

PUSS IN BOOTS.

THERE was once an old miller who had three sons. When he knew that he was about to die he called his sons to the bedside and divided his property among them. This was not very difficult in one way, because he had only three possessions, his mill, his ass, and his cat, and yet no one would say that the division he made was quite fair.

The eldest son had the mill. He was well off enough, for the farmers and neighbours would give him plenty of work; and with industry and honesty he could look to becoming a rich man.

The second son, though not so lucky, had a useful, steady servant, though he hardly saw how he could depend on the ass for his living. An ass is very well as far as it goes; the difficulty is to make it go far enough. The miller's second son had, however, some hopes of getting employment from his brother, who would require a beast of burden to carry the

sacks of corn to the mill and the sacks of flour back to the customers.

But the third son was in a sorry plight, and really it did not seem that the miller had been fair to him. True, it was a fine cat, with thick fur and a handsome tail, but, after all, a cat is only a cat! So the poor man sat down and wondered what he should do for a living; and the more he wondered the less able was he to come to a decision.

At last he began to bemoan aloud. "My brothers," he said, "by putting their property together and helping each other may do very well. There is always corn to be ground, and either sacks to be carried or odd jobs that an ass can do. As for me, so far as I can see, when I have killed my cat, and made a fur cap or a pair of mittens of his skin, I shall have disposed of all my property, and must die of hunger."

The cat had been listening to every word his master said, and when he paused in his complainings, he came forward, and in a clear voice said, "Dear master, do not be so troubled. You had better not kill me; I shall be far more useful to you alive than dead."

"How can that be?" asked the young man,

much surprised to find that he possessed a cat that could talk.

“If you will only give me a pair of boots and a sack,” said Puss, “you shall have no cause for complaint.”

The young man did not quite see how this would better his condition. However, he was so poor that he could hardly be worse off, and as the cat had always been very clever in catching rats and mice, he thought it best to see what Puss would do for him.

A bootmaker was sent for, and the miller's son managed to persuade him to hold over his bill until Puss had brought in the promised fortune. The bootmaker took the measures very carefully, and when the boots came home the cat drew them on as if he had been used to such things all his life. And very nice boots they were too, for the bootmaker had worked with a will and done his very best. The sack was easily secured from the mill, and this, too, met with Pussy's approval.

The next morning the cat rose with the sun, licked himself carefully all over, trimmed his whiskers, pulled on his fine new boots, hung the sack round his neck, and then crept to a rabbit-warren, taking care to keep out of sight

of the bunnies. Here he opened his sack, into which he had put some bran and lettuce leaves, and, with the loose strings in his hand, stretched himself out under a bush and pretended to be asleep.

He had not long to wait. There are plenty of foolish young rabbits in every warren, and presently a couple of giddy bunnies came hopping up, twitching their long ears. After sniffing at the opening of the sack for a moment or so, they hopped gaily in and began munching and nibbling the lettuce leaves as hard as they could, little thinking, poor simple things, of the fate that awaited them.

Master Puss had been watching with the mouth of the sack wide open, and his paws well on the string, ready to pull at the right moment.

Whisk!—the cat pulled the string, the sack closed, and the poor bunnies inside kicked frantically to be let out.

Master Puss lost no time in killing them, and, slinging the sack over his shoulder, set off to the palace, telling the guard at the gate that he wished to speak to the King.

Puss looked so fierce and determined as he twirled his whiskers that the sentries let him pass without demur. He walked straight into

the King's private room, and bowing gracefully and waving his tail, said :

“ My master, the Lord Marquis of Carabas ”
—(this title was out of the cat's own head)—
“ presents his most dutiful respects to your Majesty, and has commanded me to offer his humble duty, and to assure your Majesty that among your subjects none is more devoted than my master.” Here the cat made a very low bow, and the King wondered what was coming next.

The cat continued, “ My master, the Lord Marquis of Carabas, humbly sends this small present of game for the gracious acceptance of your Majesty, as a slight token of the overflowing sense of affectionate veneration with which your Majesty has inspired him.”

There was a speech for a cat to make !

The King, who was not so eloquent as his visitor, could not help feeling impressed by the beautiful long words the cat used. He had never heard of the Marquis of Carabas, but being polite—as all kings learn to be—he did not like to say so and answered graciously, “ Tell my Lord Marquis that I accept his present with great pleasure, and am much obliged to him.”

