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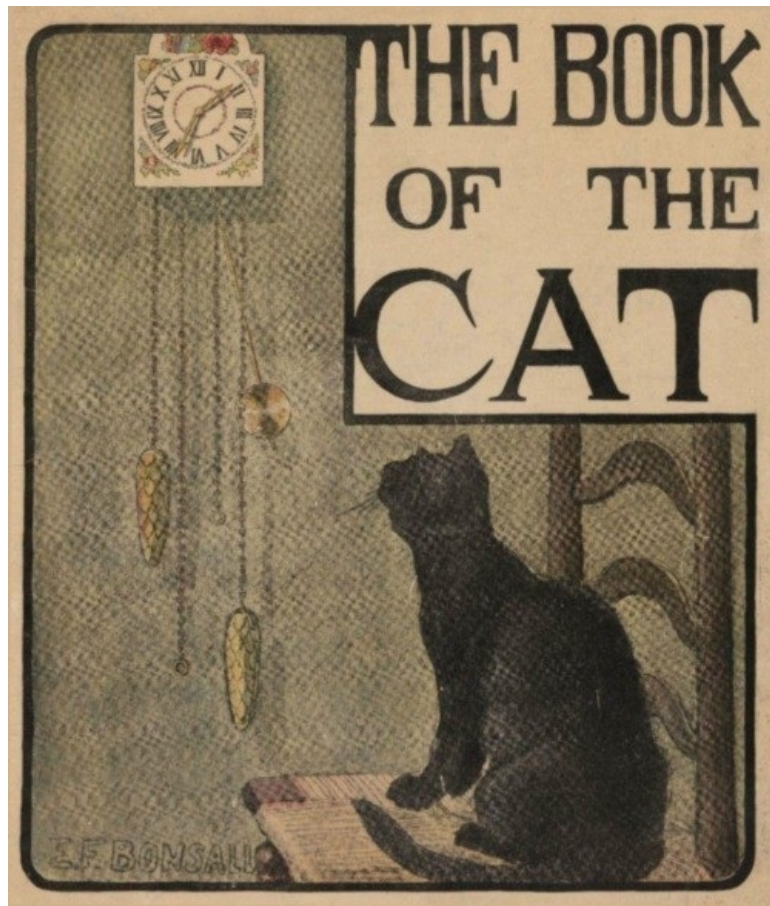
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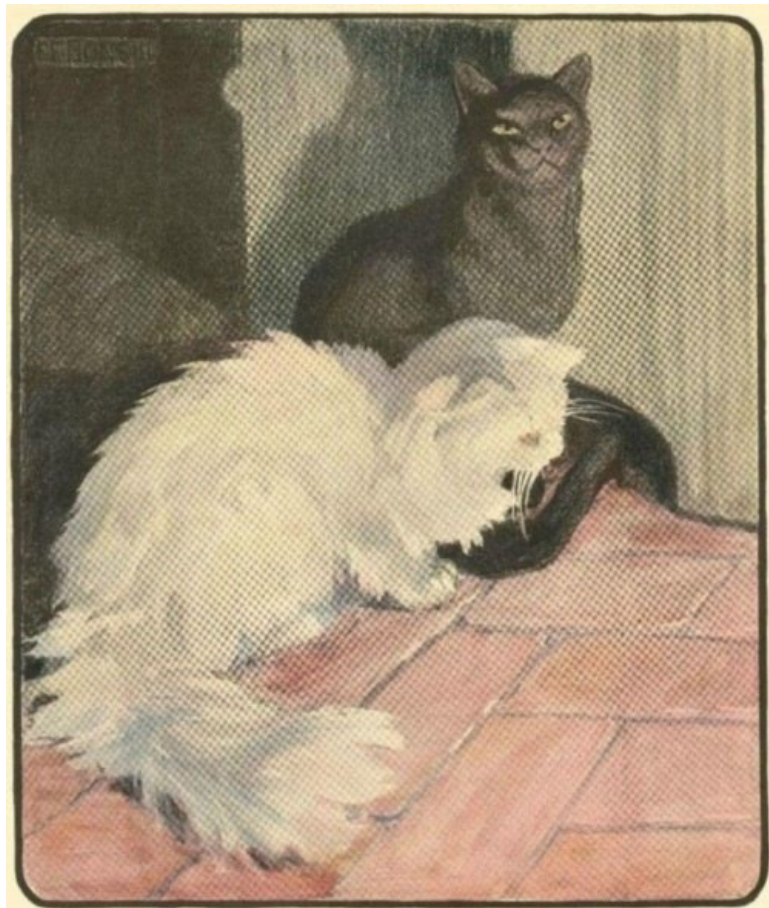
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOOK OF THE CAT ***

