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MOUSER CATS' STORY

By AMY PRENTICE



With Thirty-Five Illustrations and a Frontispiece in Colors

BY J. WATSON DAVIS



MOUSER CAT'S STORY.

On that day last week when it stormed so very hard, your Aunt Amy was feeling very lonely, because all of her men and women friends in the house were busy, and it was

not reasonable to suppose any of her bird or animal acquaintances would be out. As she sat by the window, watching the little streams of water as they ran down the glass, she said to herself that this was one of the days when she could not hope to be entertained by story-telling.



"You don't seem to care whether Mrs. Man makes the pickles properly, or not," a voice from the doorway said, and, looking around in surprise, your Aunt Amy saw Mrs. Mouser Cat, an animal with whom she was very well acquainted, but who had never before ventured to speak with her.

Considerably astonished, because it had not come into her mind that Mrs. Mouser might prove to be as entertaining as any of the other animals she had talked with, your Aunt Amy asked:

"What about the pickles, Mrs. Mouser?"

"Why, Mrs. Man is putting them up; didn't you know it?" the cat replied, and your Aunt Amy said with a sigh:

"Oh, yes indeed, Mrs. Mouser, I know that, and you also know it is not possible for me to do any work around the house, owing to my illness. That is why I am idle on this day when the storm makes it seem very, very lonely.

"You can sit out of doors all the afternoon with a foolish old duck, or talk by the hour with Mr. Turtle, who hasn't got sense enough to go in when it rains, and yet you never invited me for an afternoon's story-telling," and Mrs. Mouser arched her back as if she was angry.

"Do you know any stories?" your Aunt Amy asked, surprised again, and Mrs. Mouser replied quickly:

"It would be funny if I didn't. I've lived on this farm more than six years, and have known pretty much all that has happened around here in that time."

WHY CATS CATCH MICE.

"I wish you could think of a story to tell me now," your Aunt Amy said. "I am just in the mood for hearing one."

"It is the hardest thing in the world to stand up and begin telling a story without anything to start one going," Mrs. Mouser said thoughtfully, as she brushed her whiskers with her paw. "After you once get into it, of course, they come easy enough. How would it do if I should explain why it is that cats catch mice?"

"Was there ever a time when they didn't catch mice?" your Aunt Amy asked, surprised for the third time.



"Oh, yes indeed," Mrs. Mouser said in a matter-of-fact tone. "All cats used to be good friends with the mice, once upon a time, and it happened that because an old Mrs. Pussy, who lived in the city, didn't have anything in the house to eat, the cats took up

catching mice. You see it was in this way: A cat that had always lived in the country, made up her mind one day to go and see her cousin in the city, so she put on her bonnet and shawl, wrapped some fried fish in a paper, and started.

"When she got there her cousin saw the fish, and it made her ashamed because she hadn't anything in the house to offer the visitor, so she asked, turning up her nose considerably:

"Do you cats in the country eat fish?' and Mrs. Pussy replied:

"Why, yes, of course we do; don't you?"

"Certainly not; it is thought to be a sign of ill-breeding to eat such vulgar food,' and then remembering that she could not offer her cousin the least little thing, she said, never stopping to think very much about it. We eat mice here. They are delicious; you would be surprised to know what a delicate flavor they have."

That surprised the country cousin, and nothing would do but that she must go right out hunting for mice. Of course some one had to go with her, and then it was that the city cat found she hadn't made any such a very great mistake after all, for mice or rats, take them any way you please, cooked or raw, are very nice indeed.

THE KITTY WHICH THE SNOW BROUGHT.

"Do you think that is a true story?" your Aunt Amy asked, and Mrs. Mouser replied:

"I can't really say; but I think it is as true as that the snow brought a white cat to Dolly Man." Your Aunt Amy knew Miss Dolly's kitten very well; but she had never heard any such thing as Mrs. Mouser intimated, therefore, as a matter of course, she was curious regarding the affair, and asked that it be explained to her.

"I was in the house when this happened, so there is no mistake about the story part of it," Mrs. Mouser began. "It was snowing one day, and Dolly, standing by the window, said to her mother that she wished the snow-flakes would turn into a pretty, little, white kitten, so she could have something to play with. She hadn't hardly more than spoken, when they heard a cat calling from out of doors, and Dolly ran into the hallway, believing the snow-flakes had really turned into a pet for her. Now it is kind of odd, but true just the same, that when she opened the door there stood a white kitten, the same one we call Kitty Snow.

"She was the forlornest little stray kitten you could ever imagine, and as white then as she is now, from her nose to the tip of her tail, but so nearly frozen when Dolly took her in, that they had to wrap her in a blanket, and keep her near the fire two or three hours before she thawed out."

"I believe that you and Kitty Snow are not very good friends," your Aunt Amy said.



"Well, I can't say that we are," Mrs. Mouser replied thoughtfully. "That white cat has been petted so much that she really isn't of any very great service about the house. I don't believe she has caught a mouse in six months, and yet I heard her tell Mr. Towser Dog no longer ago than yesterday, that she was of more value around this farm than I. Just think of it! And it has been proven that I have a good deal more sense than Mr. Fox, cunning as he thinks he is."

WHEN MR. FOX WAS FOOLISH.

As a matter of course, your Aunt Amy asked her what she meant, and Mrs. Mouser sat down at one side of the fireplace, as if making ready for an afternoon of story-

telling.



"It was like this;" she said. "I was down in the meadow looking for field mice one day, and met Mr. Fox. You know some animals think that he and I are relations; but whether we are or not, we have always been good friends. So he sat down for a chat, and we talked of first this thing and then that, until finally I said, just to make myself agreeable:

"Do you know, Mr. Fox, I think you are very smart.'

"Well now, would you believe it, that puffed him way up with pride, and he said, grinning in a way that was enough to make any cat laugh:

"Indeed I am, Mrs. Mouser. There isn't an animal around here who can hold a candle to me for smartness.'

"What about the dogs?' I asked, thinking to joke him a little, and he turned up his nose as he said:

"I don't give a snap of my claws for all the dogs there are around this place! Even if four or five of them should come right up here this minute, it wouldn't bother me any. You may not think it; but Mr. Towser is actually afraid of me.

