

THE STORY MUSEUM

Puss in Boots

There was once a miller who had three sons. When the miller died he left his mill to the oldest son, his horse to his second son, but to the youngest he left only his cat. Well, the youngest was a good-natured youth and he prepared to make the best of it, though he didn't see how a cat could help him to get on in the world.

'You'd be surprised!' said the cat. 'Now if you could just get me a fine pair of boots, I may be able to help you make your fortune.'

So the boy provided the cat with the finest pair of boots he could find, and off went Puss into the fields where he filled a bag with juicy lettuces. Carrying the bag into the woods, he spread the lettuces on the path and waited. Before long a greedy rabbit passed and, unable to resist the lettuces, settled down to feast. Quick as a flash the cat's paw shot out and the rabbit found himself inside the bag.

Slinging the bag over his shoulder, the cat set off for the palace. When he got there he demanded to see the king and laid before him the fine, fat rabbit.

'A gift from my master, the Marquis of Carabas,' he announced, with a low bow. The king was delighted with the rabbit, and impressed by Cat's polite manners and handsome boots.

The next day the cat pulled on his boots and went to the fields again. He picked a bag of corn and laid a trail along the ground. Two fine partridges came past and, unable to resist the corn, settled down to feast. Quick as a flash the cat's paw shot out, once, twice and the partridges were in the bag.

With the bag over his shoulder, the cat went again to the palace and laid the partridges before the king. 'A gift from my master, the Marquis of Carabas,' he announced, with an even lower bow. The king was even more delighted with the partridges and once again impressed by Cat's polite manners and handsome boots.

The next morning the cat told his new master that he was to go for a swim in the river. The boy was not keen. The water was freezing, but the cat insisted. As the boy gasped and spluttered in the cold water, the crafty cat hid all of his clothes. At the sound of a carriage passing he ran out into the road crying, 'Help, quick! My master, the Marquis of Carabas is drowning!' Recognising the name and remembering his generous gifts, the king sent his coachman to the rescue. As he pulled the boy out of the water the cat cried, 'Oh, but he has no clothes! Thieves have stolen them!'

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The king unlocked his trunk and found the boy a suit of fine clothes. Dressed in the king's clothes he really did look like a marquis, and the princess from her seat in the carriage was quite taken with him. The king thanked him for his gifts and offered him a lift in his carriage. Though he had no idea what was happening, he was quick to climb aboard and was soon charming the princess with his handsome smile and borrowed finery.

The cat meanwhile had run ahead. As he passed a field where men were harvesting the corn he called to them, 'When the king asks who owns these fields, tell him they belong to the Marquis of Carabas. If you don't, I'll scratch you to pieces!' Frightened by his threats and impressed by his boots, the harvesters agreed.

A little further on the cat came across a goatherd with a fine flock of goats. He called to him, 'When the king asks who owns these goats, tell him they belong to the Marquis of Carabas. If you don't, I'll scratch you to pieces!' Frightened by his threats and impressed by his boots, the goatherd agreed.

The cat continued until he came to a huge stone castle with a great wooden door. Puss banged on the door, and it was opened by a terrifying ogre. The ogre looked down at the cat and growled menacingly.

'Good day,' called the cat. 'I've heard that you can turn yourself into any animal you choose, but you see- I really can't believe it!'

For a moment, the ogre was too astonished to move. Then he gave an almighty roar, turned himself into a lion and advanced upon the cat with open jaws.

'Not bad,' said the cat, staying cool in spite of the sharp teeth inches from his whiskers, 'but a big animal like a lion is easy. I bet you can't turn into something small like, say... a mouse.'

With another roar of rage the ogre began to shrink and shrink and shrink until his roars became squeaks, and the crafty cat pounced- and gobbled! In one mouthful the ogre was gone.

The king by now had arrived at the fields. 'Tell me,' he called to the men, 'whose fields are these?'

'They belong to the Marquis of Carabas,' the men told him, remembering the cat's threats.

A little later, the king passed the goatherd. 'Tell me,' he called to the man, 'whose goats are these?'

'They belong to the Marquis of Carabas,' the goatherd told him, remembering the cat's threats.

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The king looked at the marquis with admiration, and so did the princess. When the carriage reached the castle the cat was there at the gate to meet them.

'Welcome to the home of the Marquis of Carabas!' the cat bowed, lower than ever before.

Well, the king was so impressed with the castle and the fields and the fine flock of goats that he lost no time in offering the marquis his daughter's hand in marriage. So the miller's son became a prince, and he and the princess- and the cat- lived happily ever after.