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The Book of the Cat



The Book of The Cat

WITH FACSIMILES OF
DRAWINGS IN COLOUR BY

Elisabeth F. Bonsall

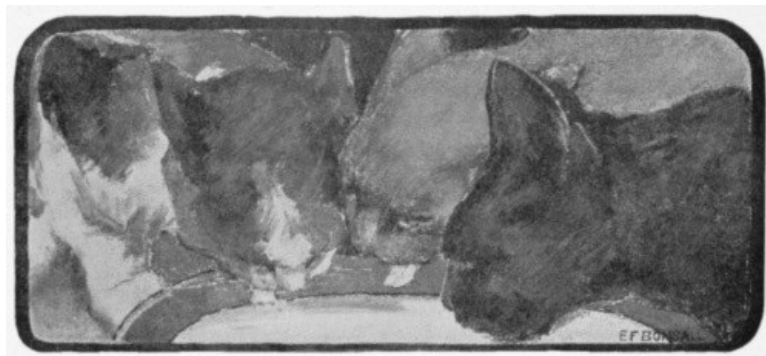
AND WITH STORIES AND VERSES
WRITTEN FOR THE PICTURES BY

Mabel Humphrey

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Snowball and Ebony.

Down at my feet on the red tiles in front of a roaring great fire sit a great black cat and a soft white Angora pussy. They are named Ebony and Snowball and are as different in nature as they are in colour, but are devoted friends for all that. Possibly because of it! for where Snowball is timid, Ebony will bravely lead the way; while if Ebony is cross, Snowball will purr and coax and cuddle until he gradually grows peaceful and pleasant again.

From the time he was a tiny kitten Ebony had known no home, and such food as he had was picked up when and wherever he chanced to find it. He had won many and lost few of his many cat battles, but he did not like to fight and never did it unless obliged to.

Snowball had never struck or received a blow in all of her carefully guarded life. She was a finely bred Angora that had taken many prizes at the cat shows, while her meals—far from being irregularly picked up—had always been brought to her on a silver tray as regularly as the sun

rose—and considerably oftener!

One bright cold November afternoon Snowball was wandering restlessly around looking for something—anything—some excitement! As she passed the Dresden saucer filled with rich cream she sniffed, and when she caught sight of her silk-cushioned basket she fairly switched her tail. Even the favourite spot on the warm hearth failed to allure.

Outside the wind blew the few remaining leaves from the trees in tempting swirls to the pavement, but she could not play with them. She was shut indoors for fear she might be stolen or stray! Stray! She would run away as soon as she found the chance!

As she wandered into the broad hall some one opened the front door to pass through it, and Miss Pussy saw and seized her chance. Like a flash she darted down the steps and up the street, never stopping until she was well out of sight of the house. Then she paused and looked curiously around.

Close under the railing of a shabby area, not many blocks from Snowball's home, she spied three rough-coated, gaunt cats greedily drinking from a dish of sooty skim milk. The saucer was thick and cracked, and—worse yet!—had not been washed since it contained boiled onions, but to the pampered runaway it seemed far more desirable than the cream she had left untasted in her own Dresden china plate.

As she edged slowly toward them the three waifs paid no attention to her, beyond giving a warning growl or two, which Snowball—not understanding that she could be unwelcome—mistook for their usual way of speaking. With a friendly "P-r-r-r-rh!" of greeting she drew near, and lapped daintily at the strongly flavoured milk. Was it hunger, or the feeling of liberty and comradeship that made it taste so good and made her for one short instant perfectly happy?

Then a stinging blow on one ear, followed immediately by a sharp slap on the side of her head from the big grey cat, sent her reeling dizzily away from the dish. She recovered herself and turned in abject terror, her one thought to escape from this uncalled for abuse, but directly in her path stood the black-and-white cat with lashing tail and flaming eyes. Another turn, and she was again confronted by the grey, crouching angrily ready for another attack.

Snowball's heart seemed to stand still, and she shut her eyes and waited for the end, when with one bound the black cat stood between her and her enemies. He began battle instantly, and so vigourously that it was impossible to stand before the whirlwind of flying claws and snapping teeth that he seemed to have become. Soon his opponents retired with inglorious haste, and he was victor—Snowball was saved!

In the silence that followed Snowball cautiously opened an eye and peeped around. Peace! And her deliverer again lapping at the puddle of blue milk that was spreading from the overturned saucer across the broken flagstones. He saw the timid glance and moved a little to one side with a gesture of friendly invitation.

Gratefully she crept to his side; the black and white noses bobbed busily up and down together as the pink tongues darted in and out, and the milk rapidly disappeared.

That afternoon Snowball brought Ebony home with her and seemed so fond of him that I could do no less than ask him to stay, and for the first time they sat in their now usual resting place—down at my feet on the warm red tiles.

How do I know about the rescue? Ah, that's quite a story, too; not to-day, Dear.



"Scat!"

