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A Winter Nosegay

By

Walter Crane

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A WINTER NOSEGAY.

Being Tales for Children at Christmastide.

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THE MAN IN THE MOON.

ONCE upon a time, long before people were able to learn what they wanted to know from printed books, long before children had pretty pictures to tell them tales, there lived an old student with his pupil. Together they spent all the day in poring over musty old books and papers, trying to find out why the sun was hot; and in the night-time they might always be seen gazing at the sky, counting how many stars there were there. They were very curious folk, and wanted to know the reasons for all sorts of out-of-the-way things that everybody else was content to know the mere facts of, such as why birds have two wings and not three, why crocodiles have no fins, seeing that they can swim in the water, and many other matters that would not interest sensible beings. They always had at their side a young owl, and a serpent, toothless and blind with age; for they thought that youthful observation and aged craftiness were most suitable companions for them in their labours. If at any time old Fusticus, for so the old student was named, got dispirited in his work, or felt inclined to give it up as a hopeless task, he had but to turn round in his chair, and there behind him sat his owl, who seemed to say, as he cocked his head on one side, "Never despair, success only comes after long perseverance!" Or if he stuck fast at any point, and could make no progress, one glance at the old serpent made him think, "Snakes wait whole days and nights on watch for their prey; why should I give in?" And, strange to say, with a little more attention and care, he always did get over his smaller difficulties.

But at last old Fusticus got weary of his long studies, as he seemed never to find an answer to any one of the questions he had set himself; and he was about to give them up altogether, when he came across a curious passage in the old tome in which he was reading. For a long time he could not make it out at all, but after deep thought and consultation with his pupil, he discovered that it was a spell, by which he could call up the Spirit of Darkness, whom he could compel to grant him any three wishes that he might demand. The only condition was that he should give to the Spirit of Darkness whatever he should ask of him.

Old Fusticus thought and thought a long time over this discovery, and at last decided to make use of it. So one day he repeated the charm he had learnt from the book, and when he had finished the last word, to his amazement, for he did not quite believe it was all true, there stood before him the Spirit of Darkness! He was not at all like what he had imagined he would have been; for he had not a hideous face, nor a tail, but was dressed in the costume of a court gentleman, with a sword at his side and a cocked hat in his hand. He had, too, a pigtail, ruffles and all complete!

"Sire," he said to Fusticus, "what is your will? You have summoned me to you by a power not your own--you know the condition on which you use that power. What is your wish?"

"My wish you shall soon learn, or rather my three wishes. But what is it that you demand in return?"

"All that I ask is now--nothing! All that I want is your first-born babe!"

"I have no child--I am an old man without a wife. If I had a child, you should have him." Fusticus did not think what he was saying, you see; but he felt quite safe in offering a thing that did not exist.

"'Tis a bargain!" cried the wicked Spirit at once and with glee. "Here is a written compact! Sign!" and Fusticus with a laugh put his name to the paper, for he thought: "Ah, my fine fellow! you have over-reached yourself this time! In trying to get too much, you have got nothing at all!" and he laughed again.

"Your wishes?" asked the Spirit of Darkness, putting the signed document into his coat-tail pocket.

"Well!" said Fusticus, "first of all I will have---- dear me! what shall I have? Now I come to think of it, I don't know that I want anything at all! Let me see, I have clothes, a house, my owl and my old serpent, I have a pupil, my books, my--oh! I know! I have not got a horse to ride upon! But to wish for only a horse! Spirit, let me have a Cock large enough for me to ride upon!"

And forthwith there appeared a monstrous cock, so large that Fusticus could easily sit upon its back. And this he at once did. "Shan't I look grand now!" thought Fusticus, "as I ride through the village. All eyes will be upon me!" Just at that moment the cock gave a loud crow, and began to strut onwards, and away they went to the village. And as the last sound of the cock's crow died away, the Spirit of Darkness vanished.

The cock made his way straight to the village, and through the chief street. Everybody turned to look at Fusticus and his remarkable mode of travelling, but his friends did not, as he had expected, seem very much struck with its grandeur. "Poor old Fusticus has gone quite mad," they said to each other; "that comes of too much reading!" and they would not return the polite bows that Fusticus showered upon them. And so silly old Fusticus soon came to repent his first wish. "Oh! that I had not been so foolish!" cried Fusticus,

and as soon as he got out of the village, he dismounted from his cock, and again called upon the Spirit of Darkness.