"Well now, do you know that made me laugh again, because in the first place I knew it wasn't true; but what was the use of saying anything of the kind to him? He was swelled way out with pride, so I changed the conversation, and began talking about mice, when suddenly there was a terrible commotion down the lane, and up came Mr. Towser, Miss Spaniel and four or five other dogs, barking and yelping.

"Oh me, oh my, how frightened I was! Up a tree I scurried as fast as my legs would carry me, and not until I was safe on the highest limb did I look around to see Mr. Fox, who didn't care the snap of his claws for dogs; but, bless you, he was going toward the meadow with his tail hanging straight out behind him, while the dogs were gaining on him at every jump. Mr. Towser told me afterward that they made Mr. Fox just about as sick as Mrs. Toad made the bugs."

"What was it Mrs. Toad did?" your Aunt Amy asked, and Mrs. Mouser replied with a grin:

"Perhaps you never heard that Mr. Crow is a great hand at making poetry?"



"I have indeed," your Aunt Amy replied, and it was only with difficulty she prevented herself from laughing aloud. "I have heard of his poetry from every bird and animal around this farm."



A WET-WEATHER PARTY.

"Then perhaps you don't care to hear any more?" Mrs. Mouser said inquiringly.

"Indeed I do," your Aunt Amy replied, "if it is anything new, and I surely have never heard of a wet-weather party."



Mrs. Mouser stroked her whiskers a moment, and then began to repeat the following:

A little Black Ant was journeying home
From a marketing visit to town,
When down came the ram, pitter-patter, so fast,
It threatened to spoil her best gown.

She wandered about till she quite lost her way,
Till at last a big Toadstool she found,
"Ah, here I can rest!" said the little Black Ant,
And she wearily sank to the ground.

And as she sat resting, a light she espied,
And a Glow-worm came twinkling by.
"Dear me!" exclaimed he, with a gasp and a sob,
"I don't think I'll ever be dry!"

"Come in, sir, come in," said the little Black Ant,
"Here is plenty of room, sir, for two.
Pray bring in your light, sir, and sit down by me,
Or else you'll be surely wet through."



The Glow-worm agreed, and soon brought in his light,
When a cricket appeared on the scene
With her fiddle and bow (she's a minstrel, you know)
--To a concert in town she had been.

"Come in, ma'am, come in!" said the little Black Ant,
"Here is shelter and light for us all!
And if you could play us a nice little tune,
We might fancy we were at a ball."



"Hear, hear!" said the voice of the Stag-Beetle bold,
Who just then was passing that way;
"And if there is dancing, I hope, dear Miss Ant,
That you will allow *me* to stay!"

"Come in, sir, come in!" said the little Black Ant,
"The more, sir, the merrier we!
And here, I declare, is my friend Mrs. Snail,
As busy as ever, I see!"

"Come in, Mrs. Snail," said the little Black Ant,
"Come join our small party to-night!
Here's the Beetle and Cricket all quite snug and dry,
And the Glow-worm to give us some light!"

So the Snail came and joined them, still knitting away,
And the Cricket her fiddle got out;
And then--well, you just should have seen how they

danced,
How they jumped and all capered about!



The Little Black Ant did a skirt-dance quite well;
The Beetle a gay Highland fling;
And as for the Glow-worm, he just jigged about,
And *danced* really nothing at all.

But all of a sudden a croaking was heard,
And who should appear but a Toad,
Who hoarsely demanded their business, and why
They were all gathered in her abode?

Then what a commotion! The little Black Ant
Went from one fainting fit to another;
The Snail simply shut herself up in her house,
And thought she'd escape all the bother!

The Beetle and Glow-worm soon took themselves off,
And the Cricket and Ant with them too,
And once more these poor creatures were out in the rain,
And didn't know what they should do.

But they presently came to the trunk of a tree,
And there they all stayed for the night;
But they never forgot that old, cross Mrs. Toad,
Who gave them so dreadful a fright!"

"Mrs. Toad certainly succeeded in raising quite a disturbance," your Aunt Amy said, feeling it necessary to make some comment, and Mrs. Mouser replied thoughtfully:

MR. THOMAS CAT'S NARROW ESCAPE.

"Yes, almost as much as Mr. Man did when he tried to drown Mr. Thomas Cat the other day. It seems that Mr. Thomas had been out in the stable stealing the food which was left for Mr. Towser, and one of the maids, seeing it, told Mr. Man, so then and there it was decided that Mr. Thomas must be drowned. Mr. Man called him up, as if he was the best friend he ever had, and when Mr. Thomas got near enough, he caught him by the tail, starting off at once for the stream.



"'What are you going to do with me?' Mr. Thomas cried, and Mr. Man said:

"'You wait and see. I'll teach you to steal Mr. Towser's food! You are no good, that's what's the trouble with you--you are no good!'

"So he took a rope out of his pocket and tied it around Mr. Thomas' neck, after they got near the water. Then bent down over the bank to get a big rock, when his foot slipped, and in he went splashing and howling until you might have heard him on the next farm, for he couldn't swim a stroke, and the water was deep where he went in.

"Of course Mr. Thomas wasn't able to do anything to help him, so off he started for the house the best he knew how, with the rope dragging on behind, and when he got

there, Mrs. Man couldn't help seeing him. Knowing what her husband had counted on doing she mistrusted that something was wrong, so down she ran to the stream, getting there just in time to pull Mr. Man out of the water before he drew his last breath.

"How did you know where I was?' Mr. Man asked after the water had run out of his mouth.

"Why the cat just the same as told me, when he came back with a rope around his neck.'

"Well, he was some good after all,' Mr. Man said.' I had begun to think all cats were useless, but it seems Mr. Crow was right in that poetry of his, after all.'

"Then Mr. Man went up to the house, and since then Mr. Thomas has been allowed to stay round the farm, just as he pleases."

MR. CROW'S FANCY.

"What did he mean by saying Mr. Crow was right?"

"Oh, that was on account of a piece of poetry he wrote about me. There isn't much of it, and perhaps you had just as soon I would repeat it."

Then, without waiting for permission, Mrs. Mouser recited the following:

Some people love the gay giraffe
Because his antics make them laugh
 (I've never found him witty),
Others prefer the cockatoo--
He does things I should hate to do;
 He's vulgar--more's the pity!

An ostrich draws admiring throngs
Whenever he sings his comic songs,
 And, really, it's no wonder!
The dormouse has been highly rated
(and justly) for his celebrated
 Mimicking of thunder.

