proved it by agreeing to marry my Beast form. Now, shall we get married at once?”

“Oh, yes! But wait! My father, and my brothers and sisters. I should tell them . . .”

“No need to worry, just go into the castle and we will find them waiting for us.”

And so, Xanitty and the Beast were married that day, and in that magical grove they lived happily ever after.

THE GINGERBREAD CAT

nce upon a time there was an old woman and old man who had no pet of their own but very much wanted one. It came to pass that one day the woman said to the man, “I know what I can do! I will make us a nice little gingerbread cat.”

The woman began right way to mix up a batch of gingerbread dough. She rolled out the dough and cut it into the shape of a cat. She used pieces of green gumdrops for the eyes, a cinnamon candy for the nose, and icing for the mouth and stripes on the body.

The woman put the gingerbread cat into the oven to bake. When she thought it must be done, she opened the oven door to check. Suddenly, out popped the gingerbread cat and it raced out of the front door and down the road.

Pussy Cats Gruff

Startled, the woman quickly gathered her wits about her and ran after it calling, "Come back, come back, little gingerbread cat!" But the cat only laughed and shouted back over its shoulder:

"Run, run, run faster than that,

You can't catch me,

I'm the gingerbread cat!"

And catch it, she could not.

They soon ran past the woman's husband, who was chopping fire wood. The man put down his axe and ran after the gingerbread cat as he knew how much it meant to his wife. The gingerbread cat saw the man join in the chase and laughed again. "I'm faster than a woman and I'm faster than you!

Run, run, run faster than that,

You can't catch me,

I'm the gingerbread cat!"

A fat pig that was eating at its trough looked up to see what was going on. When it saw the gingerbread cat, it thought gingerbread would be a nice change of pace from the usual slop.

"Stop, gingerbread cat, and visit awhile!" the pig said.

The gingerbread cat just looked at the pig and said, "I'm faster than the woman and faster than the man. I'm faster than a fat pig, too!

Run, run, run faster than that,

You can't catch me,

I'm the gingerbread cat!"

The pig took great exception to the gingerbread cat's words.

"I'll show that puffed up piece of dough!" And the pig ran after the cat, but was unable to catch up to it.

The gingerbread cat was so pleased that no one could catch up to him. A fox was walking on the road ahead of the gingerbread cat, so he sped up to pass it. As he passed the fox, he called out; "I'm faster than the woman and faster than the man. I'm faster than the pig and I'm faster than you!

Run, run, run faster than that,

You can't catch me,

I'm the gingerbread cat!"

The fox was amused at this and trotted after the gingerbread cat, knowing that up ahead was a river.

The fox found, as he expected, the gingerbread cat pacing around the bank of the river.

“I see you don’t want to get wet, and I don’t blame you. It just so happens that I’m going across this river. So if you would like to get across to get away from the woman, the man and the pig, just hop onto my tail.” The fox curved its bushy tail toward the gingerbread cat.

“Thank you!” cried the gingerbread cat and onto the fox’s tail he hopped.

The fox went into the river and began to swim. He had not swum very far from the shore when he said to the gingerbread cat, “The river is getting deeper! You had better jump onto my back or you will get wet!” So the gingerbread cat did as the fox suggested.

The fox swam a bit further and then he said, “The water is getting deeper still! Jump onto my shoulders so you don’t get wet.” The gingerbread cat jumped up onto the fox’s shoulders to keep dry.

Soon the fox reached the middle of the river.


“Gingerbread cat, this is the deepest part of the river. I must swim with my head way up in the air to keep above the water. Jump onto my nose

where you will be safe!” And so the gingerbread cat jumped onto the fox’s nose.

This was what the fox had been waiting for. He flipped back his head, sending the gingerbread cat up into the air. The gingerbread cat fell back down to the open mouth of the fox. With three snaps of the fox’s jaws the gingerbread cat was gobbled up and that was the end of him.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THE TWELVE DANCING CAT PRINCESSES

nce upon a time there was a Cat King who had twelve daughter cats. Each daughter was said to be a more beautiful cat than the next. Because of their great beauty, the Cat King was very overprotective of his daughters.

The cat princesses' all slept in the same bedroom together, and their beds all stood side by side. Every night, when the cat princesses' were in bed, the Cat King locked the door. However, every morning, when he unlocked the door, he saw that the princesses' shoes were worn on the soles from dancing. Try as he might, the Cat King, or anyone else for that matter, could not figure out how the princesses' shoes were getting worn out from dancing.

To have the mystery solved, for his daughters would tell him nothing, the Cat King proclaimed

that whoever could find out where they danced at night would choose from them his wife and he would be king after his death. The Cat King also proclaimed that whoever came forward and did not solve the mystery within three days and nights, would lose one of his nine lives.

It was not long after the Cat King made this proclamation when a Cat Prince presented himself and volunteered to discover the princesses' secret. The Cat King received the prince well. In the evening the Prince was led to a room adjoining the princesses' bedroom. In the room was placed a bed for him and he was to watch to see where the princesses went and danced. To make sure that the princesses could do nothing in secret or go some other place, the door to their room was left open.

Soon the eyelids of the Prince grew so heavy that he could not keep his eyes open and he fell fast asleep. When the prince woke up in the morning, the twelve princesses had been off dancing. The telltale sign was their shoes, which stood under their beds, were worn on the soles so badly that they showed the beginnings of holes. On the second and third nights, after eating the

food and drinking the milk he was given by the oldest cat princess, the prince fell asleep again. When he awoke, there were the shoes with holes worn in their soles. The Cat Prince was unable to tell the Cat King where the twelve cat princesses had gone to wear holes in their shoes, so he lost one of his nine lives and was banished from the Cat King's land.

There were many other suitors who came after the first Cat Prince had been banished. Each tried to discover the twelve cat princesses' secret but none could, therefore each lost one of their nine lives and were banished from the King's land. Now, there came to the Cat King's land, a poor wounded soldier who could no longer serve. The soldier cat walked through the town and happened to meet an old woman cat.

"Where are you going, dear soldier?" asked the old woman cat.

"I really don't know myself, madam," answered the soldier cat and he laughed. "I have half a mind to find out where those twelve princesses have worn out the soles of their shoes! Then I would become the King!"

“That is not as impossible as you may think it is. I can help you. Remember me when you succeed,” said the old woman cat. “You must not eat the food or drink the milk that will be brought to you at night. You must also pretend to be fast asleep.” The old woman cat pulled out a little cloak and handed it to the soldier cat.

“If you wear this cloak, you will be made invisible and then you can follow the twelve cat princesses undiscovered.”

“Thank you for your kindness, madam cat. I will go and find my fortune where the twelve cat princesses dance the night away,” said the soldier cat and he went to the Cat King.

The wounded soldier cat bowed as best he could to the King and presented himself as a problem solver.

“I, Your Highness, will discover for you where your twelve daughters dance the soles off their shoes in the night.”

“So you, and the others before you, have said. You have three days and nights in which to discover my daughters’ secret. If you have not discovered where my daughters go at night, you will lose one of your nine lives,” said the Cat King. The cat soldier nodded his head that he

understood and agreed. Then the Cat King ordered that royal clothes be placed upon the soldier cat and he was received as if he had been a prince.

That evening at bedtime the cat soldier was escorted to the room adjoining the princesses' bedroom. When the soldier was about to retire to bed, the oldest cat princess came and brought him some food and a cup of milk. The soldier begged off the food, saying that he had ate his fill at dinner. But he accepted the cup of milk. The clever soldier cat had tied a sponge under his chin and he let the milk run down into the sponge so he did not drink a drop.

Then the soldier cat laid down and when he had laid there a while he began to snore as if he had fallen asleep. The twelve cat princesses heard the soldier snoring and laughed.

"Who would want to marry a cat that snores! No wonder he got wounded, that noise would give anyone away!"

"He would have been better off not bothering coming here and keep one of his lives," snickered the oldest cat princess. Then the princesses got up out of bed and they opened their wardrobes and

chests and brought out their prettiest dresses. They preened themselves in front of the mirror. They twirled about in anticipation of a wonderful night of dancing.

The youngest cat princess, however, was not as carefree as her sisters.

“I don’t understand why, because the rest of you are so happy, but I have a strange feeling that something bad is about to happen to us,” she said.

“You silly kit! You are always worrying about nothing,” said her oldest sister. “Don’t you recall the number of cat princes that have already come and lost one of their nine lives? I didn’t even need to give this soldier a sleeping draught, he wouldn’t have woken up anyway.”

When the princesses were ready, they studied the soldier cat carefully. The soldier cat had his eyes closed and he didn’t stir. The princesses felt certain that it was now safe to go. The eldest cat princess went to her little bed and turned the knob on the bedpost. Immediately, the bed sank into the earth. One after the other, the princesses went down through the opening, the eldest leading the way.

The soldier cat, who had been watching everything, waited no longer and put on the little

cloak that the old woman cat gave him. He went down the opening with the youngest princess. About half way down the steps, he stepped on the hem of the princess' dress by accident. This startled the princess and she turned and looked about.

"What is that? Who pulled my dress?" she cried.

"Don't be so skittish, you probably have just caught it on a nail, " scolded the oldest cat princess.

Soon, the twelve cat princesses and, unbeknownst to them, the cat soldier had reached the bottom of the stairs. They found themselves in a pretty lane of trees. The leaves on these trees were of silver and the moonlight made them shine and sparkle.

"I had better take some proof of this place back with me," the cat soldier thought to himself. He snapped off a nice sized twig full of the silver leaves.

The snap sounded like a gun firing and it caused the youngest cat princess, who was the closest to the sound, to jump about one foot off of

the ground. She looked about nervously, her fur all on end.

“Did you hear that?” she hissed. “Something’s not right.”

“You skittish kitten, it’s only the kingdom saluting our arrival. Tonight is special, remember, it is the one-hundredth time we’ve come here,” said the oldest cat princess.

As soon as they left the lane of silver trees, they found themselves in another lane of trees. This lane of trees had leaves of gold. The cat soldier again reached up and snapped off a twig full of gold leaves. The youngest cat princess nearly jumped out of her skin but the eldest princess eased her sisters by assuring them it was another salute.

The princesses (and the soldier) entered another lane of trees. These trees had leaves that were of bright diamonds. The cat soldier reached up and snapped off the twig to add to his proof. The eldest cat princess quelled her youngest sister’s protests, insisting that the noise was yet another salute. The cat soldier shook his head in amazement at the eldest princess’ denial.

They continued down the lane until they came to a great lake. Upon the lake floated twelve little

boats and in each of the boats sat a handsome cat prince. They were waiting for the twelve cat princesses. Each princess got into a boat with one of the princes. The cat soldier seated himself in the boat with the youngest princess. Her prince said to her, "I wonder why the boat is so much heavier tonight?"

"I hope you are not referring to my weight! I assure you, my sisters are all heavier than me!" huffed the princess. She did not tell him about the frights she had on the way there so the prince couldn't understand why she was so short with him.

On the other side of the lake, to which the princes rowed, there was a magnificent castle that was warmly lit. From the shore the cat soldier could hear the music of drums and pipes. Inside the castle each cat prince danced with the cat princess he loved. The cat soldier danced amongst the revelers unseen. Whenever one of the princesses had a cup of milk in her paw, the cat soldier took great delight in puzzling them by drinking it up. The cups were empty when the princesses put them to their mouths. The youngest princess was alarmed by the event but

one look from her oldest sister made her close her mouth quickly. The princesses danced in the castle until it was almost dawn, by that time their shoes had holes worn into the soles. The princes rowed them back to the other side of the lake, this time the cat soldier traveled over with the oldest cat princess.

When they reached the shore, they said goodbye to the princes and promised that they would be back the next night. The cat soldier rushed ahead of the princesses and jumped into his bed. When the twelve princesses finally climbed up the stairs, very slowly because they were tired from their night of dancing, they could hear the soldier snoring.

“We didn’t have to worry about him, our secret is safe,” they laughed.

The princesses took off their beautiful dresses and put them back in their wardrobes and chests. They took off what remained of their shoes and put them under their beds, then they laid down to sleep.

That morning the cat soldier decided not to say anything about what had happened. Instead, he went back down to watch the cat princesses

dance and enjoy themselves with their princes. He joined in the fun himself and thought of how he could get out of marrying one of the princesses. The last night, besides taking a third branch from each of the trees, the cat soldier took with him a cup that one of the princesses had tried to drink milk from as further proof.

Finally, the hour arrived when the cat soldier had to give the king his answer. The cat soldier took the nine tree branches and cup and bundled them up inside his little cloak. The twelve princesses followed him at a discreet distance and when the door was closed, they gathered around to listen to what was said.

“Where have my twelve daughters gone to dance holes into the soles of their shoes?” asked the Cat King.


“In an underground castle with twelve princes,” answered the cat soldier. He then told the King what he had seen and opened the bundle to show his proof. The Cat King’s eyes glistened at the sight of the gold, silver and diamond leaves. He summoned his daughters and asked if what the cat soldier said was true. The cat princesses saw that they had been found out and that they had no choice but to confess.

Pussy Cats Gruff

The Cat King asked the cat soldier which of the princesses he wanted to marry.

“Sire,” said the soldier cat. “I know that marrying the princess of my choice was part of the agreement but I have watched your daughters these past three nights and I am convinced that not one of them would be happy as my wife. I propose that I keep the proof that I have shown you as my reward for solving the mystery instead. This way your daughters may marry the princes that they are in love with.” The Cat King agreed to this proposal and the cat princesses married the twelve cat princes that very day. The cat soldier went on his way to spend his fortune and he made sure to stop by the old woman cat who had helped him. He gave her the cup and one branch from each of the three trees from the underground kingdom.

CATSEL AND GRETELCAT

nce upon a time by a great forest lived a poor wood cutter cat with his wife and his two kittens. The boy kitten was called Catsel and the girl kitten was Gretelcat. The wood cutter had very little to eat and when a great famine began he didn't have any food left beyond the next day.

That night, he tossed and turned in his bed worrying about how to feed his family.

"What will become of us? How can we feed the children when we don't have enough food for ourselves?" he said.

"I'll tell you what we can do," said the wife. "Tomorrow we'll take the kitten out into the deepest part of the forest, then we'll light a fire for them and give them some bread. Then we'll go to work and leave them alone. They won't find their way back home and we'll be rid of them."

Pussy Cats Gruff

“Oh, no!” said the father. “I can’t do that. I can’t leave my kittens alone in the forest. The wild animals would eat them!”

“You fool,” said the wife. “Fine. Then we will all die of hunger. You might as well build our coffins now!” The father’s wife gave him no rest until he agreed to her plan.

“But I still feel sorry for the poor kittens,” he said.

The two kittens hadn’t been able to sleep either and they heard what their step mother had said to their father. Gretelcat cried and said to Catsel,

“We are done for!”

“Hush now, Gretelcat,” said Catsel, “Don’t worry yourself. I will figure out a way to help us.”

When the adult cats had fallen asleep, Catsel got out of bed and put on his little coat. He snuck downstairs and outside. The moon was shining brightly and the white pebbles that were on the ground in front of the house glittered like pieces of silver. Catsel scooped up as many pebbles as he could and put them into the pockets of his little coat. Then he snuck back into the house and up to the room he and Gretelcat shared.

“Put your mind at ease, sister, and go to sleep. We will be able to find our way back home.” Both kittens laid back down and fell asleep.

When morning came, even before the sun rose, the step mother came and woke Catsel and Gretelcat.

“Get up, you lazy kittens! We are going into the forest to get some wood,” the step mother said. She gave each of them a small piece of bread.

“This is for your dinner. Don’t eat it up before then, you won’t get anything more.” Gretelcat took the bread and wrapped it under her apron because Catsel had no room in his pockets for it. The father, step mother and Catsel and Gretelcat set out to gather wood in the forest.

All the while they were walking Catsel dropped the white pebbles out of his pockets. When they reached the deepest part of the forest, the father said: “My kittens, pile some wood up and I will light a fire so you won’t be cold.”

Catsel and Gretelcat gathered so much wood together that it was almost as high as a small hill. Their father lit the wood. When the fire was burning strongly, the step mother said: “Now, kittens, go lay down by the fire and rest. Your

father and I will go into the forest and cut some wood. When we're finished, we'll come back and get you."