"And so you already want something more? You mortals are never contented," said the latter. "Everybody laughs at my steed," answered Fusticus; "I cannot ride through the streets without looking absurd! Give me a golden carriage, drawn by four real horses this time, with as many servants as attend a duke;" and the next moment up drove the most magnificent carriage he had ever beheld, with four prancing white horses, and a footman and two postilions. Behind it rode two lords, to guard it. "Now I shall indeed be happy! Now my friends can no longer laugh!" thought Fusticus, and the very next day he took his first drive.

When his friends saw that Fusticus had come into such luck, and had such a grand carriage of his own, they all thought "Dear me! some rich relation of Fusticus must have died, and left him all this. I hope he did not see me laugh when he passed me yesterday on that curious cock of his!" But Fusticus was too pleased to be unfriendly with anybody, when he saw what marked attention his grand equipage brought him. He sat smiling inside his carriage and had a kind word for all, even for the poor old woman he saw the rough villagers jeering at and abusing. He even called to them to stop breaking the pitchers and pots that she was trying to sell in the market-place, the only grudge that they had against her being that she had a rather more hooked nose than their own!

Fusticus now lived for some time quite happy. Everybody thought a great deal of him, because of his fine carriage, in which he used to take daily drives. All the young unmarried ladies of the village tormented him that he was still a bachelor, saying that his carriage must have been made for two, as there were two seats in it. And this seemed such a forcible argument to Fusticus, that he soon took one of the ladies as a wife. In course of time a little baby was born to them. Scarcely was the child a week old, when one morning, just as Fusticus was nursing his little pet, in through the window sprang the Spirit of Darkness! Drawing the written compact from his pocket, he said, "In accordance with this, give me up your child, your first-born! But you have one wish still left. What may it be?" Fusticus was struck dumb; he could not recover himself for a long time, for in his happiness he had quite forgotten his promise, quite forgotten his third wish, and all about the Spirit of Darkness!

"I cannot yield my child, my young and innocent darling!" he cried. "Anything else you may take--my life, my carriage, anything, but leave me my child!"

"The child! the child! and nothing else!" shrieked the demon, and then, regaining himself, with a smile added: "And your last wish?"

"If I lose my boy," answered Fusticus, "my joy on this earth is for ever gone. If you take my child, then, oh Spirit of Darkness and Deceit! then, may I for all eternity pass my life in the Moon!" "Granted too is your third----" "But I have not finished yet," broke in Fusticus, "and may my child for ever remain with me there!"

And there you may see them both to this day, but the child was changed into a spider. And every now and then the good little spider lets himself down by his thread to the earth and takes his father back all the news of the day.

But if you, Reader, had three wishes granted to you, I hope you would choose them better and more wisely than did old Fusticus!

CAT AND DOG STORIES.

IT was a rainy November afternoon, and floods of water poured down from the skies, growing hourly in strength. "Just as if the heaven were weeping to find that its tears grew so plentiful," I thought. I know that it is sometimes the case with me. When I am naughty and am scolded, I begin to cry just a little; but my tears flow quicker and quicker as I think how shameful it is for a great girl like me to be weeping, and the more ashamed I become, the more I cry. But I must not go on like this, or my story will turn out a tearful one, and I shall really end by weeping myself.

Well, it was a rainy day, raining so hard that I could not go out on the lawn to play; and I was tired of amusing myself with my soft ball indoors. I was sitting with my head resting between my hands, trying to think of some new game, when suddenly the door swung open, and in walked a crooked old woman, trudging towards me on her crooked staff.

"Why are you so unhappy, my dear?" she asked me in a kind, though croaking, voice.

"I don't know how to pass the time, ma'am," I said, rather frightened.

"Little girls, aye, and big girls too, should always have something to do; they should never idle away their hours. I am your fairy godmother, Nelly; look at my face."

And I looked up at her. Sure enough, she did look like my godmother, only a little more ugly and a good deal more kind!

"As you have been a good girl this morning, and finished your knitting and sewing, I am going to give you something that will amuse you. I am going to gift you with the knowledge of animal language. Look at your cat and dog on the hearth! They are telling each other stories. Would you like to listen to what they are saying?"

"Oh, that I should!" I exclaimed.

She touched me on the lips with her crooked staff, and suddenly I heard two little voices gossiping round the fire. I glanced round at my fairy godmother, but she had vanished. I had not time to think how wonderful it all was--I was too much taken up with what I heard. There sat my precious Miss Perkie, with King Charlie

at her side, so interested that his little pink tongue had pushed its way out through his teeth.

I drew my chair nearer to the hearth, so that I might hear their conversation the better. But Charlie turned round upon me rather angrily, and said:

"If you want to listen, Nelly, don't make such a noise with your stool. It disturbs me, and it is really provoking to lose the thread of an adventure in that way. Pray begin the