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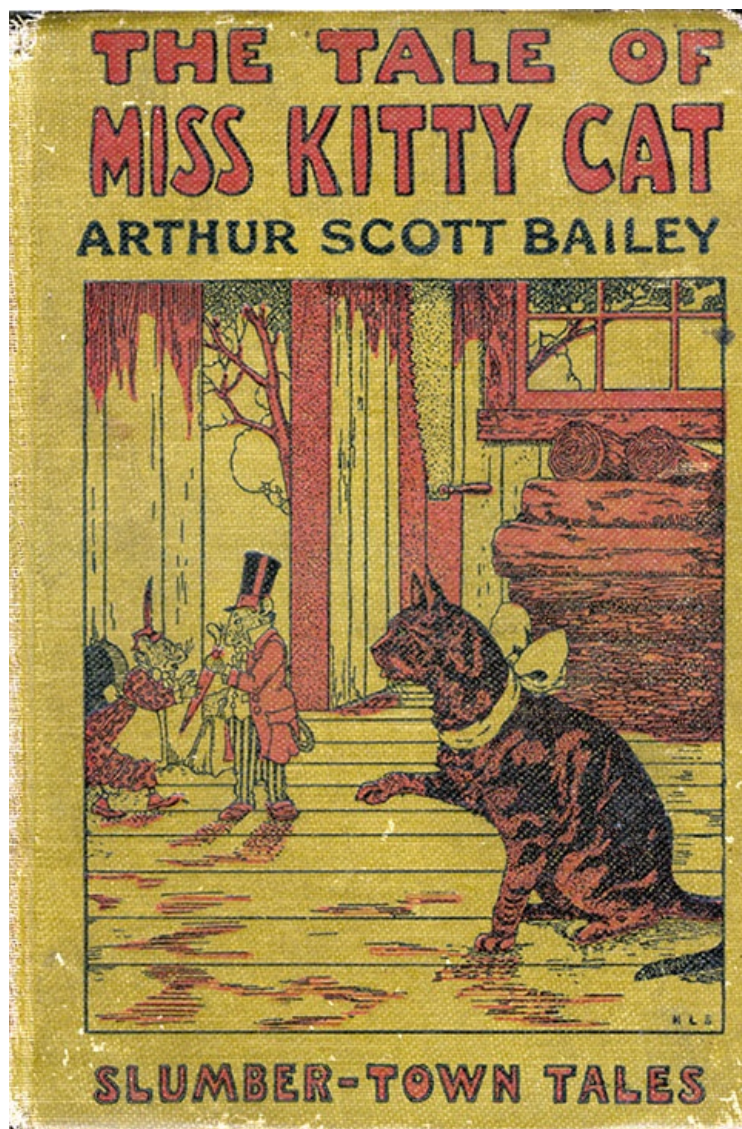
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THE TALE OF MISS KITTY CAT

SLUMBER-TOWN TALES
(Trademark Registered)

BY
ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY

AUTHOR OF
SLEEPY-TIME TALES
(Trademark Registered)

TUCK-ME-IN TALES
(Trademark Registered)

THE TALE OF THE MULEY COW
THE TALE OF OLD DOG SPOT
THE TALE OF GRUNTY PIG
THE TALE OF HENRIETTA HEN
THE TALE OF TURKEY PROUDFOOT
THE TALE OF PONY TWINKLEHEELS
THE TALE OF MISS KITTY CAT



Miss Kitty Cat Chased Old Dog Spot.

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TALES*

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AND

"TUCK-ME-IN TALES"

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ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRY L. SMITH

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THE TALE OF MISS KITTY CAT

I

A TERRIBLE PERSON

THE rats and the mice thought that Miss Kitty Cat was a terrible person. She was altogether too fond of hunting them. They agreed, however, that in one way it was pleasant to have her about the farmhouse. When she washed her face, while sitting on the doorsteps, they knew—so they said!—that it was going to rain. And then Mrs. Rat never would let her husband leave home without taking his umbrella.

As a rule Miss Kitty Cat didn't look at all frightful. Almost always she appeared quite unruffled, going about her business in a quiet way and making no fuss over anything. Of course when old dog Spot chased—and cornered—her, she was quite a different sort of creature. Then she arched her back, puffed her tail out to twice its usual size, and spat fiercely at Spot. He learned not to get within reach of her sharp claws, when she behaved in that fashion. For old Spot had a tender nose. And no one knew it better than Miss Kitty Cat.

Around the farmhouse she was politeness itself—when there was anybody to observe her. If her meals were late she never clamored, as Johnnie Green sometimes did. To be sure, she might remind Mrs. Green gently, by plaintive mewling, that she had not had her saucer of milk. But she was always careful not to be rude about it. And though Miss Kitty liked a warm place in winter, she never crowded anybody else away from the fire. She crept under the kitchen range, where no one else cared to sit. And there she would doze by the hour—especially after she had enjoyed a hearty meal.

On summer nights, however, when she loved to hunt out of doors, Miss Kitty Cat was far from appearing sleepy. She roamed about the fields, or crept through the tree-tops with a stealthy tread and a tigerish working of her tail. Folk smaller than Miss Kitty never cared to meet her at such times. They knew that she would spring upon them if she had a chance. So they took good care to keep out of her way. And if they caught sight of her when she had her hunting manner they always gave the alarm in their own fashion, warning their friends to beware of the monster Miss Kitty Cat, because she was abroad and in a dangerous mood.

Johnnie Green liked Miss Kitty. Often she would come to him and rub against him and purr, fairly begging him to stroke her back. Unless he pulled her tail at such times she kept her claws carefully out of sight and basked under Johnnie's petting.

If he had been her size and she had been his, Miss Kitty Cat might not have been so harmless. She might have played with Johnnie, as she sometimes played with a mouse. But Johnnie Green never stopped to think of anything like that. And if he had, he would have thought it a great joke. He would have laughed at the idea of Miss Kitty Cat holding him beneath her paw.

II

DOG SPOT'S PLANS

SOMEHOW old dog Spot and Miss Kitty Cat never became good friends. By the time Miss Kitty Cat arrived on the farm in Pleasant Valley Spot had lived there several years.

From the first day he met Miss Kitty in the kitchen Spot hadn't liked her. Yet he claimed at the time that he was glad to see her. He said that he could tell at once that he was going to have great sport with her. He knew it would be fun to chase her!

Inside the farmhouse old Spot was careful how he behaved. The moment Miss Kitty first set eyes on him she scurried under the table, where she crouched and glared at him. That was scarcely what you might call a friendly greeting. And Spot would have barked at her had he dared.

Since he didn't, he only whined a bit through his nose. You couldn't have told what he meant by the sound.

Miss Kitty Cat didn't like his whining. She even opened her mouth wide and said as much. She made an odd hissing noise, which amused old Spot greatly. And he told Miss Kitty, in what was almost a growl (except that it wasn't loud enough for one), "Wait till I catch you out of doors, my lady! I'll have some fun with you."

Then Farmer Green's wife opened the door and told Spot to be gone.

"You ought to be ashamed of your self—" she scolded—"teasing a poor little cat!"

Old dog Spot tucked his tail between his legs and crept through the doorway, keeping one eye on the broom that Mrs. Green held in her hand. And as soon as he was safely outside he gave two or three sharp yelps, telling Miss Kitty Cat that he would watch for her the very first time she set foot in the yard.

Somehow Miss Kitty Cat wasn't specially worried. She knew a thing or two about dogs; and she didn't intend to let old Spot bully her. It took her a few minutes to get over her anger. And then she came out from beneath the table and lapped up the milk that Mrs. Green had set temptingly on the floor, in a saucer.

When Miss Kitty had finished her meal she washed her face—a duty that she performed with great care, for she prided herself on always looking neat.

Watching her, no one would ever have guessed what was in her mind. "I'd like to wash that dog's face for him!" Miss Kitty was saying to herself. "He'd have some reason then for yelping and whining."

Having completed her toilet Miss Kitty jumped into a chair that stood in the sunshine, near a window. And there she composed herself for a nap. When she was well fed and well warmed she liked nothing better than to curl herself up and doze and dream.

Meanwhile old dog Spot was telling everybody in the farmyard about the new cat and the fun he intended to have with her.

"There'll be lively times around here when she comes outside the house," he chuckled.

III

CHASING MISS KITTY

WHEN Miss Kitty Cat awoke from her nap she got up and stretched herself. In her opinion, a nap was no nap at all if one didn't stretch after taking it. "There's nothing like a good stretch to make a person limber," she often remarked.

Of course, in order to climb trees, or spring successfully at a rat or a mouse, Miss Kitty had to keep her muscles supple. And since it happened, now and then, that others jumped unexpectedly at her, she believed in always being ready either to chase or to be chased.