Catsel and Gretelcat sat quietly by the fire. When noon came, they each ate a bit of bread because they could hear the sound of an axe cutting trees and thought their father was near. The sound they heard, however, was not an axe but a fallen tree branch their father had fastened to a tree that the wind was blowing up against the tree.

The kittens sat and kept waiting for a long time. Finally they could not keep their eyes open and they fell asleep. When they woke up, it was in the dark of night. Gretelcat began to cry.

"How do we get home now?" she said. Catsel patted his sister's shoulder.

"Just wait until you can see the moon and it will shine the way for us," he said.

When the full moon shone in the sky, Catsel took Gretelcat by the paw and showed her the pebbles he had dropped out of his pocket. They were now shining like pieces of silver in the moonlight.

Catsel and Gretelcat followed the trail of shiny pebbles the entire night until they finally reach their father's house. They knocked on the door and their step mother answered it.

When she saw it was the two kittens, she said: "You naughty kittens, why did you go to sleep so long in the forest? We thought you might never come home!" Their father was very happy to see his kittens back safe and sound and brought them into the house right away.

Things were hard for the family for a while, but they all could eat reasonably well. Then, a few months later, another famine came and the family found themselves low on food once more. Catsel and Gretelcat lie in bed one night unable to sleep because of their hungry bellies. Their father and step mother were awake, too.

"Everything except for one half loaf of bread has been eaten, after that we will have nothing. The kittens must go. We'll take them farther away from the cottage this time so they won't find their way back again. Either they go or we all will die," the step mother said. Their father didn't wish to go along with the plan this time.

"Only think, last time when they returned, everything turned out alright," he said. The

kittens' stepmother argued with their father until he realized that because he went along with her the first time, he could not say no this time.

The kittens heard every word. When the adult cats were asleep, Catsel got up and snuck downstairs to go out and gather some pebbles. However, their step mother had locked the door and Catsel could not get outside. Still, he comforted Gretelcat and said.

"Don't cry, Gretelcat. Go to sleep now, God will help us."

Early the next morning their step mother came and took the kittens out of their beds. She gave them a bit of bread each, but it was smaller than the time before. Off the family went into the forest to gather wood. On the way into the forest, Catsel crumbled his bread in his pocket. As he crumbled the bread, he would drop some on the ground, leaving a trail of crumbs behind him. Little by little, Catsel threw all of the bread crumbs onto the path.

Their step mother led the kittens deeper into the forest this time, to a spot where they had never been before. The kittens piled some wood up high and a fire was lit.

“You kittens sit here and wait. If you get tired, you can rest a little. Your father and I are going into the forest to cut wood, and in the evening when we’re finished we’ll come and get you,” said the step mother.

When noon came, Gretelcat shared her piece of bread with Catsel as he had none left. Soon the kittens fell asleep and, as had happened the time before, no one came back for them. It was the middle of the night when the kittens woke up. Catsel calmed his sister down by saying, “Wait until the moon appears, then we’ll see the bread crumbs that I dropped from my pocket. We will follow the path and find our way back home.”

When the moon shone clearly in the sky, the kittens set out but they couldn’t find any crumbs. The birds in the forest had eaten them all up!

“We’ll find our way home soon,” Catsel said to Gretelcat. But they wandered around and around and did not find their home.

The kittens walked the entire night and all of the next day too. They simply could not find a way out of the forest. They were very hungry. They had found nothing to eat but a few berries. At the end

of the day, Catsel and Gretelcat were so tired that their legs wouldn't carry them a step further so they laid down under a tree and fell asleep.

It had been three days since Gretelcat and Catsel had left their father's house. The kittens started walking again, but they always ended up deeper into the forest than before. It was about midday when they saw an appetizing-looking snow white bird sitting on a tree branch.

The bird was singing so delightfully that the kittens went under the tree and sat looking up at it, thinking:

"What a tasty meal that bird would make! If only we had the strength to climb the tree and catch it." The bird seemed to understand what the kittens were thinking for when it finished singing, it flew away before them and they followed it.

The bird led the kittens to a little house. When Catsel and Gretelcat saw the house, they forgot all about the little bird. What a house for two starving kittens to behold! They saw that it was made of gingerbread and covered with cakes and that the windows were made of clear sugar.

"We will have a good meal here!" said the kittens to each other and they fell upon the house.

Catsel reached up and broke off a small piece of the rood to see how it tasted. Gretelcat nibbled at the sweet window panes. A voice called from inside the house;

“Nibble, nibble, little mouse,
Who is nibbling at my house?”

The kittens answered;

“The wind, the wind,
The gusty, gusty wind.”

And they continued eating because they were so hungry. Catsel tore down a great big piece of the roof. Gretelcat pushed out a whole round window pane and sat down to eat it.

Suddenly the door to the house opened and a very old cat, who supported herself with a crutch, came out. Catsel and Gretelcat were so frightened that they dropped the food they had in their paws. The old cat just nodded her head and said,

“Oh, you poor dear kittens. How did you get way out here? Please come in and stay with me. No harm will come to you.”

She took the kittens by their paws and led them into her house. She set out on the table for them, milk and pancakes with sugar, apples and nuts (which Catsel was not very fond of but he was so hungry he ate some anyway). After the kittens

had eaten their fill, the old cat led them to two pretty little beds. Catsel and Gretelcat laid down on the beds and fell fast asleep, thinking that they were in heaven.

The old cat was only pretending to be kind. She was really a wicked witch cat who wanted to eat the kittens. As she was an old cat, the witch didn't see very well, but she hadn't lost her sense of smell. She had known all along that the kittens were outside, eating her house.

The witch was up early in the morning and she checked to see that the kittens were still sleeping in the beds. She saw that the kittens were asleep. Then she grabbed Catsel and carried him to a little stable and locked him in a cage with a grated door. Catsel meowed with all his might but it was no use, no one was around to help him.

Then the witch went to Gretelcat and woke her up.

"Get up! Fetch some water and cook something good for your brother. He's in the stable and he's going to get fat. When he's fat, I will eat him," said the witch. Gretelcat cried and muttered something about the fact that a cat

never fetched anything but it was no use, she was forced to do what the wicked witch told her to do.

The best food was cooked up for poor Catsel, but Gretelcat had nothing to eat but crab-shells. Every morning the witch went to the stable and said; "Catsel, stretch out your paw so I can feel if you will be fat soon." Catsel stretched out to the witch a little bone instead of his paw.

The witch, because of her bad eyesight, couldn't tell that Catsel was stretching a bone out to her and thought it was his paw. She was astonished that nothing was making him fat.

Four weeks had now gone by and Catsel was still, or so the witch thought, thin. The witch couldn't wait any longer.

"Gretelcat," she said to the kitten. "Bring me some water. Be Catsel fat or be he thin, tomorrow I am going to eat him!" Poor Gretelcat! She was very upset when she had to get the water for the cauldron and tears fell from her eyes down her furry cheeks.

Early the next morning, Gretelcat had to go out and hang the cauldron with the water and light the fire.

“We’ll bake first,” said the witch. “I’ve already heated the oven and kneaded the dough.” She pushed Gretelcat to the oven.

“Crawl in and see if it’s heated,” said the witch. She had decided to eat both of the kittens in the same day. Gretelcat quickly figured out what the witch had in mind and she pretended that she didn’t understand.

“I don’t know how to do that. How do you get in?”

“You silly kitten! The door is big enough. See, I could get in myself.” The witch went to the oven and poked her head inside the door. This was the chance Gretelcat had been waiting for! She pushed the witch into the oven and shut the door, which was the end of the witch.

Gretelcat now ran as fast as she could to Catsel. She opened the cage and cried; “Catsel, Catsel! We are saved! The old witch is dead!” Then Catsel jumped out of the cage and hugged his sister. The kittens laughed and jumped in their joy. They went back into the house to see if there was anything they could take with them as they tried to find their way back home.

In every corner of the house the kittens found chests full of pearls and jewels. Catsel filled his

pockets with the treasure and Gretelcat wrapped as many pearls and jewels as she could in her apron. Then the kittens left the house and walked as fast as they could to get out of that part of the forest.

The kittens had walked for about two hours when they came upon a great pond.

"We can't get across," said Catsel. "I don't see a bridge."

"Neither do I," said Gretelcat. "But I do see a white duck swimming over there. Maybe if we ask her, she will help us." So Gretelcat called to the duck and asked her for help. The duck nodded and swam over to them. Catsel got on the duck's back and told his sister to join him.

"No," Gretelcat said. "The two of us would be too heavy. She can take you across first and come back for me." And the duck did just that.


The kittens continued walking once they were on the other side of the pond. The forest seemed to be more and more familiar until they saw in the distance, their father's house. The kittens ran as fast as they could home. They thought even their awful step mother was better than the witch they had just escaped from. But to their surprise, when

they returned home, after a joyful reunion with their father, he told them that their step mother had fallen ill and died.

Gretelcat dumped the pearls and jewels that she had rolled up in her apron onto the table. Catsel took the treasure out of his pockets and added it to what was already on the table. Their father was very happy.

“We will never be separated again!” he promised. And they were together from that day on.

THE THREE FEATHERS

nce upon a time there was a King who had three sons. Two of these sons, Prince Sid and Prince Ben, were clever. The third son, Prince Beanie, however, did not speak much and was thought to be slow of mind.

When the King had become old and weak, he began to think of what would happen when he died. He did not know which of the three Princes should inherit the kingdom after him.

The old King called the three of them to him.

“I have been thinking seriously about which of you three should inherit the kingdom when I have passed on. This is what you shall do: Go forth, and he who brings back to me the most beautiful carpet ever made shall be king after my death.”

And so there would be no dispute amongst the Princes, the old King took them outside of the

castle. He took three of the feathers from the most recent bird they had killed and blew them into the air.

“You shall each go as your feather flies,” instructed the old King.

Prince Sid’s feather flew to the east. Prince Ben’s feather flew to the west. Prince Beanie’s feather, however, flew straight up and did not go far but soon fell to the ground. Sid went off to the right and Ben went to the left and they both mocked Beanie because he was forced to stay where his feather had fallen. Beanie sat down where the feather had landed and sulked about his bad luck.

How was he possibly going to find the most beautiful carpet in the world if he couldn’t go any farther than a few feet in front of the castle?! Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw that there was a trapdoor close to the feather. He lifted up the door and looked inside; there he found some steps. Beanie went down the steps. At the bottom of the steps he found another door and he knocked on it. Beanie heard a voice inside saying:

“Little fluffy maiden small,

Phoenix McKnight

Padding here and everywhere,
Pad over to the door,
And quickly see who's there."

The door opened and Beanie saw a great, fluffy cat sitting there and all around her was a crowd of little kittens.

"King's son, what is it that you desire?" asked the great, fluffy cat.

"I would like to have the most beautiful and finest carpet in the world," said Beanie.

The fluffy cat called a kitten and said:

"Little fluffy maiden small,
Padding here and everywhere,
Pad quickly and bring me,
The great chest here."

The kitten brought the chest and the great fluffy cat opened it. From it she gave Beanie a carpet so beautiful and fine that on the earth above, no one could have woven one like it. Beanie thanked the great, fluffy cat and climbed the steps back up to the world above.

Prince Sid and Prince Ben, however, had thought their brother Beanie to be so stupid that they believed he would never be able to find a carpet, let alone bring one back!

“Why should we go through all the trouble of finding a beautiful carpet when he won’t bring back anything at all?” Sid and Ben thought to themselves. They bought some rugs woven with coarse yarn from the first shepherd’s wives they came across and brought them home to the King.

At the same time Sid and Ben arrived with their rugs, Beanie also came back, whistling happily, carrying his beautiful carpet in a roll upon his shoulder. When the old King saw Beanie’s carpet he was astonished.

“If justice be done, the kingdom belongs to Beanie,” said the old King. But Sid and Ben argued and pestered their father saying that it would be impossible to hand the kingdom over to Beanie, who didn’t know anything about anything.

“Enough!” bellowed the old King and Sid and Ben fell silent. “We will settle the matter in a fair way and do as I did before. He who brings back to me the most beautiful ring will inherit the kingdom.”

Again the old King led the three Princes out to the front of the castle and blew three feathers into the air. Each Prince was to follow his own feather. Sid's feather went off to the east again. Ben's feather went off to the west again. And Beanie's feather again flew straight up and fell down near the door which led down into the earth.

Beanie opened the door and went down the steps again. When he knocked on the door below, he heard the voice of the great, fluffy cat say:

“Little fluffy maiden small,
Padding here and everywhere,
Pad over to the door,
And quickly see who's there.”

When the door was opened and the great, fluffy cat saw that it was Beanie, she asked him what it was that he wanted.

“I would like to have the most beautiful ring in the world!” answered Beanie. The fluffy cat called a kitten and said:

“Little fluffy maiden small,
Padding here and everywhere,

Pussy Cats Gruff

Pad quickly and bring me,
The great chest here.”

The kitten brought the chest to her and she opened it. From the chest she gave to Beanie a ring which sparkled with jewels and was so beautiful that no jeweler on earth could have been able to make it. Beanie thanked the great, fluffy cat for the ring and went back up the steps to the world above.

Sid and Ben sincerely doubted that Beanie would be able to find a ring. They believed that Beanie’s finding a carpet was just dumb luck, so they did not trouble themselves about getting a beautiful ring. Oh, no, they were far too clever for that sort of work. Instead they knocked out the nails of a carriage ring and took it back to their father. When Beanie gave his father the beautiful golden ring, there was no comparison to be made between it and the carriage rings.

“The kingdom belongs to Beanie,” said the old King.

Sid and Ben could not believe that Beanie could ever rule a kingdom and pestered their

father until he agreed to set another condition in order to be king.

“He who brings back with him the most beautiful woman will have the kingdom,” said the old King.

Once more (and he hoped that it would be the last time for he was growing tired of Sid and Ben’s whining), the old King took the three Princes out to the front of the castle and blew three feathers into the air.

Once more Sid’s feather flew to the east. Once more Ben’s feather flew to the west. And once more Beanie’s feather flew straight up into the air and landed by the trapdoor leading down into the earth.

Beanie went down and knocked on the door as he had done the two times before. He heard the voice of the great, fluffy cat say:

“Little fluffy maiden small,
Padding here and everywhere,
Pad over to the door,
And quickly see who’s there.”

The great, fluffy cat saw that it was Beanie when the door was opened.

“King’s son, what is it that you desire?” she asked.

“I am to take home with me the most beautiful woman ever this time!” said Beanie and he expected to hear the great cat say “Little fluffy maiden small . . . ” as she had before. But instead she said:

“Oh! The most beautiful woman! Well, she’s not here right now, but you will have her in a moment.”

The great, fluffy cat presented to Beanie a yellow squash which had been hollowed out and to the squash there were harnessed six moles. Beanie looked at the squash in dismay.

“Just what am I supposed to do with that?”

“Oh, just put one of my little kittens into it,” answered the cat. Beanie plucked a kitten out from the crowd around him at random and he placed her in the hollowed out squash.

He had hardly put her in the squash when she turned into a beautiful woman. Beanie was amazed to see such a beautiful maiden before him. Then he looked down at the squash and the six moles.

“What about those?” he asked, pointing to them. The maiden laughed and told him that they had to take them to the earth above. When they had done so, the squash turned into a fine golden coach and the six moles changed into horses. Beanie helped the maiden into the coach and they drove off quickly to the old King.

Sid and Ben came sauntering in later. They hadn’t bothered going down their paths in search of beautiful women, instead they brought with them the first peasant women they had chanced to meet. The old King took one look at the women Sid and Ben brought with them and said,

“After my death, the kingdom belongs to my youngest son, Beanie.”


“We can’t agree to Beanie being the king,” Sid and Ben told their father. “Let us hang a ring in the center of the hall. Whichever of the women we have brought back with us who can jump through the ring, let that son inherit the kingdom.” They suggested this contest because they thought the peasant women they brought with them would be able to jump through the ring easily. They believed that the beautiful maiden that Beanie

had brought back with him would hurt herself if she tried to jump through the ring.

To spare himself breath, the old King agreed to the contest and a ring was hung in the center of the hall. The first to attempt the feat was the peasant woman that Prince Sid had brought back with him. She was a bit too heavy and she missed the ring completely, falling flat on her face. The second peasant woman was a bit more successful than the first, she at least reached the ring. However, she got caught on it at her waist and there she swung with her arms and legs dangling down.