I know some friends who'd journey miles
To see a bat's face wreathed in smiles,
 They say it's grandly funny!
To see a buzzard drink port wine
Another eager friend of mine
 Would pay no end of money.

But that which most appeals to me--
I know my taste may curious be--
 Is--not a mouse in mittens.
It is to see a homely cat,
Dressed up in an old battered hat,
A-walking with her kittens!



"One would think from the verses, that you and Mr. Crow were very good friends," your Aunt Amy suggested, and Mrs. Mouser said with a purr of content:

"We have always got along very well together, and I hope we always shall, for really, say what you please about that old bird, it wouldn't be pleasant to have him making sport of you in his verses. We are neither of us as much in love with ourselves as were the peacock and the crane, therefore I don't fancy we shall ever have any very serious trouble."

A QUESTION OF BEAUTY.

"What about the peacock and the crane?" your Aunt Amy asked, not disposed to let slip any opportunity of hearing a story.

"Oh, that's something very, very old--why, my grandmother used to tell about it. You know the crane thinks he has got a pretty tail, and I'm not saying anything against it, for it is handsome; but this crane my grandmother used to tell about, had the idea that he was the finest looking bird who ever came out of an egg. He went around making a good deal of such talk as that, and one day he met with a peacock for the first time. Strangely enough, he had never heard about such a bird, so he strutted back and forth as usual, and after they had talked a while of the weather, and all that sort of thing, Mr. Crane said:



"People tell me I am one of the handsomest birds that ever lived. There's nothing in this world that quite comes up to my tail feathers, and that much I can say without risk of being thought vain.'

"You have some very pretty feathers,' Mr. Peacock said, keeping his own tail folded up so it couldn't be seen very well. 'But do you really think they are more beautiful than can be found on any other bird?'

"I don't *think* so, I know it,' Mr. Crane said, spreading the long plumes of his tail out so they would show to the best advantage, and just then Mr. Peacock unfolded his tail to its full size.

"If you ever saw an astonished bird, it was Mr. Crane. He looked at the beautiful feathers spread out like a great, big fan, and then started to fly away.

"Where are you going?' Mr. Peacock asked.

"And Mr. Crane answered, while he was in the air:

"Off somewhere to hide until I have got sense enough to hold my tongue when I don't know what I'm talking about.'

"Since that time I have never heard any of the cranes doing very much bragging, and it is a pity that there are yet others around this place who ought to get just such a lesson, for many of the animals here need it sadly."

"You among the rest?" your Aunt Amy asked laughingly, and Mrs. Mouser Cat replied:

"Thank goodness, I am not proud, and perhaps it is because I haven't very much to take pride in. But I have lived long enough in this world to know that one of us is of just about as much importance as another, and the animal or the bird who thinks this world couldn't move very well without him, is making a big mistake. There is nobody whose place cannot be filled when it becomes necessary; there would even be somebody to run this farm as well as Mr. Man does, if he should die to-morrow."

MENAGERIE POETRY.

"What I have in mind is told, in a foolish kind of a way, I suppose, by Mr. Crow, who wrote the verses when Mr. Man's little girl Dolly wanted a pet, and no matter how much she thought of one, if it died, or got lost, the next that came along suited her almost as well.

"Of course I don't want you to suppose I think this is anything but nonsense; but at the same time it carries out the idea of what I have been trying to say," and then Mrs. Mouser repeated the following:

I once possessed an Elephant
Who fed on potted grouse;
One day I lost him, but I think
He's somewhere in the house.



I had a Hippopotamus
Who really was quite slim;
He caught a chill, and so I thought
I'd best get rid of him.

I also had a gay Giraffe,
Whose antics made me wince;
He went a walk to Brooklyn town,
I've never seen him since.



The Puffing Fish that I possessed
Would fill my heart with pride;
But ah! one day I made a joke--
He laughed so that he died.

You should have seen my Polar Bear,
He was a lively beast;
But what became of him at last
I've no idea, the least.



My Grizzly Bear was certainly
By all my friends admired.
He tried to climb the Monument,
And when he failed, expired.

Perhaps the dearest of them all
Was James, my Cockatoo--
He took to stopping out at nights;
I gave him to the Zoo



So now I haven't anything;
It's lonely, I must own.
I'll get a little calf, I think--
I cannot live alone!

"I don't wonder you call that 'Menagerie Poetry,'" your Aunt Amy said when Mrs. Mouser ceased speaking; "but I think I understood, even without the aid of the verses, the moral you intended to draw."

"I should hope you did; but I remembered those lines, and it seemed to me they came in just right. There is a story he tells about the Elephant and the Bee, which teaches the same kind of a lesson."

WHEN MR. ELEPHANT AND MR. BEE HAD A QUARREL.

"I certainly would like to hear it," your Aunt Amy said when Mrs. Mouser Cat ceased speaking, as if waiting for some such permission.

"Well, in the first place you must understand that there was once an Elephant and a Bee that were the very best of friends," Mrs. Mouser Cat said as she curled her tail around her fore paws to prevent them from being chilled by the draft. "One day the Elephant had walked a long distance, and thought he would sit down to rest for a little while. Now it seems the Bee had been flying around there, and he had got tired too, so he laid down on the grass and went to sleep.

"Now what do you think? When Mr. Elephant sat down he happened to hit Mr. Bee's hind foot, and then there was a time! Mr. Bee talked disgracefully, so it is said, to Mr. Elephant, and you would have thought they never had been friends; but Mr. Elephant didn't answer him back, because he was a peaceable kind of an animal, and knew that the least said is the soonest mended.

"When Mr. Bee got through scolding, they went on their journey again. I don't know where they were traveling, but that doesn't make any difference in the story. Off they started, and after a while it seemed as if Mr. Bee got to feeling better, and Mr. Elephant said:

"I'm glad to see that you've got over being cross, for it was all an accident, my hitting your foot."

"Oh yes," Mr. Bee answered, as if he intended to be friendly again. "We'll try to forget all about it. Have you seen anything of my collars and cuffs since we started?"

"Why, no," replied Mr. Elephant. "Have you lost them?"

"I haven't seen them since we left home, and I believe they must be in your trunk."

"I think not," Mr. Elephant said; "but you can go in and look for them, if you choose."