After she had smoothed her fur to suit her, Miss Kitty went to the door and mewed patiently until Farmer Green's wife opened it. Then Miss Kitty Cat slipped out of the kitchen and found herself in the woodshed. A highly interesting place, it seemed to her, with any number of crannies to offer lurking-places for mice. She decided at once that the woodshed would be a fine spot in which to hunt in stormy weather.

Feeling much pleased with her new home, Miss Kitty hopped down upon the great flat stone that served as a step from the woodshed to the ground. She couldn't help thinking, as she sat there, what a pleasant yard Farmer Green had. She noticed that there were trees enough about the farmhouse to furnish homes for plenty of birds.

And if there was one thing that Miss Kitty Cat liked it was to visit birds right where they lived.

Seeing a faint stir in the grass not far away, she began to creep towards it. Miss Kitty had found that it paid to look into such things. Often she had surprised a meadow mouse in just that way.

This time, however, it was Miss Kitty Cat herself that was surprised. She was so intent on her own important business that she never took her eyes off that spot where the grass had moved. And that was why she didn't see old dog Spot when he stuck his nose around a corner of the farmhouse.

Now, Spot's ways were quite different from Miss Kitty's. Whenever he set out on a hunt he never could keep still. So the moment he caught sight of Miss Kitty Cat he gave a joyful bark. At the same time he bounded towards her.

Of course Spot's yelps warned her to run. The moment she heard his first bark she forgot all about her own hunt, being herself the hunted. She scurried off across the farmyard, with Spot tearing after her.

If she had had time enough Miss Kitty would have climbed a tree. But Spot was altogether too near her for that. And being a stranger about the farmyard, she hadn't learned all the fine hiding places. Since Spot was between her and the house, she made for the barn and sprang through the open door. Inside Spot quickly cornered her.

With her back arched and her tail almost as big as Tommy Fox's brush, Miss Kitty Cat turned and faced her pursuer.

IV

A TENDER NOSE

"HURRAH!" old dog Spot barked. At least, what he said sounded a good deal like that.

He had cornered Miss Kitty Cat in the barn. And there was nothing he liked more than teasing anybody that was short-tempered as she was.

"*Tchah!*" Miss Kitty hissed.

Now, that ought to have been warning enough to Spot to keep a good, safe distance from her. But he was one of the sort that never knows enough to take a warning for what it is worth.

"*Wow!*" he chuckled. "You needn't think I'm afraid of you. If you ran from me once, you'll run again."

He didn't intend to hurt Miss Kitty. All he wanted was to get her to run across the yard again, so that he might have the sport of chasing her. So he edged nearer and nearer her, thinking that she would dodge past him and run out of the barn.

But Miss Kitty Cat had no relish for that sport.

"Keep your distance, sir!" she cried. And though she spoke plainly enough, old Spot paid no heed to her words. Instead, he gave a quick spring at her, just to worry her a bit more.

To his great surprise, almost at that same instant Miss Kitty Cat sprang at him. And as she jumped, she flashed one of her paws out and struck Spot on one side of his long nose.

It was not just a gentle tap with a soft, well-padded paw. She thrust her claws well out from between her toes. And jabbing them deep into Spot's tender nose, she gave a sharp downward pull.

All at once old dog Spot thought of the time when, as a puppy, he stuck his nose into a hornet's nest. His joyful bark changed suddenly to a shrill *ki-yi* of pain. And at the same time he became angry.

"You don't know how to have fun," he growled at Miss Kitty Cat. "Just to teach you better manners I'm going to take you by the back of your neck and shake you."

It appeared that Miss Kitty herself had quite a different notion. At least, she went through an entirely different motion, which was not at all like offering the back of her neck for old Spot to seize. When Spot reached for her she clawed him furiously, with one paw after another, while she told him what she thought of him.

He did not wait to hear everything that Miss Kitty had to say to him. Spot thought too much of his nose to linger in the barn any longer, but turned tail and hurried into the yard.

Miss Kitty Cat chased him as far as the door. Taking one quick backward glance at her as he went, Spot noticed how fiercely her eyes glared. It was a terrible sight. And it made him hasten all the faster.

"My goodness! What a temper!" he said under his breath.

Loping across the farmyard, he looked about him uneasily. He hoped nobody had seen Miss Kitty Cat driving him out of the barn. He knew it would be a hard matter to explain to any one. All his farmyard friends would be sure to think it a great joke.

Luckily there was no one in sight except Henrietta Hen.

"She won't notice anything," Spot assured himself. "She's the stupidest person on the farm."

Having nothing more to worry about except his scratched nose, old Spot crawled under the woodshed and nursed his wounds during the rest of the morning.

As for Miss Kitty Cat, she stayed in the barn a long time.

"What a worthless fellow that old dog is!" she thought. "This barn is full of mice! I don't believe he has caught one in all the years he has lived on the farm."

SPOTS AND SPECKLES

WHEN she first met Miss Kitty Cat face to face Henrietta Hen exclaimed, "What a pity!"

Miss Kitty Cat hadn't intended to speak to Henrietta Hen at all. She didn't care, as a rule, to have anything to do with hens. She often remarked that she liked eggs and she liked chickens; but she never could see what hens were good for.

Well, when Henrietta Hen spoke to her like that Miss Kitty Cat paused and stared at her coolly for a moment or two. Then she asked in rather a distant tone, "What's a pity?"

Now, Henrietta Hen seldom knew when she was snubbed. And goodness knows people snubbed her often enough, too. For she was forever making remarks about their looks. And now she said to Miss Kitty Cat, "It's a pity your speckles are so big."

Miss Kitty Cat saw at once that Henrietta Hen was a vain creature. She had half a mind to walk on and leave her, without saying another word to her. Indeed, Miss Kitty had turned aside to continue her stroll towards the meadow when Henrietta Hen spoke to her again.

"Don't you think," Henrietta demanded, "that speckles should be worn very small, like mine? Don't you think yours are too big?"

"I'd rather not talk with you," said Miss Kitty Cat. "I can see plainly that we'd never agree."

"Oh, do stop for a while!" Henrietta Hen besought her. "I love a chat with a cat," she added with a silly giggle.

Miss Kitty Cat was vexed. She thought that Henrietta Hen was a tiresome person.

"I'll stop and have a chat with you," Miss Kitty relented, "for it's not often that I meet a spotted hen. If my speckles are too big," she went on in an icy tone, "it is just as true that your spots are altogether too small."

"Spots!" Henrietta cackled. Like all empty-headed people, she was quick to lose her temper. "Spots indeed! I'd have you know that I haven't any spots. I'm a speckled beauty—that's what I am. And if you don't believe it you can ask the Rooster."

"Perhaps I was mistaken," Miss Kitty Cat purred. "Anyhow, I'll take *your* word about the Specks. I won't bother to ask the Rooster."

"Ah!" Henrietta Hen exclaimed. "You're afraid of him! You're afraid he might want to fight you. And I wish he would," she screamed at Miss Kitty, "for it's plain that you're no gentleman."

"Well—I should hope not!" Miss Kitty Cat gasped.

"I thought you were a gentleman, or I should never have spoken to you," Henrietta Hen declared. "When I first saw you I said to myself, 'Here's a quiet, polite gentleman! It will be pleasant to have him living at the farmhouse.' But I see that I was mistaken."

"You were!" cried Miss Kitty, who was—to say the least—greatly astonished by Henrietta's odd remarks. "My name is Miss Kitty Cat. And what made you think I was a gentleman is more than I can guess."

"*Miss!*" cried Henrietta. "*Miss!* Then why, pray tell me, do you wear those whiskers?"

Try as she would, Miss Kitty could give no reason that satisfied Henrietta Hen. And Henrietta always declared that Miss Kitty Cat was a strange, strange person.

VI

BEECHNUT SHUCKS

ONCE in a while Frisky Squirrel paid a visit to Farmer Green's place. Although he had learned that the farmyard was not without its dangers, after one adventure Frisky was always sure to return, sometime, as if in search of another.

So a certain fine, fall day found him scampering along the top of the stone wall that followed the road as it dropped down the hill from the woods to Farmer Green's front gate.

Old Mr. Crow, sailing lazily over the yellowing fields, caught sight of the stone wall traveller and glided into a tree beside the road. "You'd better not go near the farmyard, young fellow!" old Mr. Crow called.

Frisky Squirrel stopped, sat down, and looked up at Mr. Crow in the tree above him.

"Why not?" Frisky inquired.

"Haven't you heard the news?" Mr. Crow asked him. "Haven't you heard that there's a cat at the farmhouse?"

"I didn't know it," Frisky admitted. "But I don't see why I should turn back. I won't hurt her."

Old Mr. Crow *haw-hawed*.

"I don't believe," he croaked, "you've ever met a cat."

"No, I haven't," Frisky Squirrel replied, "but I'd like to see one. So I'll be on my way. But don't worry, Mr. Crow? I won't hurt her." And then Frisky started off along the top of the stone wall once more, at a somewhat brisker pace to make up for lost time.