The contest was delayed for a time while Prince Ben helped his peasant woman down from the ring (which could have been a disaster had he not been there to provide a nice, soft landing for her). The pretty maiden Prince Beanie brought back with him finally had her turn. She leaped into the air and flew through the ring. She landed on her feet with all the grace and ease of a cat. Then all protests had to stop, it was certain now that Beanie would receive the crown. And when he did, Beanie and his wife ruled the land wisely.

THE LITTLE SNOW KITTEN

nce upon a time in a far away place, there were an old woman and an old man. The old woman and old man were very nice people and people spoke well of them. They were happy with their lives but they felt that something was missing.

One day when they were standing at the window watching their neighbors go by laughing and playing with their children and pets, they realized what was missing. They wanted a pet! A companion of their very own.

One time, during the winter, the old woman and old man stood at their window watching their neighbors' children play. The children had a wonderful snowball fight. When they were finished hurling snow at each other, they built a number of snowmen and played amongst the maze of snowmen.

Pussy Cats Gruff

An idea struck the old man as he looked at the snowmen the children had built.

"I know! We can go out and make ourselves a little snow dog! Then we will have a companion outside, while the snow lasts."

"A snow dog?" the old woman wrinkled her nose at the idea. "A cat would be much better for we are older and cats need care but not as much as a dog does."

"Alright, a snow cat is what we will build," the old man said.

The two of them put on their boots and their hats, their gloves and their winter coats and out they went into the backyard. Together they rolled the snow, patted it gently into place and shaped the back, the legs, the tail, and a head with two pointed ears. When they were finished, it was a very beautiful cat indeed. What a pity their little snow cat was not real!

"Marvelous!" said the old man. "If only she would purr for us or rub up against our boots!"

"Right, and run and play with the other cats in the neighborhood," said the old woman. The pair stood looking earnestly at their snow cat, wishing with all their hearts that the cat was real.

Suddenly, the ears of the snow cat began to twitch. The snow cat's tail began to curl close around its body. The icy texture of snow turned into the soft texture of white fur. The snow cat blinked its big green eyes at the old man and old woman. Their wish had come true. The snow kitten was real!

The snow kitten stretched lazily as she became completely real. She walked up to the old woman and old man and purred as she rubbed against their legs. The woman rushed into the house and brought back with her a blanket. She wrapped the little snow cat in the blanket. The old man picked the cat and the blanket up and they all went into the house.

"I should not be kept too warm. Please, put me in the window sill and I will be just fine," said the snow kitten. The old man set her down on the window sill and the snow kitten purred and rubbed her head against his arm affectionately. She was very happy to be with the old woman and old man. The old woman and old man were overjoyed to have the little snow kitten with them.

The old woman went out to the shop and bought a lovely silver colored collar for the snow

kitten to wear. She put the collar around the kitten's neck. The snow kitten looked at her reflection in the window, turning this way and that. She thanked the old woman for the collar.

Soon, the snow kitten jumped down from the window sill and went over to the door.

"It's very hot in here, I really must go out and cool down."

"But it is almost time for us all to go to bed," the old woman said. "Surely you must be waiting to curl up in a warm bed and sleep."

"Oh, no!" said the snow kitten. "I am a kitten of the snow. I would melt if I slept in a warm bed. No, no, I must play with the snowflakes that fall from the sky and frolic in the frost all night long."

Out the door the snow kitten went, and play and frolic is what she did. She was quite a sight and the old woman and old man watched her out the window until their eyelids got so heavy they had to go to bed.

Even when they went to bed, one of them would wake up with a start and wonder if they had dreamed the whole thing. Then they would wake the other, voice their fear and finally both of them would have to get up and look out the window. Outside, they were relieved to see, the little snow

kitten jumping after the falling snow and chasing the frost across the backyard.

The next morning, when the snow kitten noticed the light was on in the cottage, she rushed in carrying an icicle.

“What is that for, dear?” asked the old woman.

“This is my food. Please crush it in a bowl and I will eat it all up. This is what kittens of the snow eat!” So the old woman pounded the icicle into little pieces and put the bowl of ice down for the snow kitten. The old woman and old man watched in mild amazement as the snow kitten gobbled up all the ice in the bowl.

After she had eaten her breakfast, the snow kitten went outside and played with the children and the other pets in the neighborhood. The old man and old woman watched the snow kitten with pride.

“That’s our kitten! She’s real and she is ours!”

Whenever the kitten was hungry, she would go inside, carrying an icicle to be crushed up for her. Every time the old woman or old man said,

“Wouldn’t you like to sleep inside the cottage tonight?”, the snow kitten always answered,

“Oh, no! I am a kitten of the snow! I must play outside with the snowflakes and frolic with the frost!”

Life went by happily all winter for the old man, the old woman and the little snow kitten. But soon, signs that winter would soon be over and spring would be coming started to appear. With these signs the snow kitten began to be sad and restless. She did not play or frolic as much as she once did.

One day, just before spring came, the snow kitten said to the old woman and old man:

“Winter now has come to end,
I must leave you my friends,
The best of times this has been,
Fear not, for we shall meet again.”

The old woman and old man were upset at this news and begged the snow kitten to stay.

“You can’t leave us! What will we do without you? You have brought such happiness to our lives!” The old man locked the door to keep the snow kitten from leaving and the old woman hugged her tightly. In the warm cottage, the snow kitten began to melt and nothing could stop the

melting. Soon there was nothing left of the kitten except a pool of water and a silver collar.

The old man and old woman cried and cried. They were certain that they would never see the snow kitten again. They put away the silver collar that the snow kitten had left behind.

One night, when winter had come again, the old woman and old man awoke with a start. They listened carefully and looked at each other.

"Doesn't that sound like the purr of our little snow kitten?" the old man whispered. They quickly got out of bed. When they opened the front door, sure enough, there was the little snow kitten. In she bounded, purring and rubbing against their legs. She said:


"I told you we would meet again,
Every year will be the same,
Winter comes and I am here,
Winter goes and I disappear!"

The old man and old woman scooped up the little snow kitten. They all laughed and cried and were very happy to be back together. The old woman got the silver collar out and placed it around the snow kitten's neck again. It took some time for the old woman and old man to get used to

Pussy Cats Gruff

the snow kitten leaving at the end of winter but soon they started looking forward to the time when they would all be together again. Every early frost brought with it the promise of the return of their beloved snow kitten.

SNOW WHITE CAT

nce upon a time there was born to a King and Queen a beautiful kitten daughter. The kitten had fur that was white as snow and ears black as ebony. She also had a patch of fur on her chest that was a red as blood. The King and Queen named her Snow White. Sadly, shortly after the kitten was born, the Queen died.

After a year had gone by, the King met another cat, fell in love with her beauty, and married her. The new Queen was a very beautiful cat, but she was proud and snobbish. The Queen could not stand it if any other cat would be considered more beautiful than she. To reassure herself that she was the most beautiful cat alive, the Queen had a magic Mirror. When she stood in front of the Mirror and said:

Pussy Cats Gruff

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest cat of all?”

The Mirror answered:

“You, O Queen, are the fairest of all!”

Then the evil Queen was satisfied because she knew the magic Mirror told only the truth. But Snow White was growing up, and she became more beautiful every day. A few months passed and Snow White was more beautiful than the Queen.

One day, when the Queen went to her magic Mirror and asked:

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest cat of all?”

The Mirror answered:

“Though you are fair, O my Queen,
Snow White is the fairest cat I’ve seen.”

“What?!?!” shrieked the Queen. She was shocked and angry. She threw her catnip toys around and she scratched her drapes in her rage. This could not be! She wasn’t going to let this happen. Somehow, she had to get rid of Snow White to reclaim her rightful place as fairest cat of all.

Every day from then on, whenever she looked at Snow White, she hated her. The wicked Queen could not eat or sleep until finally, she thought of a way to get rid of Snow White. She called her huntscat and instructed him: “Take the kitten away into the forest. Kill her and bring me back her heart as proof.”

The huntscat took Snow White into the forest as he was ordered. But as he went to kill her, she was capering about so innocently that his conscience struck him.

“Go,” he told her. “You are no longer safe at the castle. For reasons known only to herself, the Queen wishes you dead. Go and hide from her if you wish to live.” Frightened by the huntscat’s words, Snow White quickly ran further into the forest.

The wicked Queen’s huntscat killed a boar instead of Snow White and took its heart to the

Queen. The wicked Queen laughed in evil delight at receiving the heart, or so she thought, of Snow White. She took it and kept it in a box.

Snow White was now a very frightened kitten, she was all alone in the forest and she had no idea of what to do. She began to run again. She ran over sharp stones and through thorny thickets in her fear. The wild animals of the forest ran past her but did not do this to harm her. Word had spread through the forest about Snow White and the wicked Queen who wanted her dead. The wild animals herded the frightened kitten to a little cottage.

Snow White was exhausted from running and when she saw the little cottage she thought, "I will go in there and find a place to rest." So Snow White went into the cottage. Everything inside was small, but the cottage was kept very neat and clean. There were a table, and seven little chairs. On the table were seven little plates, seven little forks, seven little knives and seven little spoons. Also, on the table were seven little mugs. Against the wall were seven little beds all in a row, neatly made and very inviting to Snow White.

Before she went to bed, Snow White decided that she was hungry and thirsty after all the running she had done. She went over to the table and found there was food on each little plate and milk in each little mug. Snow White took a small bit of food from each plate and a sip of milk from each mug. After having the food and milk, Snow White tried to lie down, but one bed after the other she found uncomfortable until she went to the last bed. Thank goodness! This bed felt just right. Snow White curled up and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

When night fell, the owners of the little cottage came home. They were seven dwarves who mined in the mountains all day. Each dwarf lit a candle and in the light, they noticed that someone had been there.

“Who’s been sitting on my chair?” asked the first dwarf.

“Who’s been eating from my plate?” asked the second dwarf.

“Who’s been eating some of my bread?” asked the third dwarf.

“Who’s been eating my vegetables?” asked the fourth dwarf.

Pussy Cats Gruff

“Who’s been using my fork?” asked the fifth dwarf.

“Who’s been using my knife?” asked the sixth dwarf.

“Who’s been drinking out of my mug?” asked the seventh dwarf.

The first dwarf looked around and saw that the covers on his bed were messed up.

“Hey, someone has been laying in my bed! See, the covers are all messy!” The six other dwarves rushed over to their beds to see if someone had been using them. The seventh dwarf was surprised to see the kitten, Snow White, laying fast asleep in his bed. Quietly, he called to the others: “Hurry, come here and see our visitor.”

The other dwarves brought their candles over with them to see the stranger. They were delighted to see the pretty little kitten curled up sleeping.

“What an adorable little cat!” they said. “Let her sleep, when she wakes up, we will find out who she is.”

When Snow White woke up in the morning, she was startled to see the seven dwarves peering curiously at her. They were a bit shy, but friendly,

and finally asked her what her name was and how she came to find their cottage.

“My name is Snow White. My step mother, the Queen, for reasons known only to her, wishes to have me killed. Her huntscat told me so and told me to run if I wished to spare my life. I ran and ran and when I felt that my little paws were about to fall off, I came upon your cottage and went inside. So, here I am.”

“Here you are,” said the dwarves. “Let us agree, if you will take care of the house and cook for us, you may stay with us as long as you want.”

“Yes, I agree,” Snow White said.

Snow White kept the house tidy and cooked for the dwarves with a thankful heart. The dwarves were gone to the mountains all day long so Snow White was alone. The kind dwarves warned her: “Beware the wicked Queen, she may discover that you are here and try to harm you. Don’t let anyone but us come into the cottage.”

Meanwhile, the Queen was very pleased with herself and stood proudly before the magic Mirror.

“Now,” she thought, “the Mirror has no choice but to say that I am fairest!

Pussy Cats Gruff

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,

Who’s the fairest cat of all?”

The wicked Queen cat asked.

The Mirror answered:

“O Queen you are the fairest that I see,

But over seven mountains where seven

dwarves dwell,

Snow White is there alive and well,

No cat is as fair as she.”

The Queen sputtered and fumed in her shock. The Queen realized then that her huntscat had tricked her. She threw the box with the boar’s heart inside into the fire.

She plotted and schemed in her mind how to do away with Snow White herself. Finally she decided upon the perfect plan; she painted her fur and dressed herself up like an old peddler cat. No one would have guessed this was the Queen.

In disguise, the wicked Queen went over the seven mountains and found the cottage of the seven dwarves. She knocked on the door and said: “Pretty things for pretty kittens for sale, very cheap!”

Snow White peered out the window and called out: "Good day, my good cat, what is it that you are selling?"

"Good things, very pretty things," the Queen answered. "Collars of all colors." The Queen pulled out a brightly colored collar.

"Surely, I can let an old peddler cat in," thought Snow White and she unlocked the door and bought a lovely red collar. Try as she might, Snow White could not get the collar done up right.

"Here," said the Queen. "Let me put the collar on for you." The innocent kitten had no reason to be suspicious of an old peddler cat, so she stood still and let the Queen put the collar on her. The Queen pulled the collar so tight that Snow White found she could not breathe and she fell down as if she were dead.

"Now, I am the most beautiful cat of all once more!" said the Queen to herself and she went back to the castle.

Later, in the evening, the seven dwarves returned home. They were terribly shocked and upset when they found their dear little kitten lying on the ground, motionless. They picked Snow White up and saw that she had a collar on and

that it was on too tight. They took the collar off and Snow White began to breathe again. When the dwarves felt she had recovered enough, they asked Snow White what happened. She explained to the dwarves about the old peddler cat.

“The old peddler cat was most likely the wicked Queen. Be careful and be sure not to let anyone into the cottage while we are gone.”

The wicked Queen rushed into her room, taking off the peddler clothes and the paint from her fur. She stood before the magic Mirror certain that, now, it would say the words she loved to hear:

“You, O Queen, are fairest of all.”

She asked:

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest cat of all?”

The Mirror answered:

“O Queen you are the fairest that I see,
But over seven mountains where seven
dwarves dwell,
Snow White is there alive and well,

No cat is as fair as she.”

The Queen was incredulous. Snow White had somehow escaped her again. She realized that the only possible way to be rid of Snow White was by evil magic.

The wicked Queen went to a secret, hidden chamber and there she made an apple of poison. On the outside, the apple was very appealing, white with a red cheek. Anyone who looked at the apple wanted to eat it. On the inside of the apple’s red cheek was deadly poison.

When the apple was ready, the Queen painted her fur and dressed herself up like a country cat. She went off over the seven mountains to the cottage of the seven dwarves. She knocked on the door. Snow White looked out the window and shook her head at the country cat.

“I can’t let anybody inside, the seven dwarves strictly forbid me to,” said Snow White. The Queen shrugged.

“That’s alright. I don’t want in. I just want to get rid of all these apples. I’ll give one to you.”

“No, I’d better not,” said Snow White, remembering the dwarves’ warning to be careful.

“Oh, are you afraid the apples are bad? Here, I will cut the apple in half. You eat the red piece and I will eat the white piece,” said the cunning Queen. Snow White really wanted to have a piece of the apple and when she saw the country cat eat half she was sure it would be safe.

“Thank you,” said Snow White politely as she accepted the red cheek of the apple. She hardly bit into her half when she fell down as if she was dead.

The evil Queen laughed on her way back to the castle. The wild beast of the forest heard her laughing and they knew she had succeeded in harming Snow White. The wild animals were filled with anger at the wicked Queen and they chased her through the forest and over a cliff. The wicked Queen was never heard from again.

When the seven dwarves came home that night, they were saddened to find their beloved Snow White laying on the ground as if she was dead. They hoped they could revive her as they did before, but nothing they did would work.

The dwarves believed Snow White was dead even though she still looked very much alive. They could not stand the thought of burying her in the

ground so they made a coffin of glass. Upon the coffin they wrote Snow White's name and that she was a princess. They put the coffin upon the mountain and one dwarf always stayed by and kept watch over it. The wild animals of the forest came up to the mountain to visit Snow White where she laid.

Snow White laid in the coffin a long time but she did not change a bit, it looked like she was asleep.