At the same time he could not help wondering how it was that he had never heard of the Marquis before. But Pussy's face wore such a look of sincerity that not the slightest shadow of suspicion that he was being imposed upon entered his kingly mind; and certainly the fine airs and manner of speech of the cat seemed to show that he belonged to a master of high degree.

All this was certainly very clever of the cat; but it was only the beginning of what he meant to do to make his master's fortune.

Bowing again to the King and flourishing his tail, he retired with all the grace and air of a thorough-bred courtier.

A day or two afterwards, Puss went again with his boots and his sack to try his fortune in the chase. This time a couple of young partridges, unused to the world and its ways, poked their beaks into the trap, and were quickly bagged and killed. These the cat also presented to the King as coming from the Lord Marquis of Carabas; and the speech he made was so eloquent, and had so many long words in it, that we had better not attempt to write it down but must leave you to imagine its beauty.



When the boots came home Puss drew them on as if he had been used to such things all his life.

For some time the cat continued to bring a present of game to the King every day or two. His Majesty was so pleased that he gave orders that Puss should be taken down to the kitchen and given something to eat and drink whenever he called. While enjoying this good fare the faithful creature would contrive to speak to the royal servants of the large preserves and abundant game which belonged to his noble master.

Hearing one day that the King and his lovely daughter were going to take a drive by the river-side, Puss concocted a very clever scheme.

Rushing into his master's presence, he said, "Go and bathe in the river, dear master, and I will make your fortune for you. Only bathe in the river, and leave the rest to me."

The so-called Marquis did not see how he was to make his fortune by bathing; but by this time he was so impressed by the cat's cleverness that he would have done anything Puss told him. As he was bathing, the King drove by with his daughter, the loveliest and most beautiful Princess in the world.

As soon as the royal carriage came in sight, Puss began to run to and fro, wringing

his paws and tossing them wildly over his head, while he cried at the top of his voice:

“Help! help! help! my Lord Marquis of Carabas is drowning! Come and h-e-l-p my Lord—Marquis—of—Ca-ra-ba-a-as!”

Hearing this pitiful wail, the King looked out of the carriage window; and, recognizing the cat who had brought him so many presents of game and made such beautiful speeches, he at once ordered his guards to go to the assistance of the Lord Marquis.

But this was only the beginning of the cat's scheme. Knowing that his master's shabby clothes would never do for a Marquis, he had hidden them under a big stone. He now ran to the carriage window and said to his Majesty:

“My Lord Marquis's clothes have been stolen while he was bathing, and the Marquis is shivering very much, with nothing to put on. He would like to wait upon your Majesty and the illustrious Princess, but of course he cannot do so without clothes.”

“Oh,” said the King with a laugh, “we'll soon remedy that.”

He thereupon ordered a suit from his own wardrobe to be brought for the Marquis.

It is an old saying that fine feathers make fine birds; and the young miller certainly looked very well indeed in his new garments, as he came up to the carriage to thank the King for his kindness. His Majesty was so taken with him that he insisted that my Lord Marquis should come into the carriage and drive with them; and the beautiful Princess looked as if she were not at all displeased with the proposal.

The young man felt rather bashful in his new position. But this was perhaps to his advantage; for the old King thought he was silent out of gratitude at the honour of being asked to ride in the King's carriage, while the lovely daughter for her part had no doubt the Marquis was speechless with admiration of her beauty. The King told a number of very long stories as they rode along; and as the Marquis said, "Yes, your Majesty" to everything, and seemed much interested, the King was perfectly satisfied, and thought him a well-informed and modest young man. The fact was, the Marquis was thinking all the time of the scrape he had got into, and wondering what the King and his lovely daughter would say to that rogue Puss if they only knew how he had imposed on them.

But Puss was not the cat to leave his

master in the lurch. He knew that people judge by appearances; and he had determined that his master should appear a wealthy man.

As soon as he had seen the young man safely seated in the King's carriage, he struck across the fields by a short cut and soon got a long way in advance of the royal party. In a wheat-field a party of reapers were gathering in the harvest. The cat ran up to them, and doubling up his paws in a most expressive manner, said :

“Now, good people, if you don't say, when the King asks, that this field belongs to the Lord Marquis of Carabas you will all be chopped up into mincemeat.”