Said a greedy old tramp of a cat:
"I declare, I heard someone say 'scat!'
Of course I might run;
But t'would spoil all this fun,
And I don't see much reason in that."

"Kittens will be Kittens."

The kittens were playing a sort of "follow-the-leader" in and out of their comfortable box of straw, while Mrs. Tabby Cat sat patiently by, only occasionally glancing at them to make sure that all

three were safe.

Things were very comfortably arranged for the little family of pussies out in the barn, and the only possible danger to the cat babies was the St. Bernard dog's drinking dish which was set down into the barn floor, very near the wall, and kept filled with water. One of the grooms had arranged it one idle afternoon, more for his own amusement than for any real need so to place it.

"Mr-r-r-owh!" trilled Mother cat warningly as Frisker wobbled over toward her greatest dread, that dreadful water! "Do stay near me, kittens; then you won't tumble in and get drowned."

"Miew!" answered the three kittens, in three different keys. "Don't worry about us: we're all right!"

Folly, the white-nosed kitty, rose gaily on her tottery hind-legs for an instant and cuffed playfully at her mother's ear, then started across the barn floor as fast as a fat three-weeks-old kitten can tumble, followed at once by Frisker.

Calico saw them go and, anticipating a frolic, at once made up her mind to be in it. She lifted her heavy little head and started eagerly toward her stronger sisters; but the progress was slow, for Calico was feeble, and the weak little legs would slide apart, while her tail waved wildly from side to side in the effort to keep her balance.

She was a strong-minded small pussy, though weak in body, and she kept steadily on. As she drew near her goal she felt very strong and proud! One or two surprising sit-downs and a very hard bump on the pink nose in no way dampened her enthusiasm; but alas! the fall that always follows pride dampened both enthusiasm and her whole wee self for a time.

Just as she was becoming quite reckless, almost prancing, with feet stepping at least half an inch from the floor, there suddenly yawned directly in front of the astounded kitten the six-inch chasm of the drinking dish! She toppled; her tail gave a single wild twirl; and she splashed heels over head into two inches of water!

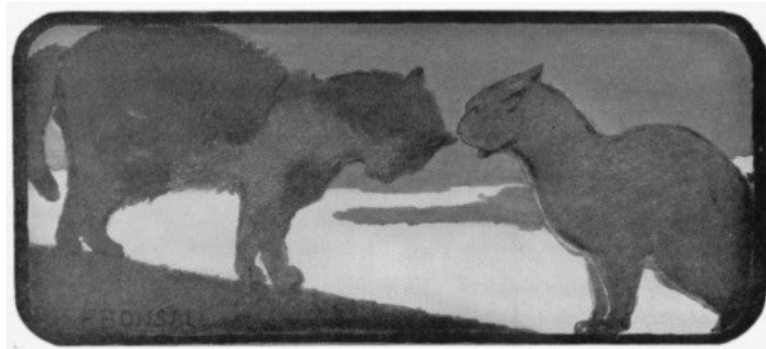
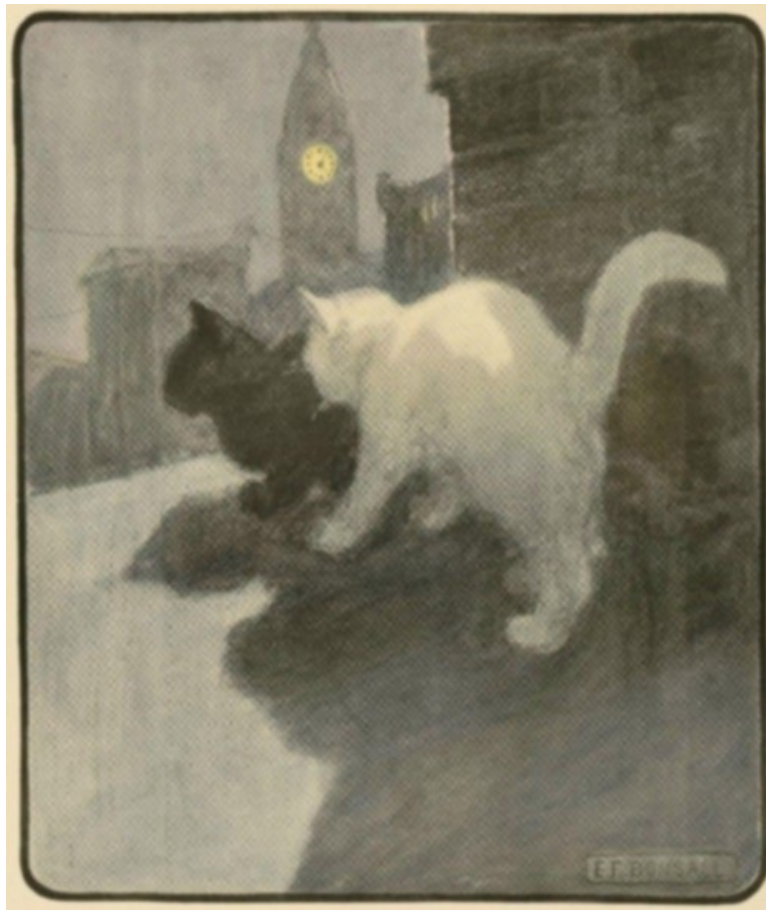
Mrs. Tabby, who had been anxiously watching the unsteady promenade sprang to the basin at once and leaning down tried to pull Calico out by the nape of the neck. To the frightened and shivering kitten—that had upon touching bottom at once gained its feet—this would have been quite as unpleasant as the cold water that was now chilling her through and through, so she protested in shrill wails.