It so happened, that one day, a cat Prince came into the forest and went to the dwarves' cottage to spend the night. The Prince saw the coffin with the beautiful kitten Snow White inside and he read what was written upon it. He said to the dwarves: "Please, let me have the coffin. I'll give you anything you want for it." The dwarves, however, answered: "No, we won't part with our beloved Snow White for all the gold in the world."

The Prince said earnestly: "Let me have it as a gift, then. Please, I can't live without seeing Snow White. I will honor and treasure her as my own life!" Then the kind dwarves felt sorry for him and gave the Prince the coffin.

The Prince took the coffin with him when he left in the morning. Four of his servants carried it on their shoulders. As they were passing through the forest, they stumbled over a tree stump and bounced the coffin around. This jarred the piece of apple Snow White had bitten off out of her throat. Snow White woke up and looked around her.

“Oh my, where am I?” she said and she lifted up the lid of the coffin and sat up. The cat Prince turned around and was full of joy when he saw Snow White was alive.

“You are with me!” he cried and told her what happened. “I love you more than any cat in the world. Please come with me to my father’s palace and we can be married.”

Snow White was charmed by the Prince’s devotion to her when she was thought to be dead.

“What a fine young cat,” she thought, “and handsome, too.” So Snow White agreed to marry the Prince.

Now one must not forget that Snow White has a father. A father who has lost his first wife, then his daughter, and now his second wife (whom he never saw much of at all) had disappeared from

the face of the earth. Snow White did not forget her poor father and she invited him to her wedding but she wanted to surprise him so her name was not mentioned on the invitation.

The King received the invitation sadly. It reminded him of his own weddings. He went into his second wife's room, which he had left as she had left it and thought how she would have loved to go to a wedding ball. He looked into the Mirror and asked:

“Mirror, Mirror, on the wall,
Why should I attend this wedding ball?”

Imagine the poor king's surprise when the Mirror talked back to him! It said:

“At the ball, O King, you will see one you know,

Once she was a kitten, her fur as white as snow.”


The old King was astonished and amazed. Snow White? Could it really be his daughter after all this time? He went to the wedding and saw

Pussy Cats Gruff

with his own eyes his beautiful kitten marry the Prince.

When she saw her father, Snow White ran over to him and they hugged each other. The King gave the newly wedded couple his blessings and they lived happily ever after.

CATNAPPING BEAUTY

nce upon a time, long, long ago, there lived a Cat King and Cat Queen who said every day, “Oh, if only we had a kitten!” But the King and Queen never had one.

It happened one day that the Queen was swimming in the pond near the castle. (She was a most unusual cat because she actually enjoyed the water.) While she was swimming, a frog crept out of the water onto the shore and said to her: “Your wish shall come true. Before one year has passed, you shall give birth to a girl kitten.”

What the frog said came true and the Cat Queen had a little girl kitten who was so pretty, the Cat King could not contain his joy. The Cat King ordered a great feast. To this feast he invited his family and his friends and also the Wise Fairy Cats so the Fairies would be kind and generous to

the kitten. There were thirteen Wise Cat Fairies but the Cat King found that he only had twelve golden plates. That meant that one Cat Fairy would have to be left out.

The splendid feast was held one week after the kitten was born. When the feast was coming to an end, the twelve Cat Fairies who had been invited to the feast came forward to bestow a magic gift upon the tiny kitten.

"I give you the gift of virtue," said the first Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of beauty," said the second Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of riches," said the third Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of modesty," said the fourth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of good nature," said the fifth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of wisdom," said the sixth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of fleetness of foot," said the seventh Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of quick wit," said the eighth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of skill," said the ninth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of keen senses," said the tenth Cat Fairy.

"I give you the gift of happiness," said the eleventh Cat Fairy.

Just when the eleventh Cat Fairy had given her gift, the thirteenth stormed into the room. She wanted to avenge the insult of not being invited. Without a greeting or looking at anyone present, the thirteenth Cat Fairy declared;

"The King's daughter will, in her fifteenth month, prick her paw on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die." Without a word more, the thirteenth Cat Fairy turned around and stalked out of the room.

The Cat King and Cat Queen were very upset by the Fairy's pronouncement. They begged the twelfth Cat Fairy to undo the evil curse. The twelfth Cat Fairy shook her head sadly.

"I cannot undo the spell, but I can change it." With those words, she went to the kitten and gave this gift; "It will not be death, but a deep catnap of one hundred years into which you will fall."

Still, the Cat King would not hear of his dear little kitten being harmed. He ordered that on that

very day, every last spindle in the entire kingdom be destroyed. And as the Cat King ordered it, so it was.

In the meantime, the other gifts of the Wise Cat Fairies were beginning to show as the kitten grew. She was very wise, beautiful, good natured and modest. She had the quickest wit of any cat and none could catch her in a race. Everyone who knew the Cat princess loved her.

It happened that on the very day when the Cat princess was fifteen months old, the Cat King and Cat Queen were away from home. The Cat Princess was left in the palace all alone for the first time. Being a cat, the princess was naturally curious and she took full advantage of being alone for the first time. She went into all sorts of places, looking in rooms and bedrooms just as she pleased. She then came upon an old tower that looked like it hadn't been used in ages.

"I wonder what's up there?" thought the Princess. Up the winding, narrow staircase she climbed. At the top of the staircase was a little door. There was a rusty key in the lock and when the Princess turned it, the door flew open. There

in the room sat an old cat busily spinning on a spinning wheel.

“Hello, old cat,” said the Princess. “What is that you are doing?”

“I am spinning,” answered the old cat.

“What is that thing which rattles around so noisily?” asked the Princess, mesmerized by the wheel. She wanted to make it spin too and she reached up her paw to take the spindle. She had hardly touched the spindle when she pricked her paw with it and she fell down onto the bed in the room. She curled up and lay there in a deep catnap.

This catnap extended over the entire palace. The Cat King and Cat Queen who had just come home and entered the great hall began to catnap, the whole court with them. The horses, too, went to sleep and the pigeons on the roof and the flies on the wall. Even the fire in the fireplace died down and slept. The cook, who was going to pull the fur of the scullery cat because he had forgotten something, let him go and went to sleep. The wind died down and not one leaf on the trees moved.

Around the palace, however, a hedge of thorns began to grow. Every year the hedge became

higher. Soon the hedge grew so close around the castle that there was nothing to be seen of it.

The story of the beautiful catnapping "Cataria," for that is what the Princess was named, went about the country. From time to time, princes came and tried to get through the thorny hedge and into the castle beyond.

The princes found that it was impossible to get to the castle because the thorns stuck together almost as if they had hands. The princes lost many patches of fur escaping from the hedge.

After many more years had passed, another prince came into the country. He heard an old cat talking about the hedge of thorns and that a castle was said to stand behind it in which a beautiful princess, named Cataria, had been catnapping for one hundred years. The prince had heard from his grandfather cat that many other princes had already come and had lost much of their fur trying to get through the hedge.

"I'm not afraid of some foliage. I'll go and see the beautiful Cataria," the young cat said.

The prince went to the hedge, expecting a struggle, but by this time the one hundred years had gone by and the day had come for Cataria to

awaken. When the prince reached the hedge, it no longer had thorns, but in their place were large, beautiful flowers.

“This is no fun! Where’s the battle? Where’s the adventure? I didn’t come here to sniff at roses!” The prince drew his sword to cut a path in the hedge. The hedge parted itself before the prince’s blade struck it. Each blow the hedge dodged until the prince had passed through.

“That’s not fair!” cried the prince when he realized he was through the hedge. He spun around to see the hedge close up again behind him.

“Spoilsport,” he muttered, annoyed.


The prince soon forgot his annoyance as he looked around him. In the castle yard lay horses fast asleep. He saw the pigeons on the roof asleep with their heads tucked under their wings. When he entered the castle, he saw a cook and a scullery cat catnapping on the kitchen floor. In the great hall, the prince found the whole court catnapping and on their thrones, the Cat King and Cat Queen were catnapping too.

The prince went further into the castle. It was so quiet that he could hear himself breathing. He came to the tower and climbed up the narrow,

winding staircase. He opened the door at the top of the staircase and went inside the room. There inside he found the princess Cataria catnapping. She looked so beautiful that the prince couldn't take his eyes from her. He bent down and gave her a kiss. No sooner had he kissed her, when Cataria awoke and opened her eyes. She smiled at the prince sweetly.

The two of them went down the stairs together and found the Cat King and Cat Queen waking up along with the rest of the palace. The prince and Cataria were married soon afterward. The wedding was celebrated with a splendid ball to which all thirteen of the Wise Fairy Cats were invited, even though the Cat King had to pay to have a thirteenth golden plate made. And the prince and Cataria lived happily ever after.

THE PIED PIPER CAT OF HAMELIN

nce upon a time in the town of Hamelin there came a time for a great celebration. Everyone in Hamelin was busy preparing for the celebration. They were so busy preparing that they did not notice that the rats in their town were greatly increasing in number.

The day of the celebration arrived and all the people of Hamelin left their homes to gather in the town square. As it was the custom of the time, the people left their tables set and with the food waiting on them so they could sit down and feast as soon as they returned from the assembly at the square.

Upon their return from the square, the people found their houses ridden over by rats. There were

rats everywhere and they had eaten all of the food for the celebration.

The people of Hamelin rushed upon the mayor, who was outside of his house as it was full of rats as well.

“The rats have to go! The celebration is ruined!” the people cried. “Get rid of them, at any cost!”

So the mayor of Hamelin put out a plea to all the land: Anyone who could rid Hamelin of the horrible rats would receive one hundred gold coins. While the people waited for someone to rid the town of rats, they had to stay in tents just outside of the town.

The next day a great cat came to the town in answer to the mayor’s plea.

“Can you rid our town of these horrible rats?” the mayor asked the great cat.

“I have killed one hundred rats with one swipe of my mighty paw!” boasted the great cat. He held up one of his great paws and showed the mayor his terrible claws.

“If you rid the town of the rats, the gold is yours,” said the mayor.

The great cat walked down the streets of the town with confidence. The rats took one look at the great cat and hundreds of them swarmed him. The great cat quickly turned and ran as fast as he could out of Hamelin, the rats chased him to the edge of the town.

The people of Hamelin rose up a cry of dismay at the sight of the great cat running from the town. The people asked the mayor for help. They did not want to stay in their tents much longer. The mayor calmed the people by sending out another plea: Anyone who could rid Hamelin of the horrible rats would be given a reward of three hundred gold coins.

The mayor's plea was quickly answered by three small cats. They hoped to share the reward amongst them.

"You are too small. If a great cat cannot get rid of the rats, how can three small cats possibly hope to?" asked the mayor.

"But the great cat was only one. We are three, together we will rid your town of the rats."

"Very well, if you succeed, you will receive the reward."

Pussy Cats Gruff

The three cats walked into the town certain that they would get the reward. The rats took one look at the three cats entering the town and they rushed out of the buildings to swarm them. The three cats showed much more spirit than the great cat but in the end their fate was the same. The rats chased the three of them to the edge of the town.

Again the people of Hamelin rose up a cry for help to the mayor. Again the mayor sent out to all the land a plea: Anyone who could rid Hamelin of the horrible rats would receive a reward of one thousand gold coins.

The three small cats were never the same after being chased out of Hamelin by the rats. They parted ways and one of the cats spent most of his time in a tavern, recounting the horrible experience to all who would listen and drinking the heaviest cream that the tavern owner had. A calico cat that was traveling around the land came into the tavern and sat a little way off from the poor shaken cat. After listening for a while to the cat's sad tale, for sad it is when a cat is chased by a rat, he went over to the cat and bought him some more cream.

“That’s mighty kind of you, young calico. Don’t tell me you are thinking of taking on these rats. In all my days, my friends and I never saw so many. Their beady little eyes and their cold pink tails. Brrr!” The cat shivered with the memory. “I was quite a mouser in my time but I swear to you, my young cat, I’ll never touch anything but cream from now on!”

“Thank you for your words of warning, friend cat. But I’m afraid that I am young, as you say, and unwise. I am shocked that this town had no cats with which to keep the rats from getting out of hand. This is an outrage and I plan to put things right. After tomorrow, there will be no rats in Hamelin,” said the calico.

“Brave words, kitten, brave words. But if a great cat could not rid the town of rats and neither could three experienced mousers, what can you hope to do?”

“Charm them,” said the calico. He got up from his chair and was walking out the door when the cat called out to him; “What do they call you, cat?” The calico turned around and said simply,

“The Pied Piper Cat.”

The next day the calico cat arrived at Hamelin. He found the people outside the town and in disarray. It had been four days since the last plea was sent out and it was obvious to the cat that no one had answered it yet. The people were mobbing the mayor so that the cat had to elbow his way through the crowd to reach him. He bowed politely before the mayor and introduced himself.

"I am called the Pied Piper Cat," he said. "I will rid your town of the rats."

"The Pie-eyed Piper Cat? What kind of name is that?" asked the mayor, more to the people than to the cat. The people started to laugh. The cat had a sense of humor and laughed with them.

"No, no!" he said, "Pied, not pie-eyed."

"Pied? What happened, did you play the pipe so badly that people threw pies at you?" the mayor howled with laughter at his own joke and the people laughed with him. The calico was not amused this time. He was beginning to see why there were no cats in the town of Hamelin.

"Let us get over the uniqueness of my name and get down to business. Do you want the rats out of your town or not?"

"More than anything!" cried the people.

"The reward, I am told, is one thousand gold coins, correct?"

"Yes," said the mayor. "Provided you rid the town of the rats."

"Consider it done," said the Pied Piper Cat and he turned from the people and went toward the town.

"Make sure the rats don't have any pies to throw at you!" the mayor called after him. The people forgot their problem at the sight of the little cat holding a pipe walking toward their town.

"Maybe if he plays badly enough, it will drive the rats away!" suggested one of the townspeople. More laughter floated to the Pied Piper Cat's ears. He ignored it, they would eat their words and the good reputation of all cats would be restored in a moment.

The Pied Piper Cat stood just inside the town and raised the pipe to his mouth. He played the most delightful tune on the pipe. When the people heard it, they stopped laughing and listened. The rats inside the town heard the beautiful melody and came spilling out of the buildings. The Pied Piper Cat left the town and the rats, enchanted by the tune, followed after him. He led them to a river

and one by one all the rats jumped into it and that was the end of them.

The people were astonished that the cat had led the rats out of their town. They celebrated with joy for they had their town back. The people eagerly rushed back into the town and began repairing the damage the rats had done. The Pied Piper Cat came back to the town and stood proudly before the mayor.

“There, you see, I have done what I told you I would do. I have led the rats from your town and they will never come back. Now, if you please, I would like my reward.”

“Reward? What reward?” asked the mayor and all the people gathered around him. “I see no rats here, what are you talking about? Do you think you can come in here and make up such a tale and expect me to give you a reward? What would the people say?”

“We would say, ‘Get out of here while you can, cat. We owe you nothing,’ ” said the people.


The Pied Piper Cat glared hard at the mayor and the people of Hamelin. Now he definitely understood why there were no cats in the town. His ears went back dangerously, his fur and tail bristled, and he backed away from the mayor and

the people. When he reached the edge of the town, he pulled out his pipe and began to play, a melody different from the one he had played for the rats, but one just as enchanting. The people of Hamelin stopped what they were doing and looked at the Pied Piper Cat. He paid them no mind but continued playing. Shortly all the children in the town had formed a line and marched toward the Pied Piper Cat. The people called to the children, but it was no use, the only thing that they could hear was the beautiful melody the Pied Piper Cat was playing.

The Pied Piper Cat turned and led the children away over many hills and valleys to a large mountain. At the playing of the pipe, the side of the mountain opened up like a door and the Pied Piper Cat led the children of Hamelin into the mountain. The side of the mountain shut behind them. There inside the mountain, the Pied Piper Cat raised the children to treat cats with respect and to always honor their word.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THE EMPEROR CAT'S NEW CLOTHES

nce upon a time in a far away kingdom lived a very vain Emperor Cat. Now we all know that every cat is vain, but this Emperor Cat was so vain that he never left his palace except to show off his new clothes. The Emperor Cat had clothes for every hour of the day and once he had worn an outfit, it was tossed aside because it was no longer new.

The Emperor cat's love of new clothes was known far and wide. Everyone knew about it, including two very conniving cats. These cats, named Claude and Clive, plotted together a way to get the Emperor Cat to give them a lot of money without them actually doing a lot of work.