"He can't say I didn't warn him," Mr. Crow exclaimed as he watched the bouncing bit of gray fur.

"I hope Mr. Crow won't worry," said Frisky Squirrel to himself. "If the cat gets hurt it will be her own fault, for I certainly won't harm her."

When Frisky reached the farmyard he crept around a corner of the barn, hoping to find a few kernels of corn. But Henrietta Hen had been there before him and there wasn't one kernel left. He ran here and there about the yard. And at last, when quite near the woodshed door, he sat up suddenly, twitched his nose a few times, and said, "Ha! I smell beechnuts!"

Now, that was not strange. Johnnie Green had been eating beechnuts in the woodshed doorway. And he had scattered the shucks on the broad stone step. Frisky Squirrel began nosing them. And just out of sight inside the woodshed Miss Kitty Cat awoke from a short nap, stopped right in the middle of a long stretch, and said, "Ha! I smell a squirrel!"

Miss Kitty Cat was wide awake in an instant. She flattened herself upon the woodshed floor and crept silently to the door. Though she didn't make the slightest sound, all at once Frisky Squirrel's nose twitched again, as he muttered to himself, "There's a very queer smell about these beechnut shucks!"

He was sitting on the edge of the stone doorstep with a bit of beechnut clutched in his paws. And when he looked up and saw somebody's nose appear in the doorway he tumbled right over backward. The only sound he made came from the beechnut shuck, which made a faint click as it fell upon the stone. And Miss Kitty Cat's sharp ears caught it.

VII

TWO IN A TREE

WHEN Miss Kitty Cat dashed out of the woodshed Frisky Squirrel was two jumps ahead of her. That was really a better lead than it sounds. Frisky was always a good jumper. And the more scared he was, the further he could leap. Anybody that knew him well would have known then—just to see him—that something had given him a great fright.

First he had noticed a strange smell. Next he had seen a strange nose come stealing out of the woodshed door. And not knowing who was going to follow that nose, Frisky Squirrel felt that the sooner he climbed a tree the better it would be for him. So he made for a tall elm that wasn't too far away.

Though Miss Kitty Cat was a fast runner, Frisky reached the foot of the tree ahead of her. And he was half way to the lowest branches before he took a real look at his pursuer.

To his dismay he saw that the creature hadn't stopped at the foot of the tree. The monster had already begun climbing after him. Frisky had never seen any one just like this fierce person. One look was enough for him. He pushed higher and higher into the tree-top and crept far out on a drooping limb, which swayed beneath his weight as he clung to it.

There he paused, while he watched to see what the stranger would do. And as he stared at the creature he remembered suddenly what Mr. Crow had told him. "There's a cat at the farmhouse," the old gentleman had said.

"This must be the cat," Frisky thought. And to her he called, "If you're the cat, don't come any nearer, madam! You might get hurt." For he remembered, too, that he had told Mr. Crow that he wouldn't harm the cat.

"It *is* the cat," he said to himself presently, "for she has stopped."

Miss Kitty Cat did not quite dare follow Frisky Squirrel to the tip where he swung. She crouched upon the branch a little way from him, where it was safer for her, and with switching tail and bristling whiskers waited to see what he would do next.

"It makes me uneasy to see you swaying so," she told Frisky. "Besides, you're shaking this limb. And I don't like it."

"She's a fussy creature—this cat!" Frisky said to himself. "I promised Mr. Crow I wouldn't hurt her; but I didn't promise him that I wouldn't tease her." So he bobbed up and down with all his might.

"Stop!" cried Miss Kitty Cat. "That's a very reckless thing to do. It's like rocking the boat."

"I think it's the finest sport in the world," Frisky chuckled.

"I know a finer," Miss Kitty snarled.

"What that?" he asked her.

"If I could get my claws on you I'd soon show you," she told him grimly.

Somehow there was something about her remark that startled Frisky Squirrel—something that made him shiver. And when he shivered he lost his hold. Down he dropped, slipping and floundering from one branch to another.

And down Miss Kitty Cat followed him.

VIII

NINE LIVES

FRISKY SQUIRREL was much more at home in the trees than Miss Kitty Cat was. While Frisky managed at last to cling to a limb and right himself, Miss Kitty lost her footing and fell out of the tree completely.

"Oh! She'll be hurt!" Frisky cried as he saw her turning and twisting through the air. But to his great surprise she struck with all her four feet on the ground, quite unharmed. "You did that very nicely," he called to her generously.

But she didn't answer. To tell the truth, she felt rather foolish because she had fallen out of the tree. And she walked back to the woodshed and stalked through the doorway without saying a word.

After that adventure Frisky Squirrel decided to go back home. So he scurried down the tree-trunk and scampered to the stone wall, and scooted along the top of it.

Old Mr. Crow was watching for him. And as before, he dropped down near the wall to talk.

"I hardly expected to see you again," Mr. Crow remarked. "You couldn't have met the cat."

"Yes!" said Frisky. "I met her. She followed me up a tree. And it's a wonder she didn't get hurt, though I was careful of her. She had a fall; but she landed beautifully."

Old Mr. Crow nodded wisely.

"She always lands on her feet," he observed. "And you needn't worry about her," he added. "You know, they say she has nine lives."

"Nine lives!" Frisky Squirrel exclaimed. "What do you mean, Mr. Crow?"

Now, Mr. Crow really knew a great deal, because he had lived many years. And he pretended to know still more, because he liked to appear learned. But this question was a puzzler for him. He simply couldn't answer it.

"You wouldn't understand, even if I explained," he told Frisky Squirrel. And then he flew away, leaving Frisky to run home and wonder what it meant to have nine lives.

As for Mr. Crow, he suddenly made up his mind that he would find out about Miss Kitty Cat's nine lives. He would ask that lady herself. So he flapped himself over to the big elm in the farmyard, where he cawed and cawed, hoping that Miss Kitty Cat would appear to see what all the noise was about.

And sure enough! she soon bounced out of the woodshed door and looked up at Mr. Crow inquiringly.

"I've been hearing a good deal about; you," Mr. Crow called down to her in what he considered his sweetest tones, though anybody else would have said they were quite hoarse. "I know you always manage to land on your feet—and I can understand that. But what's this I hear about *nine lives*?"

Miss Kitty Cat only stared at him.

"Perhaps you don't feel like talking," said Mr. Crow. "If you've just had a fall, maybe you're still a bit shaken up, even if you did land on your feet. Perhaps you'd rather I came back later."

Miss Kitty Cat suddenly found her voice.

"You've been gossiping with that young squirrel!" she snapped. "I'll have you know that I'm not shaken up at all. But I'd shake you up if I could get hold of you!"

Mr. Crow was astonished. He was sure he had been most polite. Yet here was Miss Kitty Cat as rude as she could be!

He amused himself by jeering at her until she turned her back on him and went inside the woodshed. And he had to go away without learning anything at all about the nine lives of Miss Kitty Cat. They always remained a deep mystery. Everybody agreed that the number was nine. But beyond that, nobody could explain about them.

I X

THE STOLEN CREAM

"I DECLARE!" Farmer Green's wife cried one day. "Somebody's been stealing my cream in the buttery."

The buttery was a big bare room on the shady side of the house, where great pans of milk stood on a long table. When the cream was thick enough on the milk Mrs. Green skimmed it off and put it in cans. At one end of the buttery there was a trap door in the floor. When the trap was raised you could look right down into a well. And into its cool depths Mrs. Green dropped her cans of cream by means of a rope, which she fastened to a beam under the floor, so the tops of the cans would stay out of the water.

Mrs. Green made butter out of that cream. So it was no wonder she was upset when she discovered that some one had meddled with one of her pans of milk.

"It can't be the cat," said Farmer Green's wife. "The buttery door has been shut tight all the time."

Miss Kitty Cat was right there in the kitchen while Mrs. Green was talking to her husband. And it was easy to see that Miss Kitty agreed with her mistress. She came close to Mrs. Green and purred, saying quite plainly that she was a good, honest cat and that she deserved to be petted. At least, that was what Mrs. Green understood her to mean.

Often, after that, Mrs. Green discovered traces of the thief in the buttery. Flecks of cream on the side of a milk pan, drops of cream on the table, smudges of cream now and then on the floor! Such signs meant something. But Farmer Green's wife couldn't decide what.

And another strange thing happened. Miss Kitty Cat lost her appetite for milk. She would leave her saucer of milk untasted on the kitchen floor.

Now and then Mrs. Green picked Miss Kitty up and looked closely at her face. At such times Miss Kitty purred pleasantly. She did not seem to be the least bit disturbed.

One evening, after dark, Johnnie Green went into the buttery to get a pail. The moment he opened the door there was a crash and a clatter inside the room.