Though she was too heavy for the little mother to lift, still Mrs. Tabby would not give up, and tried to claw her kitten out with sudden dabs, as she took the fish from the brook. This was more than any kitten could stand, and Calico rebelled openly; she spat at her worried mamma! (Of course, she did not know any better, for she was only a kitty.) The water might be cold; but at least it did not hurt, while her nose and ears smarted sharply from her mother's well-meant scratches. Then Mother Cat grew desperate and lost her head completely, circling round and round her baby, now coaxing Calico to jump out—"As if I wouldn't if I could!" thought the kitten—now crying piteously. After what seemed to Tabby an age, but was really less than five minutes, the groom, who had really been the innocent cause of all this trouble, sauntered in and put an end to it by lifting Calico tenderly out. Gently he dried the little trembling thing, and sat her down in her comfortable box once more, where Mrs. Cat at once cuddled down close beside her. Suddenly spying her sisters again, she made a fresh start only to be stopped by a well-directed slap from her mother's swift paw. "M'you, M'you!" snapped Mrs. Cat. "You just sit still for a while. I've had worry enough for one day, and I will not help you out again."

"I don't want you to," sniffed Calico, rubbing her still smarting nose thoughtfully.

Tabby sighed, as the kitten made yet another start for her sisters, but wisely let her go.

"Did you ever?" she groaned; "but then, kittens will be kittens!"



A Feline Fantasy.

"Oh, Maria?"

"Tom?"

"Ria!"

"Tom!"

"R-r-ria!"

The two voices grew fervent, rose higher—
Till their serenades sweet
Interruption did meet
From a bootjack that took a quick flyer.

A Night On.

"I've a very great longing for a sweet juicy robin; what do you say to catching one or two, you old moon-gazer?"

Whitey gave Mr. Twinkletoes Black a playful chuck under the chin, skipped gleefully across the moonlit roof and back, and sat down sociably by him, before that leisurely pussy turned his head to look scornfully at the youthful—I almost said "speaker," but as all of their conversation is in cat language perhaps "mewer" would be more exact.

"You foolish kitten! Who ever caught a robin in December?"

"My dear boy!"—Twinkletoes' tone made Whitey think he was anything but a dear boy—"When you've lived three years as I have (Whitey was just ten months old) you'll know December when you—er—feel it! It's apt to be cool, and snow—Ugh! Horrid stuff, it is; white—sticks to your feet you know; wet!" The fussy Mr. Black shook a dainty paw at the very thought, while Whitey listened eagerly, so that the next time he would know how December felt.

"There's one nice thing about it," added Twinkletoes: "the nights are long, and one has time to sing—and sing! One could—"

"Why can't one, Twinky?" asked Whitey hopefully.

"Oh, we might try, but—er—well, bootjacks, you know, hair-brushes, old shoes!—but it's very good exercise, this dodging."

"You said singing," corrected Whitey, rather puzzled. He didn't "know," but never having sung on roofs it was new and sounded thrilling. "Come on," he urged; "let's!" They started in, and their voices rose into awful sleep-destroying discords: "R-r-r-i-ah—M-m-r-r-riee—Mer-r-r-row!" Louder and more banshee-like grew the noise till the expected missiles began to arrive.

Twinkletoes Black was an expert dodger and skipped gracefully from place to place, avoiding the brushes and bottles that dropped from the windows of the tall apartment house next door.

Whitey had retired, silent, after the first old slipper landed heavily on his tail; but he was admiring Mr. Black's prowess with his whole heart. Nevertheless he was glad when the excitement was over with the "song," and they settled down by the chimney once more. The crisp air made him hungry, and again his thoughts turned birdward.

"Let's get some sparrows then," he said, as if there had been no interruption since birds were spoken of. "The early bird, you know, and it will be 'early' if we sit up much later. I never saw an early bird myself, but I suppose there are such things. I prefer a morning nap after these nights on. Haven't much use for early birds, usually." (To hear Whitey talk one would have thought he spent every night singing to the moon—this was his first!)