The next time the Emperor Cat held an audience in his throne room, Claude and Clive presented themselves and their idea.

“Your Excellency,” they purred. “Our compliments to the makers of the lovely outfit you are wearing. If we may be so bold to ask, is the fabric very heavy?”

“No, the fabric is not very heavy, but it is heavy enough,” replied the Emperor Cat.

“It is not as light as a spider’s web, Your Highness?”

“No. I was unaware such a fabric exists,” said the Emperor Cat, his ears perked forward with interest.

“Oh, but it does. My partner and I have perfected a weaving technique which has produced the lightest material imaginable,” said Claude.

“Yes,” nodded Clive. “And with our weaving technique, we have also discovered a secret ingredient which makes the material invisible to any cat who is not worthy of its whiskers!”

The Emperor Cat was intrigued at the idea that the clothes he wore would help him determine the worthiness of his subjects.

“I see, would you make me an outfit from this fine fabric, gentle cats?”

“Oh most certainly, we would be delighted to, Your Highness. We just need Your Majesty to provide us with the equipment and supplies and we will be able to make you the most magnificent ensemble,” said Claude.

That day the Emperor Cat ordered that all that the wondrous weaver-cats required be given to them immediately. Claude and Clive were escorted to a large room in the palace. In the room were a loom and table. Their escort, the emperor’s advisor, asked if the cats needed anything more.

“We’ve made a list,” Clive said as he pulled out a rolled up piece of paper. He flicked his paw and the paper unrolled, spilling onto the floor and past the feet of the advisor.

“It’s only a small list. It should be nothing for the Emperor Cat to have the magnificent, magical fabric made,” said Claude. Remembering what the Emperor Cat had said, the advisor took the list.

“I’ll have everything you require as soon as possible,” he said.

Left alone, Claude and Clive howled and sneezed with laughter.

"You see. I told you he'd fall for it! Everything's going perfectly!"

When the advisor returned, he had about a dozen courtiers in tow. Each courtier carried an armload of the items from the weaver-cats' list.

"His Highness had provided everything on your list," the advisor said as he watched Claude and Clive pounce on the bags that were brought to them and rifle through all of them. "His Highness would like to know when you will be finished making the garments."

Claude and Clive looked at each other.

"We will have them make in three days," said Claude.

"Very well, I shall inform His Majesty that you will be done in three days time," said the advisor as he left the room. When he was gone Clive turned to Claude.

"Three days! How do you expect us to fake making an outfit in three days?" he hissed.

"Calm down, just think about it. We pretend to work for three days and then we'll leave town richer than if we had worked three of our lives!"

"Yes, but how are we going to fool them, Claude?"

“Why do I put up with you? Have you forgotten the plan already?” asked Claude. “We take turns pushing the empty loom. I’ll do it for one hour and you do it for the next hour and so on. Then we pretend to cut the material and sew it together.”

“I knew that. I just wanted you to go over it again to make sure,” said Clive.

The two cats took their turns pushing the empty loom all day and all night. The rhythmic sound of the loom went through the palace. The Emperor Cat couldn’t sleep a wink. He was so excited about his special new outfit that the two cats were working so hard to make. He tossed and turned, curling this way and that but he couldn’t get comfortable. The Emperor Cat just had to know how his outfit was coming! He rang the bell beside his bed. A sleepy-eyed page with his fur all out of place because he had just woke up came tumbling into the room.

“Y-yes, Your Majesty?” the page yawned.

“Wake the royal advisor, though how he can sleep with all this bustle about the palace because of my new outfit and all, I’ll never know. Tell him to see how the two weaver-cats are coming along with my clothes.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” said the page and he went out to relay the Emperor Cat’s message.

“He wants me to what? At this hour? The very idea,” grumbled the advisor as he groomed himself to look his part. Up the stairs to the weaver-cats’ room he padded. Politely, he knocked on the door, then entered before there was a chance for them to say anything.

The royal advisor stood in the doorway with his mouth hanging open. He could not believe what he saw on the loom. Nothing! Claude and Clive smiled at the royal advisor.

“Isn’t it the most beautiful piece of material you have ever seen? I can see that you are struck speechless at its magnificence. Obviously, you are a cat who is worthy of his whiskers!” purred Claude, who was sitting at the loom.

Claude’s words reminded the royal advisor about the material’s magical quality. He was mortified that he could not see the material. He could never admit it. He would lose his job!

“Truly, it is the most amazing thing I have ever laid my eyes on,” said the advisor. “It will be His Highness’ most spectacular clothing for years to come.”

“Thank you,” said Clive. “We are most honored to be of service to His Majesty.”

“Yes, well, carry on,” said the advisor, closing the door behind him as he left. He walked down the stairs in a daze.

“How can this be? I, the royal advisor, not worthy of my whiskers? They told me that all I ever needed to know I learned in Kittygarten! This is a disaster! I must tell the Emperor that the material is the most splendid thing ever woven.”

The Emperor Cat jumped up and down on his bed as excited as a kitten.

“Did you see it? What does it look like? Is it as marvelous as they said it would be?” he asked the advisor.

“Your Majesty, I’m afraid the weaver-cats understated the beauty of the fabric they are weaving. This outfit, Your Majesty, will be talked about for years,” said the advisor.

Word of the magical garments that were being woven for the Emperor Cat spread throughout the kingdom. Every cat was eager for the Emperor Cat’s next royal procession, in which he would

wear the garments. They all wanted to see who was worthy of their whiskers and who was not.

The second day, Claude and Clive declared to the Emperor Cat's advisor that they were finished weaving the Emperor's marvelous, magical fabric. Now, the fabric was ready to be cut!

"Before we cut it, would you like to feel it?" asked Clive. "It's so wonderfully light, lighter than a spider's web." Clive acted like he was picking up a large sheet of fabric. He moved toward the advisor holding the lower end of the imaginary sheet for him to feel.

"Er, no, thank you!" the advisor balked. There was no way he would try to touch something he couldn't see, they would realize right away that he wasn't worthy of his whiskers. Instead, he said, "I mean, that honor should be given to His Majesty. You are making the clothes for him, remember."

"Oh, most certainly. Tell His Majesty that the clothes will be sewn tomorrow, right on schedule!" said Claude. He closed the door behind the advisor when he left. Turning to Clive, he said, "It's time for phase two of our plan! This is the most important part, if we slip up, we'll be discovered as frauds. We must keep our story

straight if they come in and ask us how it's coming alone. What should we cut out first?"

"The pants, of course!" Clive laughed. "Then we will do the shirt, next the doublet, and then the double-breasted jacket . . ."

"And last but not least, the Emperor Cat's rrrroyal, rrrregal mantle!" The two weaver-cats doubled over with laughter.

The Emperor Cat was getting more and more giddy as he waited for the days to pass when his new clothes would be completed. The cats of his kingdom were looking forward to his next procession with more enthusiasm than they had in years. Everything was going along perfectly.

"At last!" cried the Emperor Cat when his royal advisor told him that Claude and Clive had finished making his clothes.

"If Your Majesty will follow me, they are awaiting you for the fitting." The Emperor Cat leaped from his throne and eagerly followed his advisor to the room the weaver-cats were in.

The royal advisor politely knocked on the door, then entered before there was a chance for them to say anything.

“His Royal Highness, The Emperor Cat!” he announced. He bowed and gestured to the Emperor Cat to enter the room.

The Emperor Cat stepped into the room. He could not believe what he saw laid out for him to try on. Nothing! His eyes widened only slightly. He was shocked that he, the Emperor, could not see the magnificent material and his royal advisor could! Impossible! He could not possibly be unworthy of his whiskers. There must be some mistake. One thing was for sure, he would never let anyone know.

“Are you pleased with your new clothes, Your Highness?” purred the weaver-cats.

“Definitely. They are the finest clothes I have ever laid eyes on,” said the Emperor Cat.

“Are you ready to try them on, Your Highness?”

“Yes, let me see how well the material goes with my fur.” The Emperor Cat was assisted by the weaver-cats in putting on the pants, then the shirt and the doublet, then the double-breasted jacket.

“Quite the rage, Your Highness,” they assured the Emperor Cat when he questioned the fashionableness of a double-breasted jacket. “You’ve always been known to be a trendsetter.”

“Yes, indeed I have,” said the Emperor Cat, smiling and pretending to admire the clothes while Claude and Clive pretended to put the mantle over his shoulders.

“There you are, Your Highness, the complete ensemble. See how well the clothes fit you. See how the colors highlight your fur,” said Clive as he and Claude stepped back from the Emperor Cat.

“Yes, and, Sire, does it not feel lighter than a spider’s web? Almost as if you were wearing nothing at all?” asked Claude.

“Yes, now that you mention it, it does feel like I am wearing nothing at all,” said the Emperor Cat, marveled.

“Light as air! It’s all in how you weave it, right, Clive?” Clive nodded in enthusiastic agreement.

“Your Highness, you’ve never worn anything quite like that before!” gushed the Emperor Cat’s royal advisor. All of the Emperor Cat’s courtiers nodded as enthusiastically as Clive. The Emperor Cat gave the clothes his royal approval.

“I will wear them tomorrow for my royal procession.”

The next day, the streets of the kingdom were lined with all sizes and colors of cats. They were all out to see the Emperor Cat's fabulous new clothes. The gates of the palace flew open and the trumpets sounded to announce the beginning of the Emperor Cat's procession.

A hush fell over the lines of cats.

"They must be in awe of my fabulous new clothes," thought the Emperor Cat. "Surely some of my subjects are worthy of their whiskers." Of course, not one cat in the entire kingdom could see the clothes. Of course, they would not admit that they could not see the Emperor Cat's new clothes. They all oohed and aaahed as the procession went by them.

This oohing and aaahing continued until the procession reached the market in the far end of the kingdom. Here, there happened to be a kitten that no one had told about the magical quality of the Emperor Cat's new clothes. When this kitten poked his head through the crowd to see what the commotion was about, he saw the Emperor Cat marching down the street with no clothes on.

"Hey!" the kitten jumped out of the crowd. "The Emperor has no clothes on!" At first, the other cats around the kitten tried to shush him.

“The kitten obviously isn’t worthy of its whiskers,” they thought. Then they remembered their first reaction to seeing the Emperor Cat.

They looked again at the kitten’s insistence;


“No, really, he isn’t wearing anything!” The cat’s realized that, truly, their Emperor Cat wasn’t wearing any clothes.

“The Emperor Cat isn’t wearing any clothes!” all the cats cried out.

This cry soon reached the ears of the Emperor Cat. He looked down at himself and admitted what he really had already known; he had been tricked and he was wearing no clothes! Now this is not as much of a catastrophe for a cat as for a human being because cats have fur. However, the Emperor Cat prided himself in his clothes. So he held his head up higher and pretended that he hadn’t heard anything. But he did go through the rest of the procession faster than he ever had before.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THUMBCATELINA

nce upon a time there was a cat who longed for a kitten but she had never had one. One day, in desperation, she went to a cat sorceress and begged for her help.

“My greatest wish is to have a kitten,” she said.

“I can help, just take this grain of wheat and plant it in a flowerpot. Take care of the plant and wait to see what happens,” said the cat sorceress. The cat thanked her and gave her a small silver ball in return for the grain of wheat.

When the cat got home, she planted the grain of wheat as she was told and instantly a gorgeous flower sprang up. It was a tiger lily, with its petals still closed.

“What a perfect flower!” said the cat and she kissed the flower’s petals. When she kissed it,

there was a rumbling purr and the petals of the tiger lily slowly unfurled. In the very center of the flower sat the most beautiful little kitten, looking up at her mother. This kitten was no bigger than a human thumb and that is the reason she was named Thumbcatelina.

Her mother gave Thumbcatelina a walnut shell to sleep in. Her mattress of violet petals contrasted nicely with her orange and black striped fur. She looked like a miniature tiger, a very strikingly beautiful little cat.

One night, while Thumbcatelina was asleep, an old toad came in and took her away, walnut shell and all, to the stream that was near her mother's garden. The old toad lived in the stream with her son. The son toad was not very smart and all he could do when he saw Thumbcatelina was stare at her and croak.

"Silence, you fool, or you will wake her up. She's going to be your wife," said the old toad and she took Thumbcatelina and placed the bed on a waterlily. "There, now she can't get away. Come, let's get the rooms ready for your wedding." And the old toad and her son hopped away.

Thumbcatelina had been awoken by the toad's croaking and she heard everything. She began to cry. She had no way to escape and she hated the thought of being married to a wet, slimy, muddy toad. Some of the fishes in the stream felt sorry for the pretty little cat and they bit the waterlily off its stem. Full of relief, Thumbcatelina thanked the fishes for rescuing her. She sailed down the stream and a butterfly helped her by pulling the waterlily by what little stem it had left.

Thumbcatelina enjoyed a carefree life in the country. She was very happy all summer and fall. But soon winter came and Thumbcatelina found herself cold and hungry.

A kind old vixen saw the unusual cat and invited her to live in her den for the winter. As time went on, the vixen began to suggest that Thumbcatelina marry the badger who lived next door and who was very wealthy.

"He has a very large house and would provide you with everything you need. You would never want for anything again," said the old vixen.

One evening when the badger was giving them a tour of his house, they came upon a little used

passage. There in the passage laid a butterfly which looked a lot like the one that had towed Thumbcatelina's waterlily to shore. Remembering the butterfly's kindness, Thumbcatelina later slipped away and went back to the butterfly. She covered it with her own blanket to give it some warmth.

All through the winter Thumbcatelina tended to the butterfly and soon it became healthy again. It was the beginning of spring when the butterfly fully recovered and then it said goodbye to Thumbcatelina and flew out to the open air. Thumbcatelina was so sad to see her friend leave. She had also said that she would marry the badger as she had run out of reasons to delay the wedding.

On the day she was to be married, Thumbcatelina went up to the open air and looked around at the green fields. When she married the badger, she would live underground and rarely come up to the fields above.

"Goodbye, Sun," she mewed mournfully. "Say hello to the butterfly if you see her." There was a fluttering of wings around her and she saw that it

was the butterfly hovering above her. Thumbcatelina was so happy to see her friend and the butterfly didn't have to ask her twice to leave the cold climate and fly to a warmer country.

The friends had a great time flying over mountains, lakes and valleys. Thumbcatelina had never felt so free and had never been so much higher than everything else. Finally they reached a beautiful warm, sunny country. There they found a ruined castle and its walls were covered with butterflies. On the ground there were large white flowers growing.

The butterfly landed on the ground by the largest flower and Thumbcatelina jumped off of her back.


"Hello," a voice said from above, "Welcome to the Cat Fairy Kingdom." Thumbcatelina looked up to see who was speaking to them. She saw a handsome cat fairy (she marveled at his iridescent wings) looking down at her.

"Hello, my name is Thumbcatelina," she said. The cat fairy flew down to the ground. He thought she was the most beautiful cat he had ever seen.

"I am the King of the Cat Fairies. I should like it very much if you would be my Queen and rule

the land with me." Thumbcatelina was very flattered and after a while she agreed to marry the Cat Fairy King. The wedding was much celebrated. Among the gifts Thumbcatelina received was a pair of wings and she got her friend, the butterfly, to teach her all she knew about flying.

THE THREE PUSSY CATS GRUFF

nce upon a time there were three pussy cats, all named Gruff. There was Little Pussy Cat Gruff, Big Pussy Cat Gruff and Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff.

The three Pussy Cats Gruff lived on the side of the mountain. Day after day the pussy cats happily fed on the mice in the green grass.

One day the pussy cats found out that, search as hard as they could, not one single mouse could be found. Somehow, amongst the three of them, they had eaten all the mice.

“What are we going to do?” asked Big Pussy Cat Gruff. Little and Biggest Pussy Cats Gruff shrugged, they didn’t know what to do either. While they were sitting together pondering what

to do, a stranger dressed in a brown, hooded robe came up to them.

“I have never seen such long faces on a group of pussy cats! What is wrong?” the robed-figure rasped.

“We have eaten all the mice on the side of the mountain. Now we don’t know what we will eat,” said Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff.

“The only thing that you can do is go somewhere there are mice,” advised the stranger.

“Leave our home? The only place we’ve ever known?” squeaked Big Pussy Cat Gruff.

“Well, it’s up to you. But I know a place where there are plenty of mice in the fields. It’s just on the other side of the mountain and across the bridge. Best of luck to you, Pussy Cats!”