Johnnie jumped back quickly.

"There's somebody in the buttery!" he shouted.

But when his father brought a light they found no one there. A tin dipper lay on the floor.

"When you opened the door it must have jarred the dipper off the edge of the table," said Farmer Green.

"*Meaow!*" said a voice behind them. There stood Miss Kitty Cat, saying that everything *must* have happened exactly as Farmer Green said.

"She couldn't have been in here, could she?" Farmer Green puzzled. "Come, Kitty!" And he picked up Miss Kitty and held her where the light fell full upon her face. "Clean as a whistle!" said Farmer Green. "I guess she just followed us in." He set her down again. And once more, with a plaintive *meaow* she agreed with him perfectly.

A CREAMY FACE

FARMER GREEN'S wife threw away pan after pan of milk, because she knew somebody had been stealing cream off the top of them. At least, she told Farmer Green to feed the milk to the pigs, because she wasn't going to make butter of any cream that had been tampered with by goodness knew whom or what. And old dog Spot said that feeding good creamy milk to the pigs was just the same as throwing it away. He made that remark to Miss Kitty Cat, adding that it was a shame that somebody was stealing cream and declaring that he hoped to catch the thief.

Miss Kitty Cat made no reply whatsoever.

"Don't you hope I'll catch the guilty party?" Spot asked her.

"Please don't speak to me!" Miss Kitty Cat exclaimed impatiently. "I don't enjoy your talk; and you may as well know it."

"Very well!" said Spot. "But when I catch him I'll let you know."

"She's jealous," Spot thought. "She knows I'm a good watch dog. And she can't bear the idea of my catching a thief."

It was hard, usually, to tell how Miss Kitty Cat felt about anything. She was a great one for keeping her opinions to herself. It seemed as if she wanted to be let alone by every one except Farmer Green's family.

Having boasted about catching the cream thief, old dog Spot began to watch the buttery very carefully. Search as he would, he couldn't find a chink anywhere that was big enough even for a mouse to squeeze through.

One day he happened to catch a glimpse of something moving under the roof of the shed next the buttery. To his amazement he saw Miss Kitty Cat slip through an old stove-pipe hole that pierced the great chimney which led down into the buttery, where there was an ancient fireplace which hadn't been used for years and years. Miss Kitty Cat crept along a tiebeam and hid herself in a pile of odds and ends that somebody had stowed high up under the roof and left there to gather dust and cob-webs.

"Ah, ha!" said Spot under his breath. "This is interesting."

When Miss Kitty Cat visited the kitchen a little later there wasn't a speck of dirt on her coat. And her face was spotless. No one would have guessed that she had ever made her way through an old chimney.

Old dog Spot said nothing to her then. But he chuckled to himself. He had a plan that pleased him hugely.

All this happened on a morning. And late that afternoon when Miss Kitty Cat wasn't anywhere to be seen, and Farmer Green's wife opened the buttery door to get a pitcher of cream for supper, Spot suddenly began to bark in the shed. He scrambled up a stepladder that leaned against the wall and stood on the top of it while he pawed the air frantically, as if he were trying to fly.

The noise brought Mrs. Green hurriedly out of the buttery. And she was just in time to see Miss Kitty Cat peer out of the old stove-pipe hole, with a *creamy* look about her mouth.

Well, the cat was out of the bag at last. Or perhaps it would be more exact to say that Miss Kitty was out of the buttery. Anyhow, it was very plain to Mrs. Green that she had been in the buttery only a moment before, lapping thick cream off a pan of milk. And she hadn't had time to wash her face.

After that Farmer Green stopped up the stove-pipe hole. And soon Miss Kitty's appetite for milk returned. When Mrs. Green set out her saucer of milk for her Miss Kitty lapped it up greedily—and even licked the saucer clean.

Old dog Spot watched her with a grin.

"I let you know when I caught the cream thief, just as I promised you I would," he jeered.

Miss Kitty wiped her face very carefully before replying.

"Don't boast!" she said. "It's a disagreeable thing to do.... Besides, I knew—*long before you did*—who was taking Mrs. Green's cream."

XI

THE WRENS' HOME

THERE wasn't a bird on the farm that didn't dislike Miss Kitty Cat. And there was only one bird family that didn't live in dread of her. That was the Wren family. And they had a good reason for feeling safe from Miss Kitty.

Miss Kitty Cat always spluttered whenever she unbent herself enough to talk with anybody about Rusty Wren and his busy little wife, who had their home in the cherry tree outside Farmer Green's window.

"The Wrens needn't feel so proud of their house," Miss Kitty Cat sometimes said. "It's nothing but an old syrup can. And I know for a fact that Mrs. Bluebird looked at it last spring when she was hunting for a home. And she said she wouldn't live in such a place. I heard her tell her husband so."

Now, the reason why Mr. and Mrs. Wren liked their house and the reason why Miss Kitty Cat didn't were one and the same: Miss Kitty couldn't get inside it. The mouth of the syrup can, which the Wren family used for a door, was no bigger than a quarter of a dollar. It was entirely too small for Miss Kitty Cat, though it was big enough to admit Rusty Wren and his plump wife.

Miss Kitty said everything she could to persuade the Wren family to build themselves a nest in a crotch of the tree, like other birds.

"I'm sure," she told them, "you'd like such a home much better than this. There's no reason why you shouldn't be as fashionable as everybody else. You wouldn't have to look for a place to build. There's room enough right in this old cherry tree for a hundred happy homes if anybody wanted to build them."

"We like our house," Rusty Wren said.

"I wouldn't move, even if he wanted to," Mrs. Wren declared.

"Maybe you'd move because he *doesn't* want to," Miss Kitty Cat suggested.

But Mrs. Wren shook her head in a most decided way.

"No!" she said. "I'm satisfied with my house. And our neighbors would be far better off if they built as we do, inside a snug sort of box."

"You'll never know what you're missing," Miss Kitty remarked, "if you don't try an open nest sometime. Now, only yesterday I visited Jolly Robin's family over in the orchard. And their youngsters certainly did look beautiful. But you keep yours hidden inside that old syrup can where nobody can see them. It's a shame that the public can't have a chance to admire such fine nestlings as you must have in there."

Miss Kitty Cat was sitting under the cherry tree. And she looked up and smiled most agreeably at Mrs. Wren.

Rusty Wren looked thoughtful.

"There's something in what she says," he whispered to his wife. "It is too bad not to let the neighbors admire the finest nestlings in Pleasant Valley."

"You know they say a cat may look at a king," Miss Kitty simpered. "Well, a fortnight ago I went over to the pine woods and had a look at a Ruby Crowned Kinglet's family. So it seems only fair that I shouldn't be denied a look at your little wrenlets."

XII

JOLLY ROBIN'S NEWS

IN A WAY Miss Kitty Cat was a patient creature. She could play a waiting game. She spent hours watching rat-holes without growing restless.

So after her talk with Rusty Wren and his wife, when she urged them to give up their boxlike house and build themselves an open nest like most other birds, Miss Kitty left them.

"I'll let my words sink in," Miss Kitty muttered to herself. "Of course they'll want to talk things over privately."

It wasn't often that she made herself so agreeable to any of the bird people. Indeed, she had been so pleasant that Rusty Wren began to think that Miss Kitty was a much kinder creature than he had always supposed.

"Miss Kitty's very agreeable," Rusty Wren remarked to his wife. "Did you notice how sweetly she spoke of our children?"

"Huh!" said Mrs. Wren. "She may fool you; but she can't fool me. She's a mealy-mouthed animal, if ever I met one."

"I don't see how you can say that about Miss Kitty Cat," Rusty replied. "She doesn't eat meal."

"I suppose you'll be saying next that she doesn't eat birds!" his wife exclaimed.

"I fear you've been listening to gossip," Rusty ventured. "If Miss Kitty Cat comes back I hope you'll be cordial to her."

He could have bitten his tongue a moment later for saying that, because Mrs. Wren began to scold him. And he flew away and left her as soon as he could think of a good excuse.

He went over to the orchard, where he flitted about for some time. And at last he met Jolly Robin, who appeared most doleful.

"What's the matter?" Rusty Wren asked. "You look terribly upset."

"So I am," Jolly Robin admitted. "We had a caller yesterday."

"Well, well!" said Rusty Wren. "That's nothing to be glum about."

"You'd think so if you were I. It was Miss Kitty Cat. And when she left she took one of our nestlings with her."

"Perhaps she only borrowed it," Rusty Wren suggested. "Maybe she'll return it to-day."

"No!" Jolly Robin told him. "If she comes back again it will only be to take another one."

Suddenly Rusty Wren remembered that he had urged his wife to be cordial to Miss Kitty Cat the next time she called at the cherry tree where they lived.

"I must hurry home!" he cried. "I must warn my wife."