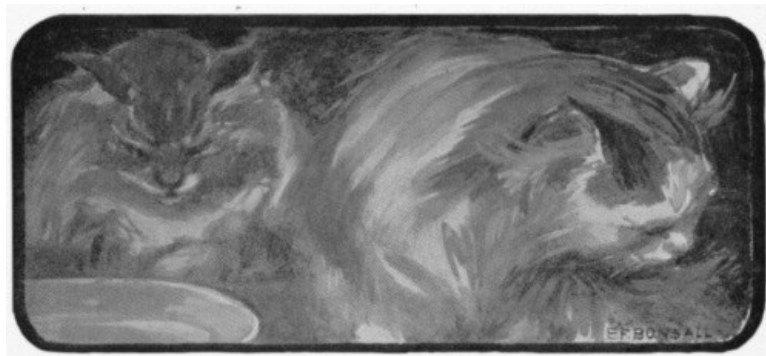
"Not a bad idea, for a youngster," said Twinkletoes pleasantly.

The two edged a little nearer the warm bricks and waited, purring a bumble-y duet to pass the time. "Just look at that moon!" sighed Twinkletoes, still musically inclined. "Got whiskers or something, hasn't it?" asked Whitey staring curiously at the illuminated clock-face. Where he sat the moon was hidden by the chimney and invisible to him.

"And it's sitting down on the tower!"

Stretching his neck excitedly that he might better see what made it act so, he caught sight of the real moon and instantly subsided into the meekest pussy that ever roamed a roof. "I—I don't understand December moons very well," he apologized.

"So I see," Twinkletoes replied. "But how about your early birds? Hello! Your moon's whiskers say that it's after five o'clock, and that's not early for birds. Now that I think of it, I don't believe they get up till later—at least in December." Whitey was tired—this was the "last straw." "Early birds!" he snorted, "early fiddlesticks! after five o'clock—just shows how much a cat may believe!" And he started home. Mr. Twinkletoes followed lazily, observing calmly, "I think the early milkman will be good enough for me!"



Great Panjandrum.

The cats had just been punished for trying to catch the canary and were cross because of it.

On their way downstairs Topsy, without meaning to, brushed against Pan—properly named Great Panjandrum because of his superior manner—who promptly spat at her. As a return compliment, Topsy boxed his ears, then scuttled off to the living-room.

Pan stalked into the library and choosing, cat-like, the one spot he should have kept away from, curled up on a handsome book that was lying open on the table and forgot his troubles in sleep. For some time Topsy wandered aimlessly from room to room; then preferring Pan's society to no society at all—she did not feel kindly towards human beings since her late whipping—she leaped lightly on to the table and curled up near him. For fully half an hour she sat idly with half-closed eyes, while Pan slept on, a perfect picture of innocent slumber. Then his paws began to jerk excitedly; his mouth twitched, and the tip of his tail waved like a pennant in a stiff breeze. Topsy eyed him coldly.

"M'yow! m'yow-yow!" he gasped; his paws slipped from the book to the table; and he awoke with a start.

"Pretty faces you've been making!" snapped Topsy. "And such talk—"

Pan seemed surprised; then he remembered that Topsy had had the worst of the punishment and suddenly felt very forbearing. (He'd had a delightful "cat-nap," and we all know how refreshing those are!)

"I dreamed—" he began; then paused impassively for questions.

"Guess you did," sniffed Topsy. "You acted like it!"

Pan looked grieved but remembered—it was such a good nap he had!—that when cats have trouble they are apt to be "catty."

"Dreamed"—he went on calmly—"that I had that yellow squalling thing on the floor, and I was just going to put my paw on its soft feathers when I awoke." He licked his chops dreamily at the thought.

"My!" sympathized Topsy, at last interested.

"Come to think of it, Tops, I'm hungry! And er-er—well, you know Mistress doesn't always feed us heartily after—um—well—after, you know."

Topsy bobbed the end of her tail understandingly, and Pan grew confidential. "I know where's a dish of cream! It's down—"

The rest of the sentence was whispered so low that I really couldn't tell you what it was; but Topsy understood, and the two hurried away as noiselessly and gracefully,—yes, and as dignifiedly as only cats can hurry.

The desired cream they found on a high shelf in the shed. They were supposed never to enter this place, so Cook had thought it a safe spot in which to set the cream.

A strong jump was needed to reach the shelf; but after several attempts they managed it and lapped, lapped, lapped to their full content.

As they sat blissfully purring after this unusual treat they heard a plaintive "Mew" from the ground close by, and peering down saw a strange cat that had evidently entered through the open window, as they had done. He looked hungry and wistful, while they had just had a delicious meal and were correspondingly pleasant.

"Mrr-ow! Come on up; it's good!" called Pan.