"Now Mr. Bee hadn't got over his cross fit a little bit, and he was only waiting for a chance to pay Mr. Elephant back. Well, he crawled into the trunk just as far as he could get, and then he gave poor Mr. Elephant the very hardest sting you ever dreamed about.



"Oh me, oh my!" Mr. Elephant howled. "What a wicked little thing you are! I'll fix you for that!" and then he hunched himself together, and gave the biggest kind of a big sneeze. Now if you never saw anything of the kind, you can't have an idea what a commotion it made when Mr. Elephant did that, and, bless your heart, that was the last of Mr. Bee. I don't know what became of him, and neither does anybody else. He must have been dashed to pieces in the terrible wind that was raised, and it served him good and right, too, for he deserved it just as much as ever Mr. Bear did when he

got so worn out by Mr. Man's boy Tommy."

WHEN TOMMY GOT THE BEST OF MR. BEAR.

"Is that another story?" your Aunt Amy asked, and Mrs. Mouser replied with a laugh:

"Yes, and it is a good one, too. Last year there was an old Mr. Bear living near this farm, who was the most quarrelsome animal you ever saw, and besides that, he was wicked. Do you know, he made up his mind that he would bite a big piece out of Mr. Man's boy's leg, just because Tommy drove him away when he was stealing honey. So one night he crept up to the well, and got into the bucket, letting himself way down to the bottom where he could float around until Tommy came out to get a pail of water.

"I'll have him sure,' Mr. Bear said to himself, 'for when he pulls up the bucket in the morning, I'll jump out and grab him, so he can't get away.'

"Well, Tommy went to the well at just about the same time as usual, and when he started to raise the bucket with the windlass, he found it was terribly heavy. He thought some one must have been putting rocks in it to play a joke on him, so he kept on turning the crank around until the bucket was nearly to the top, and then he saw what was the matter:



"My goodness!' he cried. 'There's Mr. Bear, and it's water I'm after, not bear!'

"Then Tommy Man let go of the windlass, and of course down went Mr. Bear to the bottom of the well with a bump that nearly shook him to pieces.

"Now almost anybody might have thought that Tommy would run away after that; but no, he made up his mind to serve Mr. Bear out good and hard, so he went to work winding up the windlass again. Then, when he had hauled Mr. Bear nearly to the top, he let him go back with a worse bump than before, and so he kept on doing this same thing thirteen or fifteen times, until Mr. Bear was so sore and bruised that he couldn't do much of anything more than hold himself on to the edge of the bucket.

"By that time Tommy had got all the sport he wanted, and he let Mr. Bear crawl out of the bucket. I have heard it said that it was more than two weeks before the old fellow could get out of bed, and the lesson did him as much good as the one Mr. Donkey gave the Wild Hog, for he wasn't quarrelsome again, and behaved himself decently well forever after."

MR. DONKEY'S LESSON IN GOOD MANNERS.

"I think the story about the donkey must be one which I have never heard," your Aunt Amy said. "Although the animals on the farm have told me quite a lot about Mr. Donkey, I have never thought of him as a teacher.

"It isn't what you might rightly call a story; but only something that happened when Mr. Donkey showed his good sense. Now I don't understand why Mr. Man tells about any one being as stupid as a donkey. Why, our Neddy is as wise as anybody on this farm, and you will think so when I have told this story about him.

"It was one night after supper, and he thought he would take a stroll up the road, because he hadn't been working very hard that day, and the exercise might do him good. He was going along, minding his own business, when Mr. Wild Hog came out from the bushes, and into the road.

"Mr. Donkey stepped over one side so as to give him plenty of room, saying 'good evening' politely, and was walking on when Mr. Wild Hog bristled up to him, showing both his big tusks, and said:

"Why don't you turn out when you meet anybody of consequence?"

"Perhaps I do when I meet them," Mr. Donkey replied, and that made Mr. Hog terribly angry. "Do you know I have a mind to give you a lesson in good manners?" growled Mr. Hog, and Mr. Donkey said with a grin:

"Why not go off somewhere alone, and give yourself a lesson or two?"

"Of course that made Mr. Hog more angry than ever, and he said:

"Do you know what I do when stupid animals like you try to be too smart?"

"No; I don't care either," Mr. Donkey replied; "but I will show you what I do when animals make bigger hogs of themselves than is natural."

"Just as he said this he turned around, swung up both heels, struck Mr. Hog under the chin, and knocked him over and over as many as six times. Then Mr. Donkey trotted off slowly, with a smile on his face that was for all the world like Mr. Crocodile's after he had been to the dentist's."



WHEN MR. CROCODILE HAD HIS TEETH EXTRACTED.

"Why did he go to the dentist?" your Aunt Amy asked, thinking to hear another story.



"I had better repeat the poetry Mr. Crow wrote about it, for that tells the whole story, and without further delay Mrs. Mouser Cat recited the following:

Come, listen, and I'll sing awhile
About a winsome crocodile,
Who had a most engaging smile
Whene'er he smole.

His basket with fresh fish to fill
Each day he'd tramp o'er vale and hill,
For he possessed quite wondrous skill
With rod and pole.

But as he fished, one summer's day,
A toothache chased his smiles away;
No longer could he fish and play
His favorite role.



He stamped and growled, the pain was vile,
No more he grinned, Sir Crocodile,
(And he'd a most engaging smile
Whene'er he smole.)

So straight he to the dentist went,
On stopping or extraction bent,
His soul was with such anguish rent;
He reached his goal.

"Come sit down in the chair awhile;
Open your mouth, Sir Crocodile!"
(He had a most engaging smile
Whene'er he smole.)

"Which is the tooth?" the dentist said;
"Dear, dear! You must have suffered--
You've not a sound tooth in your head,
Not one that's whole!"

He pulled them out; it took some while,
And then that toothsome crocodile
Had not quite such a pleasing smile
Whene'er he smole.

"How do you suppose Mr. Crocodile felt when he was hungry, and wanted to eat something?" your Aunt Amy asked.

THE DISSATISFIED CAT.

"Most likely much the same as did old Mrs. Pussy Cat up on the next farm."

"How was that?" your Aunt Amy asked.

"Well, you see, she was partly black and partly white, and not being a very neat cat, the white hair got dirty so often that she believed it would be a great thing if it was all black. So she got the idea into her head that if she should shave off the white hair, it would be the color she wanted when it grew out again.