The three Pussy Cats Gruff tried their best to make do with what berries and plants they could find. But the food they found failed to fill their bellies. Every time the Pussy Cats Gruff thought of what the stranger had told them about the fields of mice, they thought about how they would have to leave their home, so they stayed where they were.

A few more days had passed when Little Pussy Cat Gruff's stomach rumbled much too loud for his taste.

"I am very hungry and I can't stay here anymore. I must go to the other side of the mountain and over the bridge to find the fields that the stranger told us about. Will you come with me?"

"No, we won't leave our home," replied Big and Biggest Pussy Cats Gruff. So Little Pussy Cat Gruff said goodbye to his brother and sister and set off to the other side of the mountain.

It took Little Pussy Cat Gruff most of the day to travel around to the other side of the mountain. Many times he thought about his brother and sister and about turning back but his stomach prodded him to keep going. When Little Pussy Cat Gruff reached the other side of the mountain he was overjoyed to see the bridge and the green of grass beyond the bridge. He had been wondering if what the stranger said was true and he was happy to see that it was.

His heart lighter at the prospect of a full belly, Little Pussy Cat Gruff trotted down the mountain to the bridge. He happily capered onto the bridge.

Pussy Cats Gruff

Little Pussy Cat Gruff hadn't even reached the middle of the bridge when a big, hairy, clawed hand stuck up from under it in front of him. The hand was followed by the body of a hideous troll.

"Who dares go pitter-pattering over MY bridge?!" growled the troll.

Smart Little Pussy Cat Gruff recognized the robe the troll was wearing.

"It is I, Little Pussy Cat Gruff. I am on my way to the field beyond this bridge. A nice stranger, who was wearing a robe almost the same as the one you are wearing, O troll, told me, my brother and sister that there are plenty of mice in the field."

"Your brother and sister?" the troll looked past the little cat. "Where are your brother and sister?"

"They did not want to leave their home. But I was hungry and came to see if what the stranger said was true."

"Of course it's true!" the troll stomped on the bridge angrily, insulted. "Did you think that I—er—the stranger, I mean—would lie to you?! Go ahead and cross, see for yourself that it's true." The troll moved aside for Little Pussy Cat Gruff to cross.

The troll rubbed his hands together as he watched the cat go into the field.

“I’ll get you on the way back, when you’re not so scrawny. But I might eat the next Pussy Cat who tries to cross my bridge while I’m waiting!” he cackled and crawled back under the bridge.

Meanwhile, the other Pussy Cats Gruff were beginning to argue about the remaining food on the mountain side.

“I found that patch of berries, Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff! I need to eat too.”

“I’m bigger than you are, Big Pussy Cat Gruff, and because I am, I need to eat more than you.”

“That’s no excuse to bowl me over and eat every last one, leaving none for me! I’m with Little Pussy Cat Gruff, I’d rather go somewhere that there might be more food than to have what is left eaten up by you alone.” So Big Pussy Cat Gruff stalked off with her nose in the air.

It took Big Pussy Cat Gruff most of the day to get to the other side of the mountain.

“Whew! What a trek! I need to sit and rest.” As she sat at the bottom of the mountain she could clearly see the bridge the stranger had told her

about. Beyond the bridge, in the green field, Big Pussy Cat Gruff thought she could see a little black cat running about.

“That must be Little Pussy Cat Gruff! He made it! Oh boy! Then I will make it, too!” And Big Pussy Cat Gruff bounded down the hill and onto the bridge. She screeched to a sudden stop when a big, hairy, clawed hand plopped down in front of her. The troll drew the rest of himself up onto the bridge. He eyed Big Pussy Cat Gruff.

“Who dares go clomp—clomp—clomping over MY bridge?!”

“It is I, Big Pussy Cat Gruff. I am on my way to join my brother in the field beyond this bridge,” said the cat.

“Oh, no you don’t! You will not cross this bridge. I am going to eat you, you’ll make a much bigger meal than your little brother would have.” The troll stepped toward the cat, licking his lips.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you. I’m not as big of a meal as you think I am, it only looks that way because of my fur,” said Big Pussy Cat Gruff.

This was mostly true, she was fluffy, but she also was a bit on the pudgy side. Then, because she was still angry at Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff, she added: “Why don’t you wait until my other

brother, Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff comes? He is bigger than Little Pussy Cat Gruff and me put together!" The troll remembered that this was true.

"Very well," he grumbled. "Go across and eat to your heart's content, but next time you won't get across!"

Now that she was across the bridge, Big Pussy Cat gruff began to feel very terrible about telling the troll to eat Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff. It was still bothering her when she and Little Pussy Cat Gruff ran to greet each other. Little Pussy Cat Gruff was overjoyed to see his sister again but he noticed she was distracted.

"What's wrong, Big Pussy Cat Gruff?"

"Ohhh. I told the troll to eat Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff! I was angry at him for eating all the food I found back home. What if the troll eats him? It will be all my fault!" she blurted out. Little Pussy Cat Gruff was rolling on his back in the grass, sneezing with laughter.

"Him?" Meaning the troll. "Eat Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff!?" Here Little Pussy Cat Gruff had another fit of laughter. Big Pussy Cat Gruff, who thought this was no laughing matter, gave him an

Pussy Cats Gruff

angry swat. Little Pussy Cat Gruff composed himself, somewhat.

“It’s just that Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff is so huge! And that troll is so skinny. That troll doesn’t stand a chance against him.” Big Pussy Cat Gruff was relieved at hearing what her brother said.

“Oh, good! I was so worried.” The two Pussy Cats Gruff ran off playing and hunting for mice together.

Now Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff sat all alone on the mountain side. His empty stomach growled. Most of all, Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff missed being with his brother and sister.

“I wonder if they made it to the field over the bridge?” he thought to himself. He was gaining nothing by staying home and he saw that he had nothing to lose by going to the other side of the mountain and over the bridge. So off he went to find his brother and sister.

Being a very, very big cat, it took Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff only half of the day to get to the bridge. The bridge creaked and groaned under the weight as he tromp-tromp-tromped on it. The troll wasted no time in getting onto the bridge.

“Who dares go tromp—tromp—tromping over MY bridge?!”

“It is I, Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff. I have come to join my brother and sister in the field beyond this bridge.”

“That’s where you’re mistaken! Your brother and sister will be joining you . . . on the inside of my stomach!” said the troll and he rushed toward Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff to eat him.


Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff waited for the troll to get close to him. When the troll was in just the right spot, Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff put his head down and used the troll’s own momentum to flip him up and over the side of the bridge and into the water. That was the last anyone ever heard from the troll.

Biggest Pussy Cat Gruff was greeted by his brother and sister on the other side of the bridge. They had seen him send the troll flying into the water and told him how great he was. Little Pussy Cat Gruff tried to imitate his brother, using Big Pussy Cat Gruff as the troll but she sat on him. She got up quickly and they all laughed and ran off to play.

Pussy Cats Gruff

The three Pussy Cats Gruff passed many more days playing and eating in their new found home where they lived happily ever after.

SHOD CLAUDE AND SHOD CLIVE

nce upon a time there lived two trickster cats named Claude and Clive. They had many adventures and this is the second tale recorded of their deeds. (The first involved a certain Emperor.) Claude and Clive were near the end of the riches they had received from the aforementioned Emperor and were scheming up a new way to make sure their lives continued on in comfort. We join the two on their way through a human kingdom . . .

“I say, Clive, we should have spent some of our vast wealth on a good pair of traveling boots for each of us! It is absolutely dreadful having wet paws!”

"It's too late to think of that now, isn't it? We need all the money we have left for food!" Clive said, sharing Claude's misery.

"Yes, yes, but only until we figure out a way to get even more wealth. Hello! What have we here?" Claude stopped walking as he spotted a young human sitting on a tree stump by the road. Clive, however, didn't notice that his friend had stopped and he would've kept on walking if Claude hadn't pulled him back by the scruff of his neck. Clive let out a small cry of surprise and turned on Claude, "That wasn't necessary!"

"Just look over there," Claude ignored Clive's outburst. "This human may be just the opportunity we've been waiting for . . ."

"Yes, it's just like you to be waiting for an opportunity and not tell me about it!"

"He didn't even look around when you let out that little meow—"

"That little meow?!"

"—even now he's oblivious to us. Yes, whatever his problem is, I'm sure we can fix it."

"Since when have we become charity workers, Claude? I don't believe my ears."

"Fix it, so that we get more wealth than even I've dreamed of!"

“Now, that’s the Claude I’ve been traveling with all this time!” Clive said, laughing as he followed Claude over to where the human was sitting.

“Hello there, human!” Claude gave a slight bow and waved his paw in Clive’s direction as the young man sat dumbfounded at the sight of a talking cat. “My associate and I couldn’t help but notice that you seem to have something of great concern on your mind. If we can be of assistance, we will do whatever is necessary. For a modest fee, of course.”

“A fee? Then I’m afraid you can’t help me. You see, my father has just died and my two older brothers have taken over anything of use. They’ve sent me off with a very small amount of money to live on.”

Claude listened to the human’s story with keen interest and observed that he was the sort other humans might call handsome. He has possibilities, thought Claude.

“I’ll tell you what, you spend that money on one pair of traveling boots for my friend and one for myself and we will turn you into a Prince within a month!”

“”A Prince!” the man said. “I’d like to see that! Ha, ha, ha! Okay, follow me to the town. It would be worth the price of the boots to see if you two cats could make good on your word. Tell me, do you have names?” the man asked as the walked.

“Why yes, my name is Claude, and—“

”I’m Clive. Who are you?”

“Don’t you know? I’m Prince Nigel!” the man said, laughing.

“No,” said Claude. “You’re not a Prince—yet. Just a Marquis.”

“What am I the Marquis of?”

“All of this we are walking by,” Claude stretched his paws out in a wide sweeping motion. “What’s the problem?” He noticed that the cheerful expression was gone from Nigel’s face, replaced by one of fear.

“Tell that to the ogre that actually owns these fields and the castle beyond them.”

“An ogre!” Clive let out a squeak.

“Yes, they say he can change himself into anything he wants. He’s very clever and could have even been the stump I was sitting on back there!” Both Clive and Nigel turned to Claude, who was stroking the white fur on his chin, deep in thought. He had a small smile on his face

which told Clive that this revelation was just the sort of thing he was hoping for.

“We couldn’t have fallen into a better situation, Just you wait, Nigel. When we’re through with you, you’ll have to knight us!”

“Sir Clive, hmmm. I like the sound of that!”

“Nice! Very nice indeed!” said Claude as he examined the boots he was wearing on his hind paws. Clive was busy testing his boots out in the nearest puddle.

“Dry as a bone! No more wet paws!”

“Now, my dear Marquis of Carabas, if you will tell us where we can find the closest warren of rabbits and direct us to the King, we will set about fulfilling our end of the bargain.”

Before heading off to the rabbit warren, Claude haggled with a merchant over a sack; Clive bought a head of cabbage that was almost as big as he was. They went down to the warren and set up a trap to catch a large rabbit. After rolling the large head of cabbage into the open sack, Clive collapsed onto the grass nearby.

“Perfect! Stay there until we’ve got our rabbit!” Claude then hid and waited for a foolish rabbit to

take their bait. He didn't wait long for the smell of the cabbage attracted a big, dumb bunny. As soon as the rabbit was in the sack, Claude pounced upon it and killed it. After he rolled the cabbage out, he handed the sack to Clive. "You carry this and I'll do all the talking."

The two cats marched up to the King's palace. There they demanded to see the King, announcing that they came bearing a gift from their master.

"You have some thing your master wishes to give to me?" asked the King.

"Yes, your Majesty," Claude gave an elegant bow. "We are servants of the Marquis of Carabas. He has commanded us to present you with the best rabbit from his warren." Clive pulled the big rabbit out from the sack. The King was very pleased at the sight of such a plump bunny.

"Tell the Marquis that I thank him for such a fine gift. It is strange that I have never met him before."

"He has just recently inherited his lands and is eager to serve you, your Highness."

"I see. Perhaps I shall see him on one of my weekly rides throughout the kingdom."

“Perhaps, your Majesty. We will give our master your thanks,” said Claude, bowing as he exited the throne room, taking Clive with him.

Before returning to town, where Nigel was staying, (“Looking for work, silly human,” Claude had said to Clive), the two cats visited the workers in the fields. Claude was on a roll and Clive knew him well enough not to try to stop him.

With grand and dramatic gestures, Claude told the workers: “Hear me, good people. If you do not tell the King that the field you are working is the property of the Marquis of Carabas, we will slice you into meatloaf!” All of the workers were astonished at the sight of two cats wearing boots and standing in their fields. It scared them silly to hear one of them speak.

“It will be done, s—sir,” the head worker lifted his cap in respect.

“Good. Carry on.” With that Claude and Clive continued on to the next field.

The same speech was made at each and every field that was really the property of the ogre. Clive got so tired of hearing the same thing over and over. Claude nearly caught him mouthing the

words behind his back when one of the younger workers giggled and pointed at Clive.

When the cats did return to town, they found a very discouraged Nigel. He had searched all day for someone to hire him, but there were no work openings. Night was falling and, as he had spent the money his brothers gave him on the boots for the cats, he couldn't pay for a room.

"That's a lousy attitude and us with excellent news to bring you!" Claude put his ears back in disgust.

"What good news?"

"The King is eager to meet you. He thanks you for your gift of the rabbit."

"Rabbit? Oh, I understand. What?!" Nigel jumped up and pointed to his dirty and sweat-stained tunic and patched up breeches. "How do you expect me to meet a King like this! This is not the stuff of a Marquis."

"Just trust us, Nigel," Claude purred, "I know just what to do. If you do exactly what we tell you, you will be living in a fine castle before the week is over!"

The next few days Clive spent watching the King's castle for the day he went out for his tour of the kingdom. Claude spent the time with Nigel, instructing him on courtly manners and concerns beside the river near the road.

Finally, Clive spotted the royal carriage coming out of the castle gates. He ran as fast as he could down the side of the road to where Claude and Nigel were. Upon seeing Clive running toward them, Claude sprang to his feet.

"Hurry, Nigel. Take off your clothes and jump in the water!"

"But—"

"No time to waste, the King will be here soon and you said yourself you can't be seen in those clothes."

"I don't want to meet him without them!"

"You won't, you won't. You'll be in the water."

"But—"

"Just do it!" Claude said.

Nigel cringed when he heard the sound of the carriage approaching. It was soon drowned out by the most horrible yowling he had ever heard. It was Claude.

“Help! Help! The Marquis of Carabas! Thieves have set upon him! They have taken everything, even his clothes!

The King recognized the two cats jumping up and down in the middle of the road and ordered the carriage to stop.

“Robbed, you say? They even took his clothing? The scoundrels!” The King was shocked. He ordered one of his escorts to return to the castle immediately and bring back the finest suit for the Marquis.

Dry and fully dressed in the clothes from the King, Nigel bowed and thanked him for his kindness. He stumbled a little over his words as he was surprised to see that the princess was riding in the carriage with her father. Both the King and his daughter were impressed with Nigel’s appearance. The King invited him to join them in the carriage.

Nigel accepted, saying: “I’m fortunate to have two such dedicated servants looking out for my welfare. They have been very helpful in my taking over the lands left to me.” Claude didn’t need to hear anymore. That was their cue to carry out the rest of the plan.

While the King was hearing from the workers in the fields that the land belonged to the Marquis of Carabas, Claude and Clive entered the castle of the real owner, the ogre. They gained entry by the usual flattery. As they were seated in the ogre's presence, they looked at each other, full of doubt.

"What is this? I will have no secrets in my castle! If you have something to say, say it!" roared the ogre, slamming his fist down on the table. Both cats jumped in their seats at the outburst.

"Oh! It's just that we're not from around here and when we heard about you—" began Clive.

"—Heard about your special abilities—"

"—We just had to see for ourselves."

"But I must say. . . . To look at you. . . . I would never have guessed—"

"What!?" The ogre leapt from his chair.

"Now you've done it!" hissed Clive.

"I can easily believe that you could become an elephant or a whale. But never, ever, could I believe that you could change into something as small as a centipede!" Claude continued, trying to look braver than he felt under the stare of the ogre's bulging, angry red eyes.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! That’s it? That’s all you need for me to do to convince you? Consider it done!” In a puff of smoke, the great ogre disappeared and a centipede was running around under the table. In a flash, Claude pounced upon the unsuspecting ogre—centipede and gobbled it up.