Possibly hunger made the leap easier for this new-comer than for the well-fed cats; possibly he was more agile than they, for with one spring he landed by the saucer and dipping his head eagerly lapped long and fast before he once raised his eyes. When he finished the pink tongue was run out over his lips and whiskers, so that no delicious drop should escape, and he heaved a satisfied sigh.

"Do you—ah—always have such dinners as this?" asked he.

Pan turned his head away and pretended to be interested in a black ant that was crawling rapidly up the wall below him; he was a truthful pussy and preferred to change the subject. The stranger was comfortable and sat lazily waiting for the answer.

At that moment Cook went for the cream and seeing the cats started angrily forward, shoo-ing and scat-ing with great vigour.

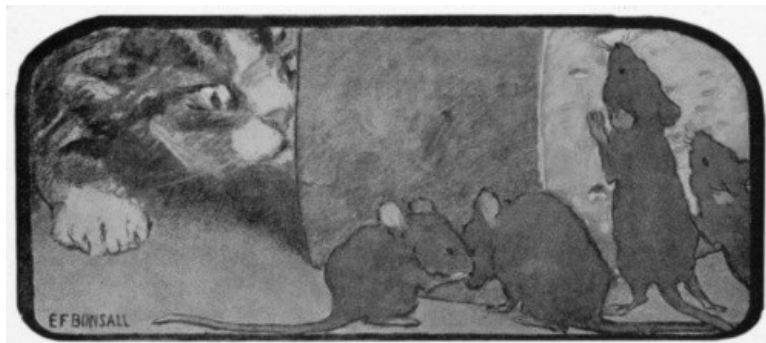
When after a wild exit the cats at last seated themselves up on a high fence they paused a moment to get their breath again. Then the stranger smiled—he actually grinned!

"I should judge you don't always have such a dinner as that!" He spoke pleasantly, but Pan looked sheepish.

"By Whiskers!" he muttered, his mind's eye still seeing Cook's vulgar, flapping apron strings; "I should think not!"

"Thanks, just the same—more," said the visitor jumping down.

"Don't mention it," politely answered the host and hostess. "Come again!"



An Autumn Frolic.

One grey as dawn, one white as milk!
With dainty paws, and eyes of flame,
And thick coats soft as richest silk!

They fly like wind, these pussies gay;
Wheel madly round in dizzy game,
Then sudden stop in whirling play.

Up! Off! They follow breathlessly,
With fawn-like grace, the glowing leaves
That dance in farewell whirls of glee.

The wind dies low; in dark'ning west
The day's orb sets 'neath purpling clouds.
At last the two cats pause, and rest.

Tabitha Tiger Reflects.

(Tabitha Tiger.) Bless my claws and whiskers! but this suspense is awful. Here I have been waiting for the last two hours behind this horrid-smelling cheese, and no sign of a mouse yet. And it's just the time for them, too.

I wonder why housekeepers expect us cats to keep the house free from mice when they're away for the summer. No self-respecting cat can eat mice morning, noon and night; and one would have to do so in order to rid the house of them. Why, I should turn into a squeaking cheese-eater, myself!

Strange place for Cook to leave cheese, strikes me—the kitchen table; but it should make a fine hunting ground. If I'd only seen it before, I needn't have wasted so much time in front of that hole up in the attic—and I caught only three and a half mice during the whole week.

I suppose some boastful cats would call it four, but a first-class mouser like myself doesn't have to stretch a tale (Tail! Good pun, that—Ha! Ha!) to keep up her reputation, and that little Spring mouse really had no more meat on than half a full-grown one.

Spring mice certainly are delicious if people only realized it—much sweeter and juicier than Spring Chickens, and tender! My Furry Ear-tips! It makes my mouth water to think of them! Their only drawback is their drawing back. The best of them will never come out far enough from the holes for

Gracious Cattails! What was that?

It is! There are his whiskers, now an eye—ear—Ah-h-h! Now he's coming! Yes, right over to this very table—I must keep still. Now down so: close behind the cheese. It's a good thing I'm not a big cat.

Well, I never! That was a close squeak—I got that tail under just in time! Pretty poor memory, I call it, to forget one's own tail. If that mouse had seen—

What! There's another, and half way over here. The first one must be close by the table leg, though I can't see him.

And still another just coming out of the hole! Claws and Whiskers! If my heart beats like this I'll never on this table be able to jump straight—never.

One more—four! Talk about your mouse hunting! Why my paws tremble so I shall have regular "mouse-ague" in a minute.

They're all making for the cheese; I can hear their claws scampering up the wood. One—two—three—where's the last? There's the fourth patter. I should get two, for they're close together and eating very intently.

Now for it!

Dear, dear! What a noise that front door does make. Master Harold's little voice, too—

Oh, my eyes and teeth! Why need they have come just now? Those mice heard it, too—they've stopped eating. Oh-h-h!