"Well, now what do you suppose that poor foolish thing did? Why she went to the barber's, and had him shave all the white hair off of her body. She actually frightened the ducks and the geese when she came home, she looked so queer; but you couldn't have made her believe it. She thought she was a perfect beauty, and when she came over to this farm that evening, Mr. Thomas Cat said to her:

"'Why you are a perfect sight, that's what you are, with those tufts of black hair all over you!'

"'That's all the style,' Mrs. Pussy Cat said, and I think she really believed that she was as handsome as any cat you could find.

"Well, things went along all right while the weather was warm, but in the course of ten days we had a heavy frost, and dear me, dear me, how cold it grew all of a sudden! Poor Mrs. Pussy Cat was almost frozen to death the first night of the cold snap, when she tried to stay with the rest of us to a concert, and went home moaning:

"'Oh, give me back my hair! Give me back my hair!'



"Of course that couldn't be done, because she had to wait for it to grow again; but Mrs. Man on the next farm wrapped her up in an old shawl, and she had to stay in a basket until her hair grew, else she'd have frozen to death, for we had a terrible hard winter that season. When the hair did come out it was uneven, of course, and she was the worst looking cat you ever saw.

"Mr. Man was shaving the first morning Mrs. Pussy Cat came out of the basket, and he hadn't seen her since she had been to the barber's.



"She jumped up on a chair by the side of him, thinking he would stroke her fur as he always used to do, when the poor man got one glimpse of her, and it nearly scared him into hysterics. I suppose he thought it was a ghost, or something like that, for she looked bad enough to be almost anything.

"He gave a yell, and jumped in the air. That scared Mrs. Pussy Cat, and she screamed as she leaped out of the chair. Then Mr. Man went after her with that big razor in his hand.

"I don't know how far he chased her; but Mr. Towser said that Mrs. Pussy Cat ran more than five miles before she stopped, and when she sneaked back home that night, I'm thinking she felt a good deal as Mr. Crow did when he tried to make folks believe peacock feathers were growing in his tail."

MR. CROW'S DECEIT.

"I have heard a great many stories which Mr. Crow has told; but never one about him," your Aunt Amy interrupted. "If he tried to deceive the other birds, I surely would like to know about it."

"Well, he did," Mrs. Mouser Cat said emphatically, sitting bolt upright; "but of course he doesn't like to have the story told, so I had rather you wouldn't let him know I mentioned it.

"I don't know how he happened to get it into his head to do such a thing, for, as a rule, he spends the most of his time over in the big tree telling stories or making poetry; but he grew foolish once, and whenever anybody came where he was, he said he had strange growing feathers, and the doctor believed he was turning into a peacock.

"Of course that made a good deal of excitement around here, among all of us, for it would be a strange thing for a crow to change in that way, and he had twice as many visitors as he ever had before, all wanting to know about the new feathers.

"Well, of course he couldn't keep saying that they were coming, and not show any signs of them, so one day he said he felt terribly sick and guessed he should go into the hospital. Then we didn't see anything of him for most a week, until little Redder Squirrel came around and said Mr. Crow was all right; that he had as many as six peacock feathers growing right out of his tail.

"Well, now, you can believe we were astonished, and more excited over it than we had been since young Mr. Thomas Cat painted the canary yellow. Of course we asked Redder Squirrel where we could see him, and he said Mr. Crow had agreed to come out on the hill, just under the tree, that afternoon.

"If we animals around here were anxious to see him, you can guess that the peacocks were just about wild, and when the time came for Mr. Crow to show himself, all the peacocks for as many as five miles around were gathered under the big tree. Mr. Crow didn't know anything about their coming, until he marched right out in the midst of them.



"Now Mr. Crow is really a wise bird, and how it happened that he was so foolish as to do what he did, beats me. Anybody with half an eye could see that he had simply stuck these feathers in his tail, and was trying to make us believe they had grown there. If he had stayed on the tree where we couldn't get very near him, there might have been some chance of deceiving us; but there he was right down where we could put our paws on him if we wanted to. And the peacocks! Angry? Oh me, oh my, don't say a word!

"One big one reached over with his beak, and pulled a feather from Mr. Crow's tail.

"'The next time you set yourself up for one of us, it would be a good idea to tie the feathers in, else they may drop out, as this one has,' the peacock said, and I expected to see Mr. Crow almost faint away with shame. But bless you, he never thought of doing anything of that kind. He took the feather as bold as a lion, looked at the end of it, and then he said, careless-like:

"'Well, I declare! I guess I must be moulting,' and with that, off he flew. We didn't see him again for as much as two weeks, and then he agreed not to write any poetry about us if we wouldn't tell the story of the feathers; but young Mr. Thomas Cat couldn't hold in, and reported it far and near, till Mr. Crow paid him back in good shape."

WHEN YOUNG THOMAS CAT PAINTED A CANARY.

"But what about painting a canary?" your Aunt Amy asked. "You spoke of such a thing a moment ago."

"Yes, and it is what I am telling you about. Mr. Crow wrote the poetry which tells the story, and you shall hear it."

Then Mrs. Mouser Cat repeated the following:

For he was such a knowing puss--
Oh yes, he was!
A really clever, sharp young puss--
Oh yes, he was!
He wouldn't do as others do,
He said, "I know a thing or two,
I do!"

"To-morrow is the great bird show--
I think it is;
The far-renowned canary show--
Of course it is.
Some yellow ochre, so I've heard,
Will wondrously improve a bird,
I've heard



"I think I'll enter at that show--
I think I will,
Just make one entry for that show--
By Jove, I will.
And if my bird don't get the prize,
Why it will be, as I surmise,
A surprise!"

The show was held--a great success--
Of course it was!
By all 'twas called a huge success--
Indeed it was!
The judges were experienced cats;
They wore tail-coats, and large top-hats--
Such hats!

Young Tom was there--he'd brought his bird--
Just think! he had!
He'd really dared to bring that bird--
Oh yes, he had!
He said, "No one will ever know
That my canary's all no go,
Oh no!"



But one old judge was rather spry--
Oh yes, he was!
You'd not have thought him half so spry,
But oh, he was!
He said, "Why really, on my word!
Disqualify that shocking bird!--
Absurd!"