"But your youngsters are safe," Jolly Robin assured him. "Miss Kitty Cat can't reach them inside the tin can where you built your nest."

"That's true," Rusty Wren admitted. "But there's my wife! Miss Kitty might harm her, if she caught her unawares." So he started for home at top speed.

XIII

AN UNWELCOME GUEST

As he neared his home in the cherry tree, Rusty Wren saw a fearsome sight. Miss Kitty Cat was crouched right on top of the tin syrup can which Johnnie Green had nailed to the tree. Inside that can was the Wren family's nest. And inside the nest were some brand-new youngsters, only two days out of their shells.

It was no wonder that when Rusty Wren came back from the orchard and saw such a sight he began to shriek.

"What are you doing on my roof?" he shrieked.



Miss Kitty Cat Looked Calmly at Rusty Wren.

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Miss Kitty Cat looked up calmly and watched him as he hopped about in the top of the tree above her head.

"I've come to make another call on your wife," she explained.

Then a muffled voice chirped, "She's been here a long time and I can't get her to go away."

The moment he heard that, Rusty Wren felt better. It was his wife's voice and it meant that she was safe. To be sure, Rusty knew that she was a prisoner in her own house; for it was plain that she dared not leave it so long as Miss Kitty Cat stayed on the roof, ready to grab Mrs. Wren the moment she stepped out of her doorway.

"Your wife is very shy," Miss Kitty remarked to Rusty Wren with a sly smile. "I've been hoping to get more acquainted with her. That's why I climbed up and sat on your roof. When people are shy and don't invite me inside their houses I believe in making myself at home outside, while I wait for them to appear."

From her doorway Mrs. Wren called to her husband, "Don't let her deceive you with her pretty talk! Remember what I told you! She's mealy-mouthed.... If you had seen her trying to reach her paw through the door you'd know how dangerous she is."

"There!" said Miss Kitty Cat with a sigh. "People never seem to understand my ways. I was only trying to shake hands!"

"With her claws!" cried the muffled voice of Rusty Wren's wife. "Ugh! She's a wicked creature if ever there was one."

"Go away!" Rusty Wren scolded. "Get off my roof! Get out of my cherry tree!"

By this time feathered neighbors of the Wren family were arriving from all directions. They didn't hesitate to call Miss Kitty Cat names. And some of them even darted quite near her, as if they meant to peck her eyes out.

Miss Kitty began to have a worried look.

"Goodness! Where do they all live?" she asked herself. "I had no idea there were so many birds around here. There's better hunting than I supposed."

Try as they would, the birds couldn't budge Miss Kitty Cat from the top of Rusty's house. He was frantic, poor fellow!

"I don't know what to do," he wailed. "My wife will starve in there—and the children, too."

Just then little Mr. Chippy came hurrying up to him.

"Don't worry!" Mr. Chippy cried. "He's coming! He's on the way now; and he can get you out of your trouble if anybody can."

Miss Kitty Cat pricked up her ears. She couldn't help hearing what Mr. Chippy said.

"I shall stay right where I am," she declared. "Nobody can make me move."

She had scarcely finished speaking when a most unexpected sound startled her.

It was "*Meaow!*"

XIV

CATCALLS

PERCHED on top of Rusty Wren's tin house, Miss Kitty Cat had been enjoying herself thoroughly, while the birds made a great how-dy-do and tried in vain to frighten her away.

When she heard all at once an unexpected *meaow* she showed that it startled her.

"A cat!" cried Miss Kitty. "I didn't suppose there was another cat for miles around." She looked about on all sides, on the ground and in the tree-tops. And there was no cat anywhere in sight.

Meanwhile the birds were all exclaiming, "There! He's here. Now Miss Kitty Cat had better watch out."

Again a strange, mocking catcall sounded from somewhere. There was a sort of jeer about it that aroused Miss Kitty Cat's anger.

"He's come, has he?" she exclaimed to little Mr. Chippy, who chattered at her from a good, safe distance. "If he's looking for a fight I'd be pleased to have him come and get it."

Whoever the stranger was, and wherever he was, he knew how to tease Miss Kitty Cat. Now he howled at her from the thicket of lilac bushes on the edge of the flower garden. Now he mewed at her from the hedge in front of the farmhouse. And though Miss Kitty Cat tried to get a glimpse of him, she couldn't see anything that even faintly resembled a cat.

The annoying cries moved from one place to another. She was sure of that. But the one that made them managed to stay hidden.

"This is queer!" Miss Kitty Cat said to herself. "Can it be that there's a cat's voice around here, and nothing more? A cat without a voice wouldn't be so strange. But a voice without a cat—that's the oddest thing I ever heard of!"

At last Rusty Wren seemed to take heart. And his wife, inside their house, abused Miss Kitty Cat loudly—or as loudly as she could from inside the tin syrup can.

"I always knew you were a coward," she told Miss Kitty. "You're always ready to attack us small people. But you don't dare fight anybody of your own size."

"How can I fight a person that I can't see?" Miss Kitty asked. "If this noisy stranger would come out in the open I'd soon show you whether I'd fight him or not. I'd teach him—if I could get hold of him—not to come here and interfere when I'm making a neighborly call."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Wren. "You don't mean half you say. If you weren't a fraud you'd go and find this person that's jeering at you."

"*Meaow-ow-ow!*" Again that mocking call grated on Miss Kitty's ears.

"There!" Mrs. Wren exclaimed. "There it is again. It would make me pretty angry to be talked to like that. But I don't suppose it bothers you. Probably you're used to having people caterwaul at you."

That was a little more than Miss Kitty Cat could stand. She scrambled down from the old cherry tree and ran across the yard to the row of currant bushes, whence the last catcalls had come.

As she drew near, a slim slate-colored bird gave a harsh laugh as he flew up from the bushes. It was Mr. Catbird. And Miss Kitty Cat felt sheepish enough when she saw him. She knew that he had succeeded in fooling her with his mocking cries.

The birds—with Mr. Catbird among them, and Mrs. Wren, too—all gathered round Miss Kitty and made such a clamor that she crept away and hid in the haymow. She never could endure much noise, unless she made most of it herself—by the light Of the moon.

XV

MOUSETRAPS

"I DON'T understand," said old dog Spot to Miss Kitty Cat one day, "why Mrs. Green wants to keep you around the house when she can buy mousetraps at the village." Old Spot eyed Miss Kitty slyly. He dearly loved to watch her whiskers bristle and her tail grow big. And he could make both those things happen almost any time he wanted to.

If anybody wished to see Miss Kitty Cat turn up her nose he had only to mention mousetraps. Of all worthless junk she thought they were the worst.

"They can't catch any but the dull-witted mice," she used to say. "A mouse that knows anything won't go near a trap unless he's hungry. If he wants to go to a little trouble to get a piece of stale cheese he can usually spring the trap without getting caught in it—even if he has to use his tail to do it."

"But a mousetrap," Spot objected, "is little or no care. One doesn't have to feed it except when he wants it to catch a mouse. And everybody knows that Mrs. Green feeds you several times a day. Besides, the fewer mice you catch, the more food she has to waste on you."

"Rubbish!" Miss Kitty Cat sniffed. "You eat ten times as much as I do. And I never heard of your catching a mouse, either."

"Ah!" said Spot. "Don't forget that I drive the cows and watch the house and the barns at night. And during my spare moments I hunt woodchucks. You couldn't expect a person of my importance to fritter away his valuable time catching mice. Mousetraps couldn't do my work," old dog Spot continued. "There never was a mousetrap made that could drive a cow."

"That's one reason why I don't like them," said Miss Kitty Cat. "They're not only poor at catching mice, but they're useless at anything else. Now, whenever I capture a mouse I always make matters as pleasant as possible for him. I always play with him for as long a time as I can spare. But a trap just goes *snap!* A trap doesn't seem to *want* to make friends with anybody."

Old dog Spot laughed right in Miss Kitty's face.

"Much you care for your friends the mice!" he chuckled. "And much they care for you! If you knew what they call you, you'd be pretty angry."

"What's that?" Miss Kitty demanded.

"I don't want to tell you," said Spot. "I don't want to hurt your feelings." He knew (the rogue) that he could tease Miss Kitty more by leaving her to wonder what name the mice had for her.

Much as she wanted to know it, Miss Kitty Cat was too proud and haughty to ask him again. And, jumping up suddenly, she walked stiffly away.

"I shall have to find a mouse somewhere," she muttered under her breath. "I shall have to find a mouse somewhere and make him tell me what old Spot won't."

XVI

A MIDNIGHT MEAL

DOWN in the cellar of the farmhouse a fat couple known as Mr. and Mrs. Moses Mouse crept out of a hole under the pantry floor and ran down a post to the cellar bottom.

"Things have come to a pretty pass!" Mr. Mouse grumbled. "Mrs. Green never did leave more than a crumb or two in the pantry where a fellow could get it. And since Miss Snooper came to live here there's less to eat than ever."