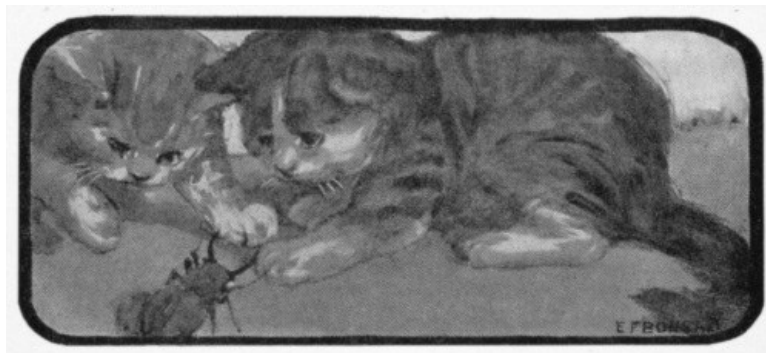
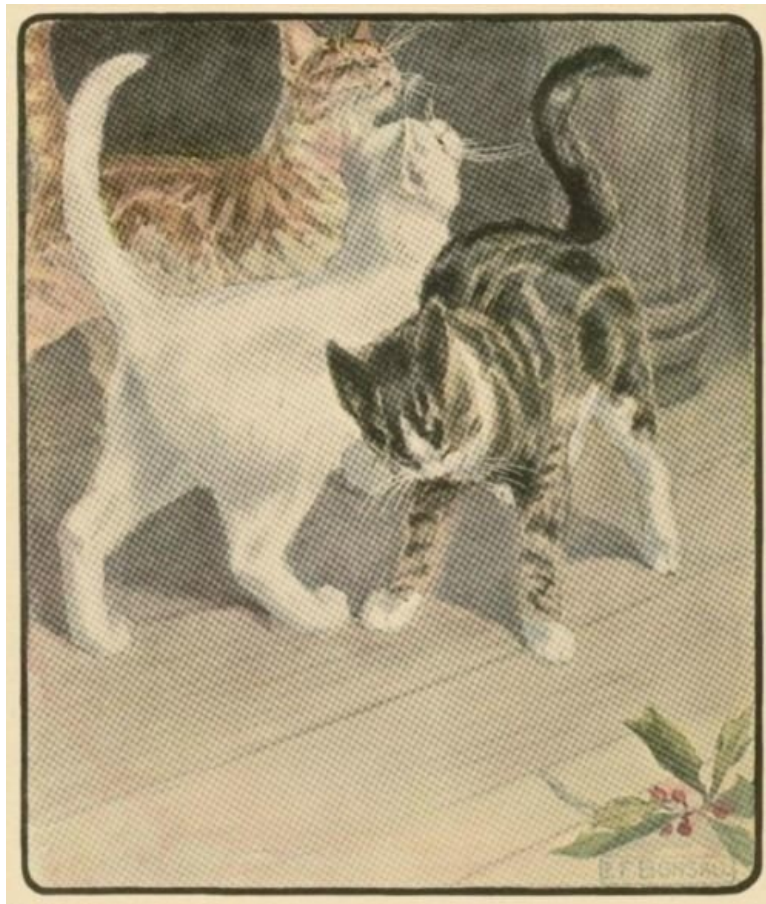
(Little boy bangs into kitchen and snatches Tabitha Tiger ecstatically from table. Mice scatter back to hole.)

(Tabitha Tiger) Mr-r-r—owh! Sf-f-ft! Sf-f-ft! (Scratch, scratch.)

(Little Boy) Boo-hoo-hoo! (Slap-slap. Boy runs away.)

(Tabitha Tiger) He spoiled the finest mouse-catch of the season, and I had to scratch him—a puss can't stand everything!

Gracious Cattails!



Dot's Beetles.

Since his fluffy kittenhood Dot has been afraid of beetles, grasshoppers, crickets and, in fact, any large insect. That is rather strange in a kitten, is it not? But he had one experience which I think excuses his timidity.

It was on a warm summer morning that he and his twin—no, let us say triplet—brother Dab (the three kittens were called Dot, Dab and Fluff, for they were too tiny to toddle around under heavier names, their mistress said) were lying sleepily in their favorite corner of the piazza. To make sure he was missing nothing that a kitten should not miss, Dot opened his drowsy eyes and looked around. Instantly the drowsy look vanished and was replaced by one of intense interest.

For lo! crawling toward their corner was a many-legged, shiny black thing with pinch-y, dangerous-looking horns! Dot did not altogether like its looks; but curiosity was strong, and, calling to Dab, he started for the intruder.

Keeping safely behind the more venturesome brother, Dab followed at a slow trot.

"See-e-e! It's alive!" mewed Dot excitedly. "Let's play with it."

"Mee-you try it first," squeaked Dab.

Dot cautiously extended a pink paw toward the beetle; it came steadily on, and the paw was hastily withdrawn. Meanwhile Dab, too, had lifted a paw to make a test of the small, awesome stranger, but thought better of it. How dare he venture when Dot would not?