So Tom's bird was disqualified--
Of course it was!
Disgracefully disqualified,
Ah yes, it was!
And Tom, although he thought he knew
A thing or two, found others too
Who knew.

"Mr. Thomas must have believed that honesty was the best policy, before he got through with the bird show," your Aunt Amy suggested, and Mrs. Mouser Cat laughed as she replied:

"It would have shamed almost any cat; but it didn't seem to make a bit of difference with young Thomas. He was just as pert as ever the next day, and went around telling about the prize he would have taken if the judge hadn't discovered the fraud. It would have served him right if he had been punished as was Mr. Fox."

WHEN MR. FOX WAS TOO CUNNING.

"Is that another story?" your Aunt Amy asked.

"Yes, it is," Mrs. Mouser said reflectively, "and it shows that there are times when even a fox can be too cunning. One day while Mr. Fox, who used to live down in the swamp, was sneaking around behind the barn on this farm, he saw a bag hanging on the limb of a tree just over the water barrel.

"Now I wonder what that is?" he said to himself, as he stopped and looked first at the bag and then at the barrel. 'It smells good, and I believe there's meat somewhere around here.'



"Then he climbed upon the barrel, and saw that it was half full of water, so he began to wonder what the meaning of it was.

"'It must be a trap Mr. Man has set for me,' he said rubbing his ear as if he thought himself very wise. 'He thinks I'll jump up for the bag, and fall into the water. Now he's got to find a younger fox than I am, if he wants to make that plan work, for I'm going to know what's hanging up there, and I won't take any chances of getting drowned, either, because I'll drink all the water first. Then that will settle it.'

"Well, he began to drink, and drink, and drink, until he swelled up amazingly; but there was plenty of water still left in the barrel. Then he drank some more; ran around a few moments, came back and drank again, until he was all swelled out, and couldn't swallow another drop; but the barrel appeared to be as full as when he commenced.

"By this time it wasn't possible for him to run the least little bit, and he was feeling a good deal as his father did after he had found the crab, when along came Mr. Man, who said:

"'Hello! here's a nice fat fox! I guess I'll take his skin,' and the next day, lo and behold, there was Mr. Fox's hide nailed up on the barn, showing that sometimes it is dangerous to be too cunning."

WHEN SONNY BUNNY RABBIT WAS RASH.

"I never saw an animal who didn't get into trouble when he thought he knew everything," Mrs. Mouser went on thoughtfully, giving no heed to the fact that your Aunt Amy was on the point of interrupting her. "Now there is Sonny Bunny Rabbit, he got it into his head that he was the greatest ever lived; that he could do just as he wanted to around this neighborhood, because he led Mr. Fox into a trap one day.

"Why, that foolish little rabbit used to sit out in the field at night, and tell me, who am old enough to be his grandmother at the very least, that he could do anything he pleased; that there was no animal around here who could get the best of him.

"Well, Sonny Bunny kept that idea in his mind, and one day Mr. Hawk came sailing along just when Sonny Bunny was talking with Redder Squirrel, and Redder he screamed:

"'Run, Sonny Bunny! Run for your life!'

"'You don't catch me running away from any old hawk,' Sonny Bunny said, as bold as a lion. 'I'm going to stay right here, and kick dirt in his face if he comes where I am.'

"'Run, Sonny Bunny, run!' Redder Squirrel cried, and for once he showed more sense than usual.

"But Sonny Bunny was so puffed up with what he thought he could do, that he stood still, and got ready to kick dirt, while old Mr. Hawk came sailing round, and round, and round, making ready to light on him. If you'll believe it, that foolish rabbit stayed right there until down came Mr. Hawk, and then, oh me, oh my, how Sonny did kick dirt!



"I'm willing to admit that part of his plan was all right. He blinded Mr. Hawk, but at the same time didn't save all of his own skin, for the old fellow's claws went into Sonny Bunny's back so far, as his mother told me, that you could almost see the bones, and the foolish rabbit laid in bed three or four weeks before he was fit to go out of doors again."

"It seems to me as if I had heard something like that before," your Aunt Amy said, and Mrs. Mouser replied:

"Very likely you've heard the same story, for all the animals around here know about it."

"But what was it you said about Mr. Fox's father meeting a crab?" your Aunt Amy asked.

MR. FOX AND MISS CRAB.

"Well, that isn't what you might really call a story; it's only something which happened to old Mr. Fox when he went down to the seashore for his health, and met young Miss Crab. He had never seen anybody of the kind, and didn't know whether she was an animal, or a fish, or a bird.

"'Good morning,' he said very politely, and Miss Crab answered him back as nice as you please.

"'Are you out for a walk?' he asked.

"'Oh no, indeed,' she said. 'I am here taking the sea air for my health. The doctor recommends it, but I am not allowed to move around very much because I'm so feeble.'



"Now old Mr. Fox was puzzled. He put his paw on her shell, and it was hard; but whether it was the house she lived in, or a part of herself, he couldn't for the life of him tell.

"Well, after a time he made up his mind that the shell must be her house, so he said:

"'Why don't you come outside where you can get purer air than you do in there?' and she replied, just as a gull went sailing by:

"'I don't dare to for fear some of those rude birds will eat me.'

"That settled old Mr. Fox. He thought if the birds liked Miss Crab well enough to eat her, she would make a good supper for him. So he began to coax and coax her to come out, and after a long time, finding that she would not do as he wanted, he began trying to bite the shell into pieces. Then she caught hold of his tongue with one of her big claws, and bit as much as an inch and a half right straight off the end of it.

"Oh me, oh my, how old Mr. Fox did howl! I'm told that he went home in a most dreadful rage, with the blood streaming out of his mouth, and when his wife asked him what the matter was, he couldn't say a word, of course not, because his tongue was gone. I don't know how long it was before he got well; but they do say he was the most shamefaced looking animal that was ever seen, whenever any one spoke to him about crabs, or the seashore."

THE BABY ELEPHANT.

"Speaking of the seashore reminds me of another piece of Mr. Crow's poetry, and if you can stand any more, I wish you would, because I think this is really good."

As a matter of course your Aunt Amy could do no less than say she would be pleased to hear it, and Mrs. Mouser recited that which is set down here:

To little John Adolphus Chubb
Your kind attention I invite;
Oh, how he loves to bathe and scrub,
Each day at noon and eke at night.