“Hey! How come you get to do all the pouncing? You’re supposed to be the brains, I’m supposed to be the cat that does all the other stuff. I wanted to be the hero!”

“Get over it. You can be the hero next time.”

“Didn’t you say that the last time?”

Claude shook his head in disbelief. He then turned to the ogre's servants (who had been standing around listening to the two cats exchange words) and informed them that their new master, the Marquis of Carabas would be arriving soon.


Upon their arrival, Nigel, the King and the Princess were shown into the castle. The King was so impressed with the extreme wealth of the Marquis that he remarked: “We are pleased to have a person of such excellent taste and quality move into our kingdom. You are a welcome addition to our country.” The Princess agreed.

After some time, Nigel and the Princess announced their engagement. Afterward Nigel would always joke that it was longer than a month before he became a Prince. But he never held that against Claude and Clive. They spent one of their lives as his advisers, enjoying life in the court to the full.

That was, of course, until Sir Claude got bored and Sir Clive wasn't going to pass up the opportunity to finally be the hero.

Pussy Cats Gruff

THE CAT WHO WISHED TO BE HUMAN

t the edge of a fair city, in a time long ago, there was a large abandoned factory. Inside this factory lived a community of cats. The owner of the property had died many years ago and the city had grown away from the once prosperous factory. The land no longer had value to anyone save the cats. Behind the trees, grass and brambles that hid the factory, the cats lived in peace away from the human world.

The cat community was actually more like a kingdom. The old female cat that found the abandoned factory was the Queen Mother of this little kingdom. It was she who had crawled into the building and up into the attic to give birth to her first litter of kittens. The factory had been full of mice and she taught her kittens well in the art of hunting. The attic was the spot reserved only

for the descendants of the Queen Mother. She watched proudly as litter after litter were born in that special place in the attic of the factory.

Now, the most recent litter to be born in that special spot was of her great, great, great, great, great grandson. As the Queen Mother was getting very old, she felt that this would be the last litter in her long line that she would live to see. Because of this she paid special attention to these six adorable kittens. She paid extra special attention to the runt of the litter, who had ginger stripes showing boldly all over her little body.

The kittens got into all sorts of mischief when they were finally allowed out of the attic. The factory was so big compared to the dark, cozy room they had spent the first six weeks of their lives in. There were rafters that ran along the entire length of the factory. The kittens realized they could run along from one side to the other without even touching the ground! They were so excited, they ran straight for the wooden beams. Their father, the Cat King, ran after them, shouting for them to go slow.

The kittens were running along the beams just fine until they came to a crossbeam near the

middle of the building. The first born kitten, whose name was Jody, jumped to get on the other beam to keep running. Her little body wasn't long enough. She let out a frightened mew and her siblings stopped, frozen in horror.

The Cat King leapt over his paralyzed kittens, landed on the other rafter and caught Jody by the fur on the back of her neck. The other kittens all let out a sigh of relief and looked up at their father sheepishly. His angry glare answered them. He jumped back to the rafter the rest of his kittens were on. He set Jody down and turned to them. "Let this be a lesson to you all. Do not run on the rafters. You may walk on them when you have learned the basics of timing and how to judge distances. Follow me, this is the end of your adventures today. We will try letting you out again tomorrow." He took Jody, who had remained huddled in a ball where her father had set her, up in his jaws and led them back to the attic.

The kittens were much more cautious their second day out. They followed their very great grandmother down the stairs to the floor of the factory. The rest of the little kingdom was very curious about the newest additions to the royal

family and came out to meet the princes and princesses. The kittens, quite unfamiliar with all the different smells and sounds at the bottom of the factory, were shy and hid behind the Queen Mother when some other kittens came out and wanted to play.

All the adult cats chuckled at the innocence of the royal offspring and told the other kittens that maybe another day the princes and princesses would like to play.

“They can’t right now because they’re with their grandmother.” This seemed to cheer them up, as they had been rather hurt and confused that the royal kittens didn’t want to play with them, and they bounded away.

“Will we really get to play with them, Grandma?” asked the second oldest kitten, Rory, as the Queen Mother led them back up to the attic.

“I didn’t know there were other kittens here,” said Sheenie, the third born. The Queen Mother laughed.

“There are a lot of things you don’t know yet, my kittens.”

“Will you tell us about them, Grandma?” asked Auburn, the Queen Mother’s favorite great-grandkitten.

“Oh yes, in time you will learn everything you need to know about our kingdom and the world outside.”

Auburn wanted to know more about the world outside, what could possibly be bigger than the kingdom? But Mythos, the third-last born, asked about the other kittens again.

“In a little while, when you have been taught some of the skills you need in play. You cannot, must not, play with them now. They are more familiar with the kingdom than you are right now and they could beat you very easily because of that. If that happens, they won’t respect you when it is your time to rule the kingdom. We cats have very long memories.” The kittens all looked at the rafter and gave a little shudder, they knew what their grandmother said was true.

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After a few months, the royal kittens had grown old enough to venture outside of the kingdom. They were taken out by the Queen Mother one by one to explore.

Jody was taken first, as she was the first born kitten. The Queen Mother led her outside through a window. Jody sniffed around and looked out as far as she could see from beside the window. She would not leave the side of the building to follow the Queen Mother further into the outside world. She didn't like all the new smells. The Queen Mother soon brought Jody back in.

The other royal kittens gathered around Jody.

"What is it like?" Auburn asked.

"Nothing to meow about. I like it better here," Jody said, sniffing with an air of importance. As she was the oldest she figured they would all share her opinion.

"It's your turn now, Rory," said the Queen Mother. Rory was a little hesitant after Jody's comments, but he soon followed his grandmother. Once outside the kingdom Rory wondered what was wrong with his sister. He had never seen anything so green as the stuff all over the ground.

"What is it, Grandma?" he asked, sniffing at it excitedly.

"That's called grass. It is good to eat sometimes"

“Really?” Rory looked at his grandmother, then began to eat the tender blades of grass.

“Not too much, Rory. Too much will make you sick.”

“Ohhh” Rory stopped eating the grass. “It tastes kind of funny, but its nice and juicy.” Having said that, he wondered off around the field outside the factory. He stopped at the trees around the field.

“What’s this?”

“This is called ‘the woods.’ Would you like to go in?” Rory peered into the woods. A bush to their left rustled as if something was behind it. Rory backed away from the trees, tail held low.

“No, let’s go back home, Grandma.”

Next to go outside the factory was Sheenie. She enjoyed all the fresh smells and the gentle breeze stroking her fur. She was the most inquisitive of the kittens so far and she jumped right into the bushes in the woods before her great-grandmother could stop her.

“Please don’t eat me!” a tiny voice pleaded. Sheenie looked down at the small soft, brown body pressed under her forepaws.

“What have you found, dear?” asked the Queen Mother.

“I don’t know. It looks kind of like a mouse.” Her great-grandmother sniffed the frightened creature and smiled at Sheenie.

“You found a chipmunk.”

“What do I do with it, Grandma?”

“Let it go. We have all the food we need in our kingdom.”

“Okay,” Sheenie stepped off and away from the chipmunk. It lay quite still, unsure that it was really being let go. Then it sprang up, made a quick little bow in thanks and darted under some more bushes.

Sheenie came back with the news of meeting the chipmunk. Jody became aloof and said nothing as her brothers and sisters listened.

“It’s my turn, Grandma!” said Mythos. “Do you think I’ll meet something new?”

“In the woods and beyond it’s possible to find something new all the time. Let’s see what you find.”

Mythos found the main road, well-worn from years of horses and carts and carriages going from villages to town and back. The Queen Mother felt

the ground beneath her paws tremble. Mythos felt it too. Standing in the middle of the road, he asked; "What is that, Grandma?"

"Mythos! Get off the road! Follow me, quickly!" she hissed. Mythos still didn't understand but he knew better than to question his great-grandmother. He ran to huddle beside her in the underbrush where she hid. The ground was shaking harder now.

When Mythos looked back at the road, he saw a flurry of long dark sticks. They moved by the cats' hiding place quickly. Mythos shot back out to the middle of the road. He saw that the dark sticks were actually the legs of another animal. It looked like it had two bodies and another pair of legs, in the middle of its larger body, that didn't touch the ground. He shared his thoughts with his great-grandmother as they walked back to the factory.

"The legs you saw go by us were of the animal called the horse. The other body was actually another creature. The strangest creature you may ever meet. It was a human."

"If it has legs, why doesn't it walk?"

"Oh, it walks alright, Mythos. It even runs. I never had much use for the humans, they were

too loud and demanding for me. When I found our kingdom, I was never happier. The humans don't bother us there."

"Are they dangerous?"

"Some are, but some are kind. They are always changing, its better to leave them alone."

Mythos' report of seeing a horse and a human only interested Auburn.

"Big deal!" said Kylie. "So you saw a bunch of dirt in the woods."

"Aren't you even interested in seeing a human?" Auburn couldn't believe the rest of her siblings were so unadventurous.

"Of course not! I want to play in the field!" said Kylie. And when it was her turn that's exactly what she did.

Finally, it was Auburn's turn to go out into the world with her great-grandmother.

"You've waited a long time for this, haven't you?" the Queen Mother asked.

"Yes. You once told me that you lived in the human world, Grandma. I want to see that. I want to see the place you came from."

"I always knew I'd put my paw in my mouth telling stories of my younger years," said the

Queen Mother with a chuckle. "But I'm not surprised. You, of all the kittens I've helped raise, seem to understand the importance of the past. I think you will understand why I choose our home over staying there when I show it to you."

"Thank you, Grandma!" Auburn let out a chirp of delight.

Auburn found the world outside to be exactly as her brothers and sisters (except for Jody) described. So she didn't miss much by not paying attention as she walked. Her excitement grew each step away from the dirt road, and toward, so she assumed, the human kingdom.

"What do you think, Auburn?" asked the Queen Mother when they could see the town.

"Amazing! But why don't they all live in one big building like we do? The paths between all those places—it looks so confusing! Was it like this when you lived here?"

"Yes. Perhaps fewer buildings, but it's pretty much the same. I dare say so are the humans, they are careless and can be cruel. Stay close by me and do exactly what I do. Understood?"

"Yes, Grandma," Auburn said, giving the Queen Mother a meek nod.

The old cat and the kitten travelled through much of the town without incident. As they wove their way through the streets and alleys of Cheshire, for that was the town's name, the Queen Mother pointed out things of interest to her granddaughter.

"There's the fish vendor! Ahh, I do miss fish sometimes. He was my favorite merchant."

"Why? Because he gave you some of his fish?"

"Gave me? No, kit!" the Queen Mother said with a laugh, "Because he was so easy to steal from!"

To prove to herself and her doubting granddaughter that she still had it in her, the Queen Mother slunk over to the fish vendor. Auburn twitched her right fore paw nervously as she watched her great-grandmother—stuffy royalty personified—sneaking up on an unsuspecting, dead mackerel. Auburn would have sneezed with laughter at the sight if she wasn't so anxious about being by herself.

One quick swipe of her paw and the Queen Mother had her prize. No sooner had she turned with it in her mouth than she heard the booming echo of a human voice.

“Hey, you! Cat! Drop that fish!” No way was the Queen Mother letting go of the fish, not with its salty taste seeping into her mouth where she bit it. She bounded over to Auburn and tried to tell the kitten to follow her.

“Ambrmm, mphpm mmph!” was what came out in the most undignified way. But Auburn had been startled by the human’s outburst and she got the idea. The two cats bolted away from the market, pursued by the dogs owned by some of the merchants.

The Queen Mother might be old but she knew some tricks, like the hole in the fence down the alley on their left. The two cats skidded to a halt. Auburn slammed sideways into the wood. The Queen Mother looked around, confused and frantic. Where was the hole? Surely this was the alley.

“You’ve got the right alley, old-timer,” snarled the lead dog, a hound not that young himself. “They fixed this fence a couple years ago. Heh-heh, that’s the last fish you’ll ever steal, kitty. Too bad you won’t be the one enjoying it.”

Before the hound could act on its words, it was interrupted by the sound of human footsteps and the scent of meat. The cats were forgotten and the

dogs ran toward the smell's source. The cats crept out of the alley. They saw the dogs chomping on some meat and bones provided by a human who was watching nearby. The two cats were almost out of Cheshire. Auburn stopped and looked back at the human. At that moment the human chose to look up. He smiled and winked at the kitten. Auburn turned away quickly, feeling as though the human had distracted the dogs for them.

The feeling that the human had somehow known they needed help grew so strong Auburn told her grandmother about it after they'd eaten the fish.

"Just luck, kitten. That's all it was. You need a little luck to live as long as I have."

"I can believe it!" Auburn said before she could stop herself. There was a moment's silence, then both cats burst out laughing.

"Ha! Ha! Too true. I promise I not to tell if you don't."

"I promise," Auburn managed to get the words out between laughs.

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". . . no one has seen it since, but the legend says that on foggy fall nights when the moon is

full, you can still hear the screech of the Tailless cat, searching for the human that stole its tail." Mythos finished his story. It was fall, winter would soon be upon the tiny cat kingdom and the royal siblings that enjoyed the outdoors were spending their last night out in the woods until spring returned.

"G-good story, Mythos," said Kylie.

"I hope the Tailless cat finds that human and gets its tail back," said Sheenie.

"It's only a story. Besides, what would it do with its tail if it got it back?" Rory asked no one in particular.

"Rory, humans don't go around cutting off cats' tails," said Auburn.

"Ha! The voice of reason. You know everything about humans because you went into town—once."

"No, but I—" Auburn stopped, remembering the promise she made to her grandmother months ago. She couldn't explain to her siblings without breaking her promise.

"But what?" Mythos said with a mocking expression on his face.

"I just know all humans aren't like that!"

"Tell that to the Tailless cat," said Sheenie.

“Prove us wrong,” said Mythos. All the cats stopped and looked at him.

“What?” Auburn said in a quiet voice.

“Go back to the town and bring us back something from a human—”

“Like they did to the Tailless cat!” said Sheenie. Mythos shot her an annoyed look.

“Yes. That will be the proof we need.”

“Fine! I’ll do it,” Auburn stuck her orange nose in the air and ran off in the direction of the main road.

“Should we follow her?” Rory asked.

“Nah,” said Mythos. “She’ll probably get half way there and turn around. The only time she’s been to town has been during the day. She’ll be back.”

Auburn had no intention of turning back. She was tired of them mocking her because she didn’t consider humans to be the enemy. She felt a little angry at her grandmother for putting her in a position that made it so hard to defend her belief. Now they’d handed her the opportunity to make them take back their mean words. The fact that fog was rolling in and the air smelled of an approaching storm made no difference to her. But

Auburn realized it did. Why did Mythos have to tell that stupid story? On a night with a full moon, too. He made it up, she told herself and quickened her pace down the road.

Moments later the clouds covered the moon and opened up, raining down lightning, booms of thunder and large drops of water. Auburn soon realized she couldn't continue toward the town. She would have to wait out the storm in the underbrush by the road. Her fur wasn't too wet from the rain. She busied herself cleaning and smoothing her fur. A hard task since some rain snuck through the leaves of the underbrush and the sound of thunder coupled with the unbidden memory of the story of the Tailless cat made her fur bristle.

If it hadn't been for the sound of the horse's hooves splashing in the puddles in the ruts of the road, Auburn would never have known someone was coming down toward her hiding place. She huddled down to wait for them to pass. At that moment a loud crack of thunder sounded overhead. The horse gave a frightened whinny. A horrible screech came from behind Auburn. The Tailless cat! Auburn bolted from her hiding place in panic. The horse reared as the orange cat

streaked in front of it out of nowhere. Another crack of thunder. Then a flash of lightning. In the light, Auburn saw a human thrown from the horse's back. She crawled under the bushes on the other side of the road as the horse galloped on to the town, leaving the human on the road.

Auburn held her breath. The human laid still were it fell on the road. Was it dead? Injured? If it was it was her fault! She'd bite Mythos' ear off—literally!—for telling that stupid story.