As the kittens hesitated, a wasp that had been hovering near alighted on Dot's furry head and rested there for an instant. It would not have harmed him, had not the beetle become alarmed at a sudden spat from Dab, and blundered hurriedly away in another direction. This happened to be directly at Dot, for whose tottering courage the sudden charge was too much! He sprang to one side, in his turn startling the wasp which promptly stung him.

With a pained cry the little kitten dashed wildly from the verandah, and it was several days before he could be persuaded to go on it again—the beetle had been on the piazza!

As he had not seen or felt the wasp until it stung him, his kitten mind could only think that somehow the awful black thing had hurt him cruelly. No more piazzas with painful "black things" for him, thank you! Its name he heard afterward from his mistress.

Now the kittens are almost full-grown cats, and the ground is covered with snow. Dot dislikes the snowflakes, but he prefers them to beetles, and the beetles are gone! But even yet he does not quite forget his baby terror.

One evening shortly before Christmas Mistress Dorothy went in to where her pets sat basking in the warmth of the kitchen stove, carrying with her their usual supply of warm milk. The cats were on their feet at once, while the girl mischievously held the milk just beyond their reach. Mewing softly beneath their breath they were surely trying to say "please!" just as politely as they could.

Still the milk was withheld, and they grew restless; they shifted from one foot to another working their claws madly in and out; they purred sonorously and walked rapidly around one another. They rubbed sides so vigorously as almost to knock each other over but never forgot to keep an anxious eye toward the coveted supper.

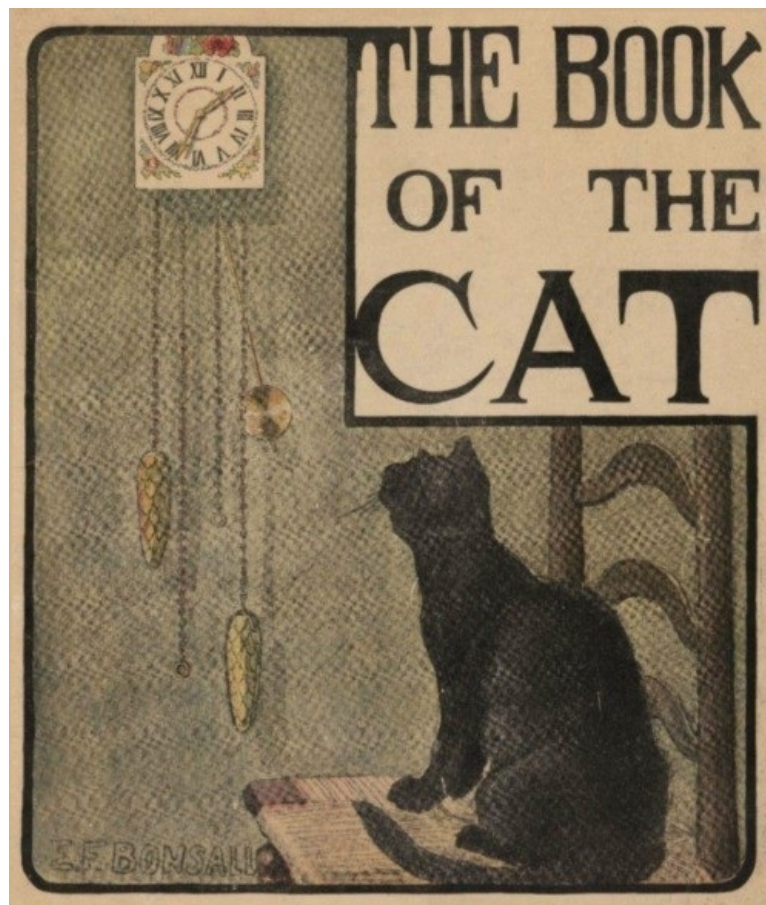
Dorothy at last relented—as they knew she would!—and, stopping to set the dish down, a sprig of holly dropped from her belt, just as Dot, turning, gave a particularly ecstatic hump to his back.

Suddenly his tail bushed out like a bolster, his eyes fairly bulged, and he jumped clean off the floor. In front of him was the holly which a quick puff of air through the open door had blown scratching unevenly over the floor directly at poor Dot.

"Sft-sft-ft-sft! Beetle!" spat the terrified pussy. He was far too scared to run—fairly stiff with fright, for this unknown thing might—it might—anything!

Laughing so heartily that she was almost helpless, Dorothy snatched up the offending branch and again placed it at her waist. Then Dot saw his mistake, and as his mistress seated herself he sprang upon her lap and commenced to play with the bright berries—very brave he was, since he understood!

Dorothy let him pretend he had been playing before; but she really knew that he hadn't been—just as well as you and I know.



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