Mrs. Mouse nodded her head somewhat dolefully.

"Do you remember, Moses," she said to her husband, "what delicious bits of stale cheese Mrs. Green used to serve for us here in the cellar, stuck on a short piece of wire? To be sure, she was somewhat thoughtless—the way she left that dangerous loop caught back, so it would snap over and catch you behind the ears if you weren't careful. But you were always very skillful at avoiding that."

"Ah! Those were happy days—or, I should say, *nights!*" Mr. Mouse exclaimed with a sigh. "It makes me sad just to think of that fine, old, stale, moldy cheese."

"I suppose Mrs. Green gives it all to that horrid Miss Snooper now," said Mrs. Mouse, as she climbed to a shelf and looked at the labels on several jars of jam and jelly that stood there in a row.

Moses Mouse watched her hopefully. Being quite plump, he was a bit lazy. And he did not care to scramble up to a shelf for nothing.

"There isn't one without a cover, is there?" he inquired.

"No!" his wife replied.

"There isn't one with a little sweetness oozing down the side of it, is there?" he asked her.

"No!" said Mrs. Mouse. "Not one! I suppose Miss Snooper has licked them all clean."

"That disagreeable Miss Snooper has spoiled everything for us," Moses Mouse declared. And for a fat gentleman he looked oddly unhappy.

"I don't know what we'll do for our supper," he whined. He always whined when he was hungry.

"There's that chunk of putty that Farmer Green left in the woodshed," his wife reminded him.

"Ugh!" Moses Mouse made a wry face. "We've dined upon that for the last three nights. And I never did like putty, anyhow. I wish that snooping Miss Snooper had to eat it." His mournful eyes roved about the cellar until they rested on something in a dark corner. "What's in that box over there?" he asked Mrs. Mouse.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Well—go and see, then!" he snapped. "I'm so faint I can scarcely stand."

Mrs. Mouse always humored Moses when he was hungry. She knew that he was never fretful after he had eaten a good meal. So her feet twinkled across the cellar floor and she disappeared inside the box.

Not hearing anything from her, Moses Mouse soon grew more impatient than ever.

"Well!" he sang out. "What luck!"

"Potatoes!" came his wife's muffled answer, out of a full mouth. "I declare, I forgot to call you."

XVII

THE EAVESDROPPER

FOR ANYBODY that was so faint, Moses Mouse ran to the box of potatoes very spryly. His wife was already inside it, eating.

"I'll have my supper first," he announced, "while you stay outside on the cellar bottom and watch for Miss Snooper."

"I'm just as hungry as you are," his wife objected. "I don't want to wait. You know you'll be a long time at your supper." What she really meant was that Moses Mouse would be sure to overeat.

"Very well!" he said. "But don't blame me if Miss Snooper sneaks up on us."

Thereupon Moses Mouse fell to right greedily. Although there were delicacies that he liked more than raw potatoes, he was hungry enough to enjoy them—and not even ask for salt. And his wife, too, ate almost as heartily as he did. The pale moonlight, streaming through the cellar window, lighted their banquet hall with its ghostly gleams. They enjoyed the cool dampness of the place. They liked its musty smell. And Moses Mouse remarked—between mouthfuls—that they hadn't had such an elegant feast for weeks. "It's quite like old times," he said.

Mrs. Mouse agreed with him. Indeed, they relished their meal so thoroughly that they forgot everything else. And if Moses Mouse hadn't happened to glance up and see two eyes gleaming at him from over the edge of the box he would have had no reason for leaving his meal unfinished. At the moment, his mouth was crammed so full of raw potato that he could scarcely say a word.

"Miss Snooper!" he gasped, all but choking over the words. And he vanished in a twinkling, hoping, of course, that Mrs. Mouse would take the hint and disappear too, but not waiting to see whether she managed to get away safely.

A second later Miss Kitty Cat sprang into the box. She reached out a paw and grabbed at what looked like Mrs. Mouse. But to her great disgust she found her claws clutching nothing more interesting than a small potato, with a little knob at one end that looked not unlike a head.

Miss Kitty Cat let go of her prize with a mew of disappointment. She knew that by that time Mr. and Mrs. Mouse had made their escape. And Miss Kitty soon learned how they slipped away. In one corner of the box she found a tiny hole. "Here's where they went!" she exclaimed. "I don't see how I missed seeing it when I first came sniffing around this box."

Though she had lost a midnight supper, Miss Kitty did not feel too sad. She was too angry for that.

"At last," she cried, "I've found out what old dog Spot wouldn't tell me. The mice are calling me 'Miss Snooper' behind my back!"

In the morning, when Miss Kitty met old dog Spot in the woodshed, she was still feeling peevish. "What are you doing in here?" she snapped.

"Oh, I'm just snooping around to see what I can find for my breakfast," he told her with a grin.

Miss Kitty Cat bared her teeth in a snarl.

"*Snooping!*" she cried. "You'd better be careful what you say to me! I heard some mice talking last night."

"Ah!" said old Spot. "Now you know that listeners seldom hear anything good about themselves."

Then he decided, suddenly, that he would look elsewhere for his breakfast.

For Miss Kitty Cat was in a terrible temper.

XVIII

KIDNAPPED

THERE was great rejoicing among all the Mouse family. Pudgy Mr. Moses Mouse had picked up a bit of news that delighted him and his wife and all their many relations. Somebody had stolen Miss Snooper—as the Mouse family always called Miss Kitty Cat! Somebody had taken her away!

Master Meadow Mouse had seen it all; and he had told Moses exactly how it happened. Master Meadow Mouse knew that a wagon had borne Miss Snooper up the road and over the hill. He had watched it disappear, with his own eyes. All those things Moses Mouse repeated as fast as his short breath would permit. He had hurried back home to tell the news as soon as he had heard it. He found, however, that no one cared *how* Miss Kitty Cat (or Miss Snooper), went, nor where; no one cared who took her; no one cared when. It was enough to know that she was gone. And everybody exclaimed that it was the best news ever—and good riddance to bad rubbish—meaning Miss Kitty Cat.

If it were only true! The Mouse family scarcely dared believe that it was. But when two days passed, and Moses Mouse himself had even ventured into the pantry, and the kitchen, and the woodshed, without meeting Miss Kitty, the Mouse family dared decide that she had indeed gone for good.

Meanwhile Miss Kitty Cat was having a most unhappy time. It was true that she had been stolen. A man driving a peddler's wagon up the hill one evening had noticed her as she lay on top of the stone wall, around the turn of the road beyond the farmhouse. "Kitty! Kitty! Kitty!" he called, as he stopped his horse. And reaching behind the seat, he brought out a bit of food, which he held out for her.

Now, it happened that at that very moment Miss Kitty Cat had her mind on food. She had been hoping that a meal would appear at any moment out of a chink in the wall. And when it was dangled right before her eyes like that she couldn't resist it. She climbed up into the wagon. And the next thing she knew the peddler had clapped her into a basket and fastened the cover. Miss Kitty Cat was a prisoner.

"There, my beauty!" the peddler exclaimed. "I'll take you home with me. We need a mouser. And I dare say you're a good one. Unless I'm mistaken, you were hunting chipmunks on the wall."

Miss Kitty Cat made no answer. Naturally, it pleased her to be called a beauty. But there were other matters that she didn't like in the least. Her captor had forgotten to toss the scrap of meat into the basket—the bait with which he had caught her. And it was somewhat breathless inside her prison. And Miss Kitty Cat had no idea where the peddler was taking her.

He had clucked to his horse and started him plodding up the hill. Every time a wheel struck a stone Miss Kitty gritted her teeth. She never did enjoy riding in a wagon, anyhow. And this one was not at all comfortable.

"They'll wonder, back home, what's become of me," she thought. "And one thing is certain: everybody will miss me!"

XIX

STRANGE QUARTERS

THE PEDDLER that took Miss Kitty Cat away in his cart drove long into the night. Inside the basket into which her captor had popped her, Miss Kitty kept her wits at work. She knew that there were many twists and turns as they creaked up the hills and rattled down the other side of them. Then there were level stretches where the peddler held his horse to a swinging gait that fast put long miles between them and Farmer Green's place in Pleasant Valley.

"Dear me!" Miss Kitty thought. "What a tramp I'll have getting back home again!" For already she was planning to return to the farm. She didn't care if they did need a good mouser at the stranger's house. They needed one just as much at Farmer Green's.

"If Mrs. Green has to depend on traps to take care of the mice she'll soon be eaten out of house and home," Miss Kitty mused. "The minute that fat Moses Mouse knows I'm gone he'll be as bold as brass."

At last the wagon left the hard road and pulled up in a dooryard. A dog barked. And Miss Kitty heard voices.