Cautiously, she crept out and circled the human's body. It smelled familiar. Oh, no! She rushed to the fallen human's head. It was! Auburn let out a mew in dismay. She could never forget the face of the human who helped her and her great-grandmother escape the dogs. Dogs were worse than humans, but she couldn't even explain that to her siblings.

Even with the left side of his face veiled by his dark hair, which had been neatly tied back when she saw him in Cheshire, and the right side obscured by the mud it lay in, Auburn could recognize him. This was how she thanked the human who saved them? At least I can get some of the mud off, she thought. Her rough, pink tongue worked quickly to remove the mud.

Another screech came from the trees by the road. This time Auburn became angry. She bared her teeth and blinked the drops of water way from her glowing, green eyes. She turned to face the trees, back arched.

“Not this human, Tailless cat! Find revenge somewhere else!” she spat into the woods. There came a movement in the branches of the trees. Auburn let out a yowl in warning. A very large bird fluttered down from the branches. It landed beside the human’s head and looked from it to Auburn.

“What are you?” Auburn blinked furiously to see through the rain. Her fur was soaked. She didn’t notice.

“I am an owl. Callie is my name. What are you doing? Protecting this human from the ghost of the Tailless cat?”

“How do you know about that?”

“I’m an old friend of your great-grandmother. I watch you all when you come into the woods at night.”

“So, that was you screeching?” Auburn’s eyes narrowed, thinking Callie has scared her on purpose.

"Yes, I'm afraid I wasn't ready for that clap of thunder. I'm sorry I frightened you. This is no weather for a cat to be out in, I think you'd better go. Come, I'll take you home."

"No, I won't leave until I know the human is alright," Auburn broke her promise and told Callie everything. Callie watched Auburn look at the human whenever he was mentioned, which was often. "Being an old friend, I know you won't tell anyone."

"That's right. It wouldn't have been your grandmother if she hadn't stolen that fish!" Callie slapped her leg with her right wing, laughing. She turned serious and fixed her own glowing gaze on the cat. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you loved this human." The owl's words startled Auburn. She sat thinking for a moment.

"You know, I think I do."

Callie didn't have a chance to respond. The human let out a soft moan and rolled from his side onto his back. Auburn caught sight of a piece of cloth, a handkerchief, that dropped as the human moved. She remembered she needed proof for her brothers and sisters. Callie flew up into the trees on silent wings. Auburn moved closer to the human to snatch away the cloth. As she neared,

the human lifted a hand to his head and let out another little moan. His eyes fluttered open and gazed blankly at their surroundings. Auburn froze.

The Lord of Marlborough, Rodney, didn't quite understand what he was doing lying in the rain in the middle of the night. All he really knew was that he was wet, cold and had a very bad headache. He tried looking around, but found that his vision was blurred. The only thing he remembered before he lost consciousness again was a pair of bright, green eyes looking at him intently.

The human crumbled back down to the road and Auburn took the chance to catch the handkerchief in her mouth. She heard the splashing of hooves hitting the puddles, this time coming from the direction of the town. Someone's come for him! she thought. She hid in the underbrush again as the last of the storm dropped from the sky. She watched as another human picked up the man on the road, placed him inside the thing her grandmother said was a carriage, turned the horse and carriage around and went

back to the town. Satisfied her human would be okay, Auburn set back for the factory, her precious proof held fast between her sharp teeth.

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All through the winter, Auburn was admired by her brothers and sisters for bringing back the Lord of Marlborough's handkerchief. While she no longer had to endure their snickers over her like of humans, Auburn felt that something was wrong. Something just kept gnawing at her.

When spring finally came and she bounded out of the factory with her siblings, Auburn realized what it was. She wanted to be with the human that she took the handkerchief from. She didn't want to be his cat. She wanted to be human.

The revelation frightened her. She could share her heart with no one, they wouldn't understand. And the other dilemma was: How, exactly, was she going to become a human? The more she thought about it, the more confused and sad she became. Being a cat was all she knew, could she just walk away from everything for a human? Would she be miserable forever if she didn't try? She had distanced herself from the rest of the cats in the

kingdom, even her great-grandmother. Auburn had already made her choice, it just took her some time to admit it.

The next day, while most of the other cats were catnapping, Auburn padded away, whispering a goodbye over her shoulder. She walked through the woods until she reached the road. She sat beside it for a while remembering the night that drew her back there. A flutter of movement caught Auburn's eye as she sat there. She turned to see Callie land beside her. The owl brought up a wing to shield its eyes from the sun, blinking at the brightness of the spring day.

"So you have returned. I sensed that you would, the night we met here."

"Is that why you're here?"

"Yes. I know why you have left the kingdom."

The pupils of Auburn's eyes expanded with surprise. No one could possibly know that she was leaving her home. "How?"

"I wasn't always an owl. In fact, I'm not really an owl at all. I'm an enchantress. I've long known the advantage of being both a human and an animal."

“You . . . you could make me human?” Auburn looked at the owl with wonder.

“Yes, Auburn, I can. The only thing I require is that you do not speak to the humans. I will make it so your vocal chords are useless.”

“Why?” Auburn asked, a plaintive mew escaping after the question.

“The human kingdom is so much different from yours. It is a kingdom overrun with fear and suspicion. More so than you would ever imagine for a species that considers itself the top of the food chain.”

“But you’re human . . .”

“A human that chooses to be a night bird most of the time. We’re not all bad. That human you care for, the Lord of Marlborough, he’s a good one. If he wasn’t, I wouldn’t be offering to do this for you. Do you still wish to be human, Auburn?”

“Yes,” said Auburn, after a moment. “Yes, please make me a human, Callie.”

“As you wish.” Callie give her a deep bow.

A brilliant light flashed and seemed to fill the entire area of the woods the owl and the cat were in. Auburn felt as if she had eaten too much catmint. The woods were spinning and twisting

around her. The ground was falling away from her. The next instant everything stopped. Auburn found herself standing beside a tall woman with long, gray hair. She had gentle lines on her face. If it wasn't for her eyes, Auburn would never have known it was Callie smiling at her.

Something was different. Auburn stepped back. She was looking right into the woman's face, not up at her, she was She looked down at herself quickly. Long, red hair spilled over her shoulders, obscuring the view of her long, green dress. Auburn stuck out a leg, while holding the hair back out of her face. A human leg! With a pretty brown bootlet on it's foot! Her foot! Her hair! Her arms! Auburn opened her mouth to thank Callie, but nothing came out. This brought Auburn's excitement down a notch. She looked at Callie with an angry pout and crossed her arms in front of her chest. Couldn't she have waited until I was in the human kingdom before she took my voice! she thought. Callie laughed at her friend.

"Oh, Auburn. You don't need a voice to communicate! I know exactly what you're feeling!" Callie wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes. "Oh, and there's one more thing I forgot to mention. You will be able to speak to the humans

if the one you love loves you in return and gives you a kiss because of that love.”

Auburn felt very vulnerable in her new human body. She wished Callie had mentioned about this kiss, whatever that was, before changing her into a human. Now she couldn't ask her and Callie seemed to think she already knew. Auburn cocked her head to the side and gave Callie a look that she hoped showed her puzzlement. Callie moved forward and clasped Auburn's hands in her own.

“A heartless man they would have to be, not to love you the instant they saw you, child. Don't worry. Trust your heart. It has brought you this far, it will see you to the end. I won't be far while you are adjusting. I'll be around if you need me.” Callie stepped back and another bright flash appeared. The woman was gone. Up in the tree was the owl. She let out a soft hoot.

“Follow me, Auburn. Let's go meet Rodney, my Lord of Marlborough.”

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Auburn was delighted that, even though she was human, she could still understand Callie. She followed the owl, sometimes walking, sometimes

running to keep up. Callie perched in an apple tree beside a large manor. Though it had gates, they were wide open and Auburn ran through them to get to the owl.

The Lord of Marlborough was walking about Marlborough Manor, enjoying the new growth of spring, with his valet by his side. They were discussing the mysterious incident on the main road last fall when they rounded the corner to the side of the enormous house. Rodney stopped in his tracks and his valet did the same. Both men stood staring at the most peculiar sight they had ever seen. A pretty young woman with long, red hair and wearing a green dress was standing with her hands behind her back in front of the apple tree. In the apple tree was perched, in broad daylight, an owl and it was making soft chuffing noises as if it was talking. The woman stood listening to the noises as if the owl was talking to her. The owl noticed the two men watching and flew off in the direction of the woods. The girl turned and took a few steps after the bird, reaching out her arm and opening her mouth. The men heard no sound come from the woman. The lord and his valet exchanged looks, then the Lord of Marlborough cleared his throat.

Auburn jumped at the sound behind her. She didn't understand why Callie had left her, especially after promising she wouldn't. Auburn turned around slowly. She saw the Lord of Marlborough standing beside a slightly smaller man. Rodney was more startled than Auburn was, though Auburn would never believe so, when he saw the woman's green eyes. He knew immediately that this woman had been at the road last fall. He advanced toward her, smiling. Uncertain, Auburn backed away.

"It was you, wasn't it? At the road, when my horse threw me. I always wondered why you never spoke to me. Now I see it was because you can't." Auburn stopped backing away and nodded her head. He hadn't seen that she was a cat. Auburn couldn't believe how well things were going.

Auburn was allowed to stay at the manor. She began to understand why a human would have a home that was as large as her kingdom. They took up so much more space. Guests were always coming over, from Ladies to Dukes. Auburn didn't care much for the Duke of Ellington. He looked at her in the most awful way. If she were still a cat, she'd scratch out his eyes. She always stayed as

far away from him as possible. She tried to ask Rodney about why the Duke was always visiting. After a few tries he understood her questioning gestures; he rolled his eyes and mumbled something about being related. Auburn couldn't see two people more unrelated than her Rodney and the Duke of Ellington.

She found that humans had some peculiar ways of doing things, like playing croquet. She'd almost broken a toe trying to bat one of the bright red croquet balls with her foot. She'd also given the Duchess of Queensbridge a concussion via an overenthusiastic swing of her mallet. If not for these few incidents, Auburn thought she might actually enjoy the game. But whenever she pointed to the game people made excuses to do something else.

The time she spent alone with Rodney, which was rare since the valet, Micah, often accompanied them, he chattered away pleasantly. He didn't seem to feel the love toward her that she felt toward him. Auburn was growing discouraged and often sat in the room she'd been given at the manor, wondering if her family missed her and how her great-grandmother was.

Alright, Auburn thought, I'll try to let him know that I appreciate everything he's done for me these past six months. Like teaching me to dance, and ride a horse and play croquet Stop it, Auburn! You know you're not any happier than if you were his pet. He treats you that way anyhow. So this is it. Somehow, let him know you're leaving.

Auburn entered the dining room where a late breakfast was laid out on the table. Rodney looked up when she entered the room.

"My dear!" he said, rising from his chair. "I've got a surprise for you!" Auburn gave him a questioning look. "A party. Tonight. It's in your honor. It's to celebrate six months of having you with us. You've not been your regular bouncy self the last month or so. I thought this would help." Auburn gave him a halfhearted smile. Great, she thought, just when I'm going to tell him I'm leaving, he throws me a party. He looked so pleased with himself, and Auburn was secretly pleased with him, that she couldn't bring herself to spoil the day. So she sat down at the table to eat breakfast.

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Auburn was dazzled by the sparkling decorations for the party. All this for me? Maybe he does love me, she thought, walking by all the elegantly dressed guests. She had been fairly well-received and liked by all the humans Rodney knew. Even the Duchess of Queensbridge bore her no ill will after recovering from her concussion.

It was a special party, a masquerade. Auburn couldn't resist choosing the cat's face for her mask. It was a black cat mask and a black crepe gown she wore, but she almost felt like a feline again. If only she knew whether Rodney loved her or not, then maybe she would be content to stay a human, pretending to be a cat once in a while.

One of the servants, who were all dressed like mice so people could tell them apart from the guests, came over to her and presented her with a sealed envelope on a platter. She nodded her thanks and, after picking the envelope up, waved the mouse away. Thankful the Duchess had shown her how to read while she was keeping her company during her recovery, Auburn opened up the envelope and read the letter inside:

MY DEAR,

MEET ME BY THE APPLE TREE AT 10 O' CLOCK.

It was not signed. The apple tree was where she'd met Rodney as a human for the first time. He must want to tell me he loves me! Auburn looked at the large clock in the front hall. It was almost 10 o'clock. She had to hurry to be there on time. She ran out of the room abruptly. Three of the many costumed persons observed her departure; a peacock, a fox and a dragon. Each slipped out of the room by separate ways.

Two rusty-orange gloves clasped around Auburn and proceeded to drag her away from the apple tree. She strained to see who had a hold of her.

"It will go much better for you the less you struggle, my pretty," said the Duke of Ellington, his voice muffled by his fox mask. Auburn's face formed a scowl under her own mask as she let out a silent hiss of rage and twisted in his grasp. The Duke dragged her over to his carriage, which he had waiting at the gates of the manor.

"Stop!" At the sound of Rodney's voice, both the Duke and Auburn stopped for a moment. The Duke hauled Auburn into the carriage and ordered the driver to go.

The Duke was pleased with the success of his plan. "He'll try to get you back. But it will be too late. You belong to me now. He never really appreciated you, you know. I can give you the love you want." Auburn tried to snort her disgust at his words, but nothing came out. Even though she was a cat turned human, she knew that the Duke knew nothing of love. His smug look grew unbearable. Auburn, frustrated by not being able to speak her contempt of the man, threw herself across the carriage at him, fingernails first. Clawing and kicking at him with reflexes from fighting with her brothers and sisters, the Duke was soon overcome. He threw himself out of the moving carriage to escape her fury. Auburn leapt out after him.

The Duke was huddled in a ball, feebly fending off blows from the enraged Auburn when the now-unmasked dragon of Marlborough came upon the scene. Through it all, Auburn's mask had somehow stayed in place. When she raised her head at his approach, in a defensive posture that belonged only to a cat, Rodney drew up his horse and let out a gasp. The sight of Rodney drained the anger out of Auburn. She heard him gasp and realized that he must be able tell that she was a

cat from her costume. She felt too tired to deal with him. She ripped the mask from her face and plunged into the woods, running without seeing where she was going.

Auburn stopped in the field. Before her stood the factory. Her home. The rustling of leaves sounded behind her. She turned at the sound.

“What’s the matter? Why are you so sad? You’ve done nothing wrong,” said the Lord of Marlborough, taking her hands. “Heaven knows, he deserved worse for trying to kidnap you. I didn’t realize . . . I mean, I’ve always cared for you but . . . I didn’t know how much I loved you, until I saw him dragging you over to his carriage.” Rodney kissed Auburn and held her close. Immediately, her voice was restored and the words came out in a jumble.

“Then you know . . . this is my home . . . that I’m really . . . I was born here . . . a cat,” she said between sobs.

Rodney cupped her face in his hands. “Ever since I saw you ‘talking’ to that owl, there hasn’t been a thing you’ve done that did not tell me a hundred times over that you were really a cat. I

just could never figure out why you wanted to be a human. It took me awhile to realize it was me.”

Auburn laughed at his last remark. It felt so good to be able to laugh and cry and speak to him.

“So, you came home after all. And you brought him with you,” Callie, still wearing her peacock costume, approached them. “I was never far, though you didn’t recognize me. I suppose I deserved that knock on the head.”

“Callie? You’re the Duchess of Queensbridge?” Auburn gasped, trying not to laugh.

“Yes. And don’t worry about the Duke of Ellington, he won’t be looking at anyone that way anymore. I’ve made sure of it. And I plan to bestow a special gift upon you both.”

“Me?” said Rodney, pointing to himself. Callie nodded.

“Take these rings,” she said. In the palm of her hand were two rings of gold, each molded in the shape of a cat cradling a beautiful opal between its head and its tail. “Think of them as an early wedding present. Turn the jewel toward the cat’s head and you will be cats—” Auburn let out a little squeak of joy. Rodney’s jaw dropped.

“Come now, Rodney. I know you’ve always wanted to be one. Turn the jewel toward the cat’s

tail and you will be human. Simple as that. Be careful not to lose them, guard them with your lives. And be happy throughout all nine of them.”

“Thank you, Callie,” Auburn moved forward to hug her friend but she was not fast enough. The familiar flash of light was followed by the soft hoot of an owl. The pair watched Callie glide away. Putting on her ring, Auburn turned to Rodney.

“Ready to meet my family?”