The reapers, startled by the appearance of the fierce little booted creature, promised at once to do as they were told.

Soon afterwards the royal carriage passed, and the King stopped, as the cat had supposed he would. Beckoning one of the reapers, the King asked to whom all that fine wheat belonged.

The good people, remembering the threats Puss had made, replied :

“To the Marquis of Carabas, your Majesty.”

“You have a fine crop of wheat, my Lord

Marquis," said the King; "I am rather a judge of wheat."

"Yes, your Majesty," replied the Marquis; and the King thought again what a nice young man he was.

Meanwhile the cat came to a meadow where the mowers, with their scythes, were cutting the long grass.

"Good people," said Master Puss, running up, "when the King asks you presently to whom this meadow belongs, if you do not say 'To the Marquis of Carabas,' you will all be chopped up into mincemeat."

When the King passed he did not fail to ask to whom the fields belonged, and was much surprised at being answered again, "To the Marquis of Carabas, your Majesty."

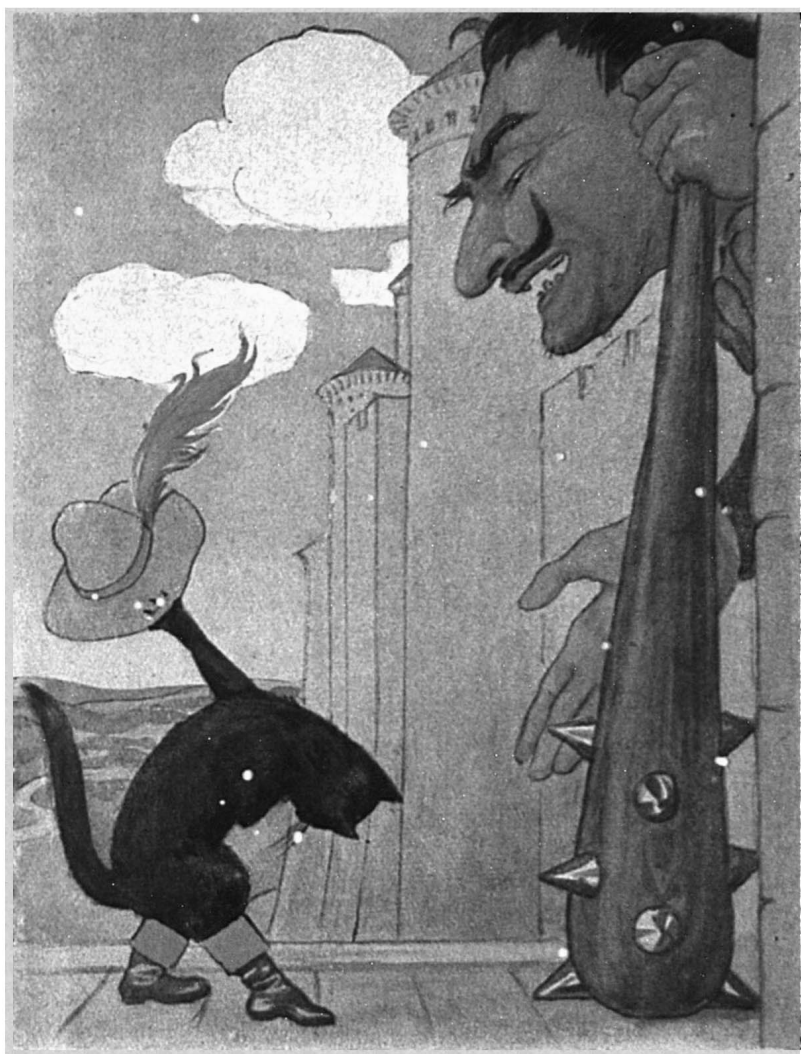
"Really, my Lord Marquis, your possessions are very great!" said the King; whereat the young man blushed and answered, "Yes, your Majesty." And now the Princess thought he looked handsomer than ever. In fact, she was fast falling in love with him.

As they drove on the cat always ran before, saying the same thing to everybody he came across—that they were to declare the whole country belonged to his master.