Now John Adolphus William Chubb
A fine young elephant is he;
And when he's in his little tub,
Oh, 'tis a pleasant sight to see!

His nurse,--a motherly old thing--
No need to coax the rogue has she;
Adolphus, when he sees her bring
The water, trumpets in his glee.



Oh, how he loves the cold, cold stream
Descending on him in the tub!
He feels as if he'd like to scream--
He loves it so--does William Chubb.

And then, the evening's washing o'er
(Though he could wish it lasted still),
His nurse will gay, "Come, come, no more;
You've had enough now, Master Will!"

So swift he's dried, his night-gown on,
A night-cap tied upon his head,
And to the rattle's music,
John Adolphus William goes to bed.



"I don't think that is very nice poetry," your Aunt Amy said when Mrs. Mouser had come to the end of the verses. "It is too ridiculous."

"That may be; but I have heard some of your friends, like Mr. Turtle, for example, tell you even worse than that," and Mrs. Mouser spoke quite sharply. "Now if you want a really pretty little story, that hasn't got much fun in it, I can tell you one about two mice, and it must be true, because I had it from a cat friend of mine who was on the spot."

THE STORY OF SQUEAKY MOUSE.

Your Aunt Amy said to Mrs. Mouser that she would be very much pleased to hear it, and, telling the story as if she did not entirely approve of it herself, Mrs. Mouser began:

"Mother Mouse had two little daughters, Meeky and Squeaky. Meeky was a good little mouse, and did everything her mother told her. Squeaky was very brave and daring, but she was the torment of everybody's life.

"One day Mother Mouse was too ill to go out and do her own marketing.

"I wish you children would go and get me a little lump of cheese,' she moaned.

"Away scampered the two little mice to a high shelf they knew of; their mother had warned them against traps and cats, so they were careful not to linger on the pantry floor. When they found the cheese, Meeky began at once rolling up a little lump to take home to her mother, but Squeaky filled her mouth as full as it would hold, and ran up and down the shelf, making a great clatter.

"Be careful,' said her sister. 'The cat will hear you.'



"Squeaky looked down and saw the cat on the pantry shelf; she knew it couldn't get up to her, and she could not resist calling: "'Peekaboo!"

"Dear me, how Mrs. Cat glared!"

"Oh,' said Meeky, 'how are we to get down with mother's cheese now?'

"Squeaky said they would wait till the cat went to sleep, and pretty soon this seemed to be the case. But Mrs. Cat was only shamming, for the minute Squeaky reached the floor she pounced upon her, and while the mouse was carried shrieking away, Meeky made her escape.

"Of course, Mother Mouse and Meeky felt badly for a while, but the other mice said it was just what might have been expected, and just what happened to young mice who would not mind what their elders told them."

"Don't you ever feel badly, Mrs. Mouser, when you have caught a mouse, to think that it had a mother, and brothers and sisters, in its hole, waiting for it to come back?" your Aunt Amy asked.

"Why should I?" and Mrs. Cat spoke sharply. "Mice were made for cats to eat, and even if they were not, unless I killed all I could, Mr. Man's house would be over-run with them."

A SAUCY MOUSE.

"Of course I can't do very much in the daytime, because they don't come out of their holes; but I work all night, and it would surprise you to know how many there are in the house, I don't kill off a tenth part of them, and they seem to think they have more rights here than I have.

"Why, it is only last week that I happened to look up on the broad shelf in the dining-room closet, and there were six mice, sitting around as bold as you please. Five ran for their lives the minute they saw me; but what do you think the other one did? Why, he sat on his tail with his paws behind him, and actually scolded because I had come around there.



"I really believe the foolish creature thought he could frighten me, for he kept right on scolding and sputtering until I got my paw on his neck, and of course that settled him. I left him a good deal worse off than Mrs. Lioness did Mr. Rat, when she wanted to play with him."

FATAL SPORT.

"That must be a new story," your Aunt Amy said, and Mrs. Mouser looked surprised as she replied:

"Well, well, I don't understand what all the animals around here have talked about! This is the third or fourth very old story that you haven't heard, and when I came in here to visit this afternoon, I had an idea that everything I might offer to tell, you had heard from some of the others."

"Suppose you tell me what Mrs. Lioness did to Mr. Rat?" your Aunt Amy suggested, and Mrs. Mouser began:

"Once upon a time--you can see from the beginning how old this story is--Mr. Rat ate his way into the place where they keep animals to show them off--a Zoological Garden, I believe Mr. Man calls it. Well, after Mr. Rat got in he found a Mrs. Lion who was all alone, and feeling as though she really needed company. She was just as kind to Mr. Rat as she could be, and asked him why he didn't make his home there with her.

"I would like to,' Mr. Rat said, 'for you seem to be a very nice kind of a Mrs. Lion; but when Mr. Man, who owns this place, comes along, he will kill me if he can.'

"I would like to see Mr. Man try to hurt any one who was visiting me!' Mrs. Lion said sharply, as she held up her paw. 'Do you see that? I could kill Mr. Man with it in a minute if I struck him.'

"As she spoke she laid her paw on Mr. Rat in play, just to show him what she could do, and the 'play' was so rough that the breath of life was squeezed out of Mr. Rat in a jiffy.

"Now you might have supposed that Mrs. Lion would feel badly because she had killed Mr. Rat without meaning to; but instead of that she said, looking at his body:

"What a poor kind of a creature he must be, when he allows himself to be killed with what was no more than a love pat!"

"And a little mouse, who was sitting in a hole in the wall, having seen all that happened, squeaked with a nervous snicker:

"A lion's sport is altogether too strenuous for such as us, and if Mr. Rat had been wise, he would have kept well outside the cage, fearing your play even more than your anger.'



"It seems to me he was a wise little mouse,' your Aunt Amy said, and Mrs. Mouser replied with a sneer:

"He was a good deal like many others I know of, exceeding wise after they have seen the result of another's folly. But it seems to me that we are talking altogether too

much about mice."

A CAT'S DREAM.

"I have been wanting to repeat to you what I call some very nice poetry, which Mr. Crow made about a dream of mine. It is really the best thing he ever wrote, and although I the same as promised not to ask you to listen to anything more of his, I am very anxious for you to hear it."