"I've brought you something in here that you'll like," said the peddler as he handed Miss Kitty's basket to somebody. "But don't look at it out of doors or it'll get away."

Later, inside the house, a woman let Miss Kitty out of her prison.

"What a big cat!" she exclaimed. "Where did you get her?"

"Oh, I picked her up on the road," said the peddler. "She looked as if she wanted a ride," he chuckled. "I think she was hunting along an old stone wall."

"She'll find hunting enough here," said his wife. "This house is overrun with mice. I'll just put her down cellar and let her work for her supper." Then she gave Miss Kitty a toss down the cellar stairs and slammed the door behind her.

It was no wonder that Miss Kitty Cat was angry.

"A fine way to treat a guest!" she spluttered down there in the dark. "That woman might have set out a little milk for me. It would have tasted good, after my long ride in that stuffy basket." Miss Kitty couldn't help thinking what a fine home she had had at Farmer Green's and how good Mrs. Green had always been to her.

Even Johnnie Green—though he *was* a boy—had petted her oftener than he had pulled her tail.

But Miss Kitty was too hungry to sit long at the foot of the cellar stairs in thought.

She soon heard faint rustlings squeaks, and scratchings around her. And though she didn't care to oblige the woman upstairs in any way, Miss Kitty lost no time in providing a hearty meal for herself.

Then she lay down on an old sack and slept for a while.

And just before the roosters began to crow she had found a broken pane in a cellar window.

"What luck!" said Miss Kitty under her breath. And very silently she slipped through the opening and stole away.

XX

A LONG JOURNEY

BY SUNRISE Miss Kitty Cat had trotted at least a mile along the road that passed the peddler's house. She wanted to get a safe distance away before the family got up and turned loose the dog that had barked the night before, when she arrived.

Miss Kitty remembered clearly that the wagon had been climbing a long hill before it turned into the peddler's dooryard. So without hesitating she started *down* the road. She knew that in that direction lay Pleasant Valley—and her home at Farmer Green's.

Having put the first mile of her journey behind her, Miss Kitty stopped beside a little brook and drank her fill of cool, sweet water. She was very thirsty, because she hadn't had a drink since the evening before.

A pretty wood stretched beyond the brook, tempting Miss Kitty Cat to explore it. At that hour of the morning there were many birds twittering among the trees. And spry chipmunks were frisking about in search of their breakfast. Miss Kitty Cat just naturally began to think of her own breakfast.

"If I were at home, Mrs. Green would be setting a saucer of milk on the woodshed steps about this time," she murmured. "But now I must shift for myself."

Luckily Miss Kitty was quite able to find something to eat, as a surprised meadow mouse soon discovered.

After breakfasting, Miss Kitty lingered a while to tease the birds, who scolded her shrilly, calling her a tramp and telling her to get out of their woods.

Of course Miss Kitty had to stay there for a time after that, to let the birds know that they couldn't frighten her away. She scared them almost out of their wits by threatening to climb up where their nests were. But she didn't do more than sharpen her claws against a tree-trunk. That alone was enough to throw them into a panic.

At last, after she had bothered the birds quite enough, Miss Kitty Cat set off for Pleasant Valley once more. Sometimes she travelled through fields; sometimes she jogged along the roads; sometimes she jumped to the top of a stone wall and used that for a highway. And always when she heard the creak and rattle of a wagon, as the sun rose higher and higher, she crept into the bushes and hid until she had the road to herself again.

If Miss Kitty hadn't been homesick she would have thought her adventure a great lark. But somehow she couldn't get Mrs. Green's house out of her mind. Especially the thought of the kitchen, with its delicious odors of seven-layer cakes baking in the oven, and doughnuts frying on top of the range, made Miss Kitty's nose twitch. And her own particular warm spot under the range, where she basked away long hours! When she recalled that it was no wonder that her pace quickened.

Perhaps Miss Kitty Cat herself couldn't have told exactly how she knew the way back to Farmer Green's place. No doubt she wouldn't have told, had she known; for she was one of the kind that keep such things to themselves. She never even explained to old dog Spot, afterward, where she spent the three nights that she was away from the farm.

Anyhow, Miss Kitty Cat kept plodding along. And one afternoon when she came out of a patch of woods on a hill-top, she saw something looming right ahead of her that looked familiar.

It was Blue Mountain. And she knew that on the other side of it lay Pleasant Valley—and her home at Farmer Green's.

XXI

IN THE PANTRY

OF COURSE everybody knows that while the cat's away the mice will play. So what happened during Miss Kitty Cat's absence from the farmhouse was really no more than any one might have expected. There were gay banquets in Mrs. Green's pantry at midnight. And among those present there was no one that had a better time than fat Mr. Moses Mouse. He was always the life of the party. He made jokes about Miss Snooper—as he called Miss Kitty Cat. And nobody laughed at them harder than he.

With every night that passed, Moses Mouse grew still merrier. Some of his companions even claimed that they could scarcely eat, he made them giggle so violently.

On the fourth night of Miss Kitty's absence, and at the fourth banquet, Mr. Mouse balanced a bit of cheese on the end of his nose, exclaiming at the same time, "What a pity it is that Miss Snooper isn't here! How I'd like to offer her this delicious tidbit!"

To his great surprise, none of his friends laughed.

"Look out, Moses!" Mrs. Mouse cried the next moment.

"Don't worry, my dear!" said he. "I shan't lose this nice piece of cheese. If I drop it I can find it again. But I'm not going to drop it. I've practiced this trick a good many times.... It's too bad Miss Snooper isn't here to see it."



Miss Kitty Cat Sees Moses Mouse Balance a Bit of Cheese
on His Nose.

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Still nobody even snickered—though Moses himself would have had he not been afraid of joggling the cheese off the end of his nose. He thought the silence very strange. And removing his eyes from the cheese, which he had been watching closely (though it made him look cross-eyed), he took a quick glance about him. Everybody had vanished.

"Ha!" said Moses Mouse to himself. "They're playing a trick on me. They're hiding." And he promptly lost his temper. Much as he loved to cut capers and

play tricks on others, Moses never liked to have any one get a laugh on him. And now he gave a sort of snort, because he was angry.

Thereupon the bit of cheese fell off Moses's nose and rolled behind him on the pantry floor. He turned to get it, only to find himself face to face with Miss Snooper herself; for Miss Kitty Cat was home again.

Before Moses Mouse could jump she clapped a paw down on him. And there he was—a prisoner!

"Well, well!" cried Miss Kitty Cat. "Aren't you glad to see me? You were just wishing I was here."

Moses Mouse didn't act glad—not the least bit! He struggled his hardest to get away. But Miss Kitty hadn't the slightest trouble holding him, with only one paw, too.

"Now that I'm here," she said to him, "don't you want to balance that scrap of cheese on your nose once more, and offer it to me?"

Since Miss Kitty caught him, Moses Mouse hadn't said anything that she could understand. He had made only a few squeaks of fright. Now, however, he managed to gasp, "Yes! Just let me go a moment! I can't pick up the cheese while you're crushing me against the pantry floor."

XXII

THE FLOUR BARREL

MISS KITTY CAT took her paw off Moses Mouse, after giving him a sharp nip to warn him not to try to run away.

"Ouch!" Moses squeaked. And then, when he felt himself free, he picked up the bit of cheese that he had dropped upon the pantry floor. But he was shaking with fear.

He shook so hard that he couldn't balance the cheese on the end of his nose. It tumbled off at once and he turned quickly to get it. Miss Kitty Cat turned with him. And while she was turning, Moses Mouse turned back again and jumped behind a flour barrel.

She sprang after him. But the barrel stood so near the wall that there was only a small space behind it. It was wide enough for Moses Mouse to slip through; but it was entirely too narrow for Miss Kitty Cat. And Moses Mouse waited just beyond reach of her paw.

She ran around the barrel, only to find that Moses had crawled back through the opening and was watching her with his beady little eyes.

Miss Kitty Cat was almost frantic. She hurried around the barrel again, and saw that Moses Mouse had repeated his trick. He needed only to move the length of his tail, while she had to whisk all the way around the fat flour barrel.

"This will never do," Miss Kitty thought, as she peered through the crack at Moses Mouse, while she paused to get her breath. And as she stared at him, an idea popped into her head. It seemed such a good idea that Miss Kitty Cat decided to act upon it at once.

So she wheeled and started off again, as if to run around the barrel once more. But when she had whisked half way around it she turned and hurried back again.

She had expected to surprise Mr. Moses Mouse on the wrong side of the crack. And to her astonishment, he wasn't there. He wasn't anywhere in sight.

"Goodness me!" Miss Kitty Cat wailed. "There must have been something wrong with my idea."

There wasn't. It had merely happened that Moses Mouse had had an idea of his own.

"I don't want to stay dodging here the rest of the night," he had said to himself. "The next time Miss Snooper makes a trip around the barrel I'm going to run up the side of it and trust to luck."

That was exactly what he did. Once on top of the barrel, Moses Mouse leaped to a shelf. He crept along the shelf until he came to the pantry window. Now, Mrs. Green had left the window slightly open. And Moses Mouse darted out of doors and half jumped, half tumbled, to the ground. He knew how he could get to his nest quickly enough, through a certain chink in the cellar wall.

Miss Kitty Cat soon decided that she had lost Moses Mouse again.

"Dear me!" she sighed. "What wretched luck I'm having to-night! I declare, it's a sad home-coming for me."

Meanwhile Mr. Moses Mouse was having a most merry time. Mrs. Mouse made a great fuss over him. And that was exactly what he liked.

XXIII

A SECRET

MISS KITTY CAT was behaving in the strangest manner. She came into the kitchen and hovered about the feet of Farmer Green's wife, mewling and looking up at Mrs. Green as if she had something special to tell her.

"What is it, Kitty?" Mrs. Green asked her. "Are you hungry?"

But Miss Kitty Cat soon showed that she wasn't hungry, for she wouldn't touch anything that Mrs. Green offered her.

"Well, you'll have to run away, anyhow," Mrs. Green told her. "I can't take a step with you right under my feet."

Though Miss Kitty Cat trotted towards the door, she soon made it plain that she didn't intend to leave the kitchen unless her mistress went with her. She came back and twitched Mrs. Green's apron gently with her claws. Then she ran to the doorway again and called to Mrs. Green.

It seemed to Miss Kitty Cat that she couldn't have said more clearly that she wanted to lead Mrs. Green somewhere. But still Mrs. Green didn't quite understand.

"Scat!" she cried, just a bit impatiently. "I've too much to do to be bothered this morning. I suppose you've caught a mouse and want to show it to me. You'll have to bring it here, for I haven't any time to waste to-day."

Miss Kitty Cat felt somewhat hurt. She went out and sat on the doorstep and looked in at Farmer Green's wife. Now and then she gave a plaintive mew. But Mrs. Green wouldn't pay any attention to her.

"Dear me!" said Miss Kitty. "Mrs. Green is busier than ever this morning."

Old dog Spot had been watching Miss Kitty's actions. And now, as she started towards the barn, he sidled up to her, wagging his tail to show her that he wanted to have a few friendly words with her.

"If Mrs. Green won't come with you, I'll be glad to," he offered. "Just lead the way and I'll follow."

"You?" Miss Kitty Cat exclaimed with scorn. "You needn't think I'd take you where I want Mrs. Green to come. You needn't think I'd show you what I want her to see."

"Ho!" cried old Spot. "I don't know how you're going to stop me from following you."

"I do," said Miss Kitty firmly. "If you try to tag along after me where I'm going I'll soon make you wish you had minded your own affairs."

There was a look in her eyes that old Spot did not like. It reminded him of the time when he cornered Miss Kitty in the barn, soon after she arrived at the farm. He remembered that his nose still bore the marks of her sharp claws.

"Well, well!" he said. "I was only joking. I'm too busy to bother with you, anyhow. I have a little matter to attend to in the pasture. There's a Woodchuck up there that's getting too bold."

Then he trotted off, trying to look as important as possible, so that no one would think he was afraid of Miss Kitty Cat.

"Good!" Miss Kitty cried, as she watched him while he started up the lane.

"I'm glad he's out of the way. It would be awkward if I had to fight him while I'm doing what I'm going to do."

XXIV

FIVE IN A BASKET

"WELL, if you're not bothering me again!" Farmer Green's wife exclaimed.

Miss Kitty Cat had come up behind her and brushed against her, asking at the same time with her most polite mew if Mrs. Green wouldn't please turn around.

Mrs. Green looked over her shoulder.

"I declare!" she cried. "So that's what you've been fussing about, is it?"

Miss Kitty Cat gently laid something on the floor at her mistress' feet. And she acted much pleased when Mrs. Green bent over and picked up a tiny, soft, pudgy—kitten.

"What do you think of that?" Miss Kitty Cat asked Mrs. Green. At least, that was what Mrs. Green understood her to say.

Anyhow, Miss Kitty appeared delighted with what Mrs. Green told her. And feeling that her youngster was in safe hands, Miss Kitty Cat ran out of the kitchen and disappeared.

In a little while she returned, carrying another kitten in her mouth. Mrs. Green admired this one as much as the first. And again Miss Kitty vanished.

She returned with a third kitten; she returned with a fourth one.

"Well, well!" Farmer Green's wife said to her. "We have enough now—don't you think so?"

Mrs. Green soon learned that Miss Kitty Cat was not quite of the same mind. She made one more trip across the yard to the barn. And at last, with an air of great pride she set down a fifth kitten upon the kitchen floor.

"That's all, Mrs. Green," Miss Kitty said. "They're so beautiful it's a shame there aren't twice as many."

But Mrs. Green was out in the woodshed and didn't hear her. She came in soon with a basket.

"This is what old Spot used to sleep in when he was a puppy," Mrs. Green told Miss Kitty Cat. "I suppose you're willing to use it for your family."

Miss Kitty made no objection when Mrs. Green carefully laid the five kittens side by side on an old shawl which she spread in the bottom of the basket. Then Mrs. Green picked up the precious burden and with Miss Kitty following closely, set it down in a corner of the woodshed.

"There!" said Mrs. Green. "Now they're snug and warm. And I'll set your milk right beside the basket, so you won't have to leave your family when you drink it."



Miss Kitty Cat Guards Her Kittens.

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It was not long before old dog Spot poked his long nose through the woodshed doorway and spied Miss Kitty Cat close beside the basket, lapping her milk. He gave a short bark when he saw her. And to his astonishment both Miss Kitty Cat and Farmer Green's wife came running at him.

Mrs. Green had a broom in her hand and Miss Kitty Cat had her claws in her paws. They both ordered him to keep away from the woodshed. And Spot sneaked off to the barn and hid in the stall beside the old horse Ebenezer.

"What's troubling you?" Ebenezer inquired in his slow way.

"It's that ill-natured Miss Kitty Cat," Spot exclaimed. "She has a big family of kittens. And she's terribly touchy about anybody's coming near them. Although she's keeping them in my basket, she hasn't even invited me to have a look at them.... I only hope," he added, "they won't grow up to be like their mother."

Old Ebenezer looked down at him with mild surprise.

"What's the matter with Miss Kitty?" he asked.

"She can't take a joke," said Spot. "If you chase her, she always claws you if she can."

Now, that was one of the first things Miss Kitty taught her children. She claimed that claws were made to be used—especially on old dog Spot.

But when a kitten tried its claws on one of its mates Miss Kitty always cuffed it smartly. She claimed, then, that claws were *not* made to be used—especially on one's own family.

And in time the kittens learned their lessons perfectly.

THE END

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A vain fellow was Turkey Proudfoot. He loved to strut about the farmyard and spread his tail, which he claimed was the most elegant one in the neighborhood.

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Pony Twinkleheels trotted so fast you could scarcely tell one foot from another. Everybody had to step lively to get out of his way.

THE TALE OF OLD DOG SPOT

Old dog Spot had a keen nose. He was always ready to chase the wild folk. And he always looked foolish when they got away from him.

THE TALE OF GRUNTY PIG

Grunty pig was a great trial to his mother. He found it hard not to put his feet right in the feeding trough at meal time.

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Solomon Owl looked so solemn that many people thought he knew everything.

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Jasper Jay was very mischievous. But many of his neighbors liked him.

THE TALE OF RUSTY WREN

Rusty Wren fought bravely to keep all strangers out of his house.

THE TALE OF DADDY LONG-LEGS

Daddy Long-Legs could point in all directions at once—with his different legs.

THE TALE OF KIDDIE KATYDID

He was a musical person and chanted all night during the autumn.

THE TALE OF BETSY BUTTERFLY

Betsy spent most of her time among the flowers.

THE TALE OF BUSTER BUMBLEBEE

Buster was clumsy and blundering, but was known far and wide.

THE TALE OF FREDDIE FIREFLY

Freddie had great sport dancing in the meadow and flashing his light.

THE TALE OF BOBBY BOBOLINK

Bobby had a wonderful voice and loved to sing.

THE TALE OF CHIRPY CRICKET

Chirpy loved to stroll about after dark and "chirp."

THE TALE OF MRS. LADYBUG

Mrs. Ladybug loved to find out what her neighbors were doing and to give them advice.

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Obvious spelling/typographical and punctuation errors have been corrected after careful comparison with other occurrences within the text and consultation of external sources.

Transcriber's notes in text—detailing corrections—are indicated by faint dotted underlining. Scroll the mouse over the word and the note will appear.

Page 22: "They why" changed to "Then why".

Page 71: "horrid" replaces "horried".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TALE OF MISS KITTY CAT ***

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