But though the Marquis had no castle, there was a personage in those parts who had—and a fine castle it was. This personage was an Ogre, a giant, and a magician, all in one. The cat knew all about him and his wicked ways. Going boldly to the door, he rang a loud peal at the bell, and called out to the Ogre that he had come to pay a friendly visit and to inquire after his welfare. The cat did not really care about the giant's well-being; but the giant was the owner of much land, in fact, of those very fields and meadows which the cat had persuaded the workers to describe as belonging to the Marquis of Carabas. The Ogre himself came to the door, carrying his great spiked club. Bowing low, and doffing his plumed hat, Puss repeated his words and said he trusted the Ogre was now better. (The fact was, the Ogre had eaten a huntsman, top-boots and all, a few weeks before, and the spurs had disagreed with him.)

The Ogre replied that he was much obliged to the cat for his politeness, and invited him to walk inside. This was just what the cat wanted. He at once accepted the invitation, and, sitting on a table, began to talk to his host in his politest manner.

The Ogre himself came to the door, carrying
his great spiked club.



"Sir," he began, "every one says you are a very clever magician."

"That is true," answered the Ogre, who was very vain.

"Sir," continued the cat, "I have heard that you are able to transform yourself into the shape of various animals."

"That also is true," answered the Ogre.

"But, sir," continued the cunning cat, "I mean large animals, such, for instance, as an elephant."

"Quite true," answered the Ogre. "See for yourself."

He muttered some magical words, and stood before the cat in the shape of an elephant, with large flapping ears, sharp tusks, little eyes, and long trunk—all complete.

The cat was startled at this sudden change; but, mustering courage, went on: "Well, sir, that is marvellous indeed! But can you change your shape at will, and represent whatever animal you choose?"

The Ogre wondered somewhat to find the cat so anxious to obtain useful knowledge. But most people are flattered at being thought clever and like to exhibit their talents. So the Ogre resolved to gratify the curiosity of Puss.

The elephant waved his trunk three times in the air, and then stood before the astonished cat in the shape of a huge African lion, with waving mane, a huge head, and the most awful set of big white teeth. The cat stood gazing at him like a creature transfixed with fright, just as he, in his time, had seen many a poor mouse terrified and trembling, and unable from very fear to fly from danger.

When the lion opened his mouth and gave a roar, the cat was so awestruck that he dashed straight up the wall, and, reaching a window, escaped on to the roof of the castle. His polished boots were very much in the way, but terror lent him wings, or rather feet, and his boots scarcely received a moment's thought. There he stood on the roof, quaking, and yet spitting and snarling, as it is cat nature to do, while every hair on his tail rose on end with horror. He could hear the Ogre below laughing at the thought of how he had frightened his visitor.

But presently Puss recovered courage, for he was a very brave cat, and felt ashamed of himself for having been so easily frightened. He knew by the laugh that the Ogre had now resumed his natural shape, so he

came down again into the room with a cool and collected air, muttering something about the heat of the room, which had compelled him to run out for a breath of fresh air. At this the Ogre laughed louder than ever, but the cat sat down again on the table, and resumed the conversation as if nothing had happened.

“Sir,” he went on, “I should not have believed these wonders if I had not seen them with my own eyes. You are the greatest magician it has ever been my good fortune to meet.”

The Ogre made a deep bow and seemed much gratified.

“I have long heard of your fame and skill, but what I have seen far surpasses all my ideas of what a magician could achieve.”

Here the Ogre again bent forward and made a deep bow. He was beginning to think the cat really had a good deal of sense after all.

“But once,” went on Puss, “I heard of a conjuror who could not only assume the shape of a large animal like an elephant or a lion, but that of the smallest also—for instance, he would appear as a rat or a mouse. But then, you know, he was an old magician, who had been practising for a great number of years,

and I do not expect ever to find any one who could come up to him."

"Don't you, indeed!" cried the Ogre angrily. "You fancy he was a greater man than I? Ha! ha!—I'll show you that I can do the same thing."

In a second or two the Ogre was capering about the room in the shape of a little mouse. This was exactly what the cat wanted.

He instantly sprung on the mouse, and a single nip with his sharp teeth put an end to the Ogre.

The cat, cunning fellow, had now gained his object. Here was a castle for the Marquis of Carabas—a sumptuous mansion in which no King need be ashamed to rest after a long ride; and the cat thought, with glee, how surprised the Marquis would be on his arrival.