"Don't think that I object so severely to what Mr. Crow writes," your Aunt Amy replied. "I have heard a number of things he wrote which I thought were very good indeed."

Then Mrs. Mouser Cat repeated the following:

Kitty cat, kitty cat, asleep on the rug,
With velvet paws beneath your head nice and snug,
What are you dreaming of? What do you think
When out slips your little tongue so soft and pink?

When you flick your ears, and your whiskers quiver so,
And you give an eager cry like a whisper low;
When your tail pats the rug so intent, and you seem
Just ready for a spring, tell me what do you dream?



"Oh, I have a fairy-land I visit in my sleep,
Where the mice don't expect me and are playing bo-peep;
Down I pounce upon them, they are not so quick as I,
And I smile as I regale myself upon a mouse pie;

"There are pantries where the pans of milk are brimming o'er,
Where I lap the rich cream and spill no drop upon the floor;
Loveliest custards, daintiest bits of fragrant cheese;
And I help myself without a word as often as I please.

"Then I walk along the fences and I grandly wave my tail;
My whiskers are so fierce all the other cats turn pale;
When Pug and Towser eye me, suspiciously, I know,
I give a spring upon them and off in fright they go.

"And in my pretty fairy-land no cruel boys appear;
Only black eats and white cats, and purrs and mews to hear.
And these are what my visions are, oh little mistress sweet;
Sure any cat would need to smile asleep here at your feet."



"Now I really think that is good, Mrs. Mouser," and your Aunt Amy spoke no more than the truth. "I don't seriously object to Mr. Crow's nonsense verses; but at the same time I never really enjoy them."

BLOOD RELATIONS.

"Of course there's a difference in tastes," Mrs. Mouser said thoughtfully. "Some of the things which Bunny Rabbit thinks are good, I don't like at all, and perhaps he objects to what I believe is very fine. Now here is a story Mr. Crow has got about Mr. Man's boy Tommy. Mamma Speckle thinks there was nothing like it ever told. He says that Tommy Man, one night after he had been tucked up in his crib, was awakened by a strange, humming, buzzing sound close to his head, and when he got out the sand that the 'sand-man' had put in his eyes, he stared about him. There on the bottom of the bed was a fearful hobgoblin, so Tommy Man thought, with big

round eyes, awfully long legs and wings, and a beak that looked like a trooper's sword.

"Are you one of those angels that my mamma said took care of little boys at night?" asked Tommy Man, trembling. 'Cause if you are I guess I can get along by myself all right; you needn't stay.'

"But the mosquito made a jab with his bill at the bed-clothes over Tommy's chin, and said, loudly:

"Cousin-n-n-n-n, Cousin-n-n-n-n.'

"Oh, you're a cousin, are you? I wonder which one?"

"Z-z-i-m m-m," answered the mosquito, buzzing about Tommy Man's head.



"Zim? Oh, I guess you must be that soldier cousin of mother's by the looks of the sword you carry; his name was Jim.'

"Cousin-n-n-n-n!" buzzed the mosquito sharply. 'Don't you know your own relations?'

"You my relation?" Tommy asked in amazement. 'How do you make that out?'

"Oh, easy. Relations are those who have the same blood in them, ain't they?'

"Yes," assented Tommy.

"Well, you and I have the same blood. You had it, and now I've got it. I just tapped you, you know.'

"Tommy didn't know anything of the kind, and he was terribly frightened, so he just covered up his head, and trembled until Mr. Mosquito flew away."

"Those are what I call nonsense stories," your Aunt Amy said when Mrs. Mouser ceased speaking, and she replied quite sharply:

"Of course they are, and that is about all the animals on this farm know."

"I am certain you make a mistake, Mrs. Mouser Cat, for you have told me several this afternoon which teach a good lesson," your Aunt Amy said, and for a moment it seemed very much as if Mrs. Mouser was angry, but her face brightened an instant later, as she cried:

"I've got the very story for you, although it's about a mouse, and I don't really believe in talking of them so much, for it makes it appear as if they were of great importance, when all they are fit for is to furnish food for us cats.

"Once upon a time there was a miller who lived in his mill, and on a certain morning, when he was opening the sacks of grain, out hopped a little mouse.

"Oh, wife, wife!" he cried as if he had seen some horrible animal. 'Bring me the butcher knife so that I can kill this mouse!'

"But the little mouse put her paws together and begged for her life. She promised to keep the mill free from mice if the miller would spare her life. Well, after a good deal of talk the miller agreed that she should be allowed to live in the mill, and for a whole month she kept her word so well that not even a mouse's tail was seen anywhere around the place. Then, one morning the miller heard a faint squeaking, and he cried out angrily:

"What's this, Mrs. Mouse? You have forgotten your promise, and let in some of your friends.'

"No," answered the little mouse, 'I have kept my promise. Those are my three babies, who were born last night,' and she led the way proudly to her nest, where the three squirming little mouse babies lay.

"So this is the way you keep your word, is it?" the miller cried angrily. 'You promised to drive all other mice away from this mill, and here are three who have come to get their living from me!'

"Then he picked up the babies and threw them into the river. Oh, but the little mouse was angry! Yet she was only a mouse, and he was a man, so she said nothing; but after that, whenever she got a chance, she gnawed and gnawed and gnawed at the outer post of the mill, sometimes working the whole night long.

"Then came a big storm, and the river rose very high; the posts which were half gnawed through, broke, and the mill fell over into the river.

"Save me! Save me!" shouted the miller as the swiftly-running current carried him down the stream.

"I am sending you to find my lost babies," squeaked the little mouse as she ran to and fro on the bank.

"There's a good lesson in that story, if you know how to find it," Mrs. Mouser said as she curled herself into a little ball near the fireplace, much as though she had come to an end of her story-telling; but just at that moment a mouse showed his nose in one corner of the room.

In an instant Mrs. Mouser Cat was on her feet looking as if she had never thought of such a thing as taking a nap, and in a very few seconds she had the mouse in her claws.



"I guess this breaks up my visit," she said, going toward the door. "I must give the kittens a chance to learn how a mouse should be caught, and it isn't likely I'll have time to come back here this afternoon."

Then Mrs. Mouser Cat disappeared through the half-opened door, and your Aunt Amy was left alone, wondering which, of all the animals on the farm, would be the next to provide her with an afternoon's entertainment.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOUSER CAT'S STORY ***

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