Sure enough, just as Puss sat slyly licking his lips after swallowing the Ogre, the King's carriage came in sight.

The cat had only just time to run upstairs and dress in a page's doublet when the King's coach appeared in front of the castle.

There, to the great surprise of the Marquis

of Carabas, stood Puss, gallantly attired, and looking as much at his ease as if he had done nothing but look after the castle all his life. Not only did his clothes give him a very dignified air, but he wore them with a grace which greatly increased their effect; and nothing could exceed the courtly air with which he welcomed the King and Princess to the castle.

“Welcome, your Majesty and your Royal Highness,” he said, bowing low, “to the poor castle of my master, the Lord Marquis of Carabas! If your Majesty and the gracious Princess will be pleased to alight and take some refreshment, this will indeed be the proudest day of my life, and of my master’s, the Lord Marquis of Carabas.”

He made another deep bow, waved his cap, and laid his paw upon his heart.

“Upon our royal word, my Lord Marquis,” cried the King, “you have a splendid castle, and we shall have great pleasure in viewing it more closely. We are always happy to visit our loving subjects; and, moreover, shall be glad to stretch our royal legs; also our long ride has given us an appetite.” (The King said this as a hint that some luncheon would be acceptable, and the sly cat took the

hint, (as you will see.) "What say you, daughter? will you be of the party?"

The Princess, whose curiosity had been raised by the aspect of the castle, was quite willing; and the King commanded the Marquis to give the Princess his hand and conduct her into his dwelling.

Puss led the way, walking backwards and bowing with the grace and ease of a lord chamberlain.

The castle was splendidly furnished, for the Ogre had been a person of taste. Every room was hung with costly tapestry, and in the stables were a number of fine horses and a grand gilded coach in which the King himself would not have disdained to ride. Indeed, the Princess, after looking at it attentively and trying the cushions, went so far as to remark smilingly that it was very comfortable and that it seemed fit for a married couple; whereat the cat nudged his master to make a bow.

While they were walking through the upper rooms, the cat slipped away for a few minutes to the kitchen. Here he looked quickly into the various cupboards and was delighted to find everything he wanted—rich meats,

and salads, and sweets, and the choicest of wines.

When the royal party returned to the great hall—lo and behold!—he had spread a luncheon such as any King and Princess might have been glad to sit down to.

The Marquis invited the King to be seated, and himself handed the Princess to a chair. If the King had been good-humoured before, he was radiant now; for he was rather fond of his meals, and the luncheon was faultless, the Ogre having made a point of having the best of everything.

With each glass of wine the King became more jovial, and appeared to conceive a greater affection for the Marquis. At last he began to treat him almost as a father might a son, and after luncheon he said:

“It will be your own fault, my Lord of Carabas, if you do not become our son-in-law, provided, of course, our daughter has no objection.”

At this plain speech the young lady became scarlet with confusion, but she made no objection and did not look displeased. Indeed, she had long ago made up her mind that the Marquis was the handsomest and most attractive

young man she had ever met, and you may be sure, being a Princess, she had met many.

So the Marquis of Carabas made a little speech (not nearly so fine as the cat could have made it for him), in which he thanked the King for his condescension, and expressed himself still more glad that the Princess had been graciously pleased to offer no objection; and as it was generally supposed that silence gave consent, he supposed it to be the case with this honour, and he accepted it accordingly.

As for the cat, he was obliged to go into the courtyard to hide his joy, which was so great that he stood on his head on the flagstones and kicked his hind legs in the air.

In so doing, his boots fell off, but he soon recovered them and spent quite a long time trimming his whiskers by them, as if they were looking-glasses.

“Surely a cat may laugh at a King,” he said, “and at a Princess too, for that matter.”

Little more remains to be told. The Marquis returned with the King and the Princess to the royal palace; and the marriage took place a few days later amid great rejoicings. The King, of course, gave away his daughter,



M.W.T.



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and Puss was present in an elegant new pair of boots. As he strutted in the procession he was the proudest cat in all the land, as he had every right to be.

The Marquis of Carabas made a good and kind husband, and neither he nor the Princess had cause to regret what had happened. As for the cat, he was made a great lord, and never had occasion to run after mice except for his own amusement. He had a new pair of boots whenever he fancied them, and had only to walk into the royal kitchen to be given as much cream and milk as he could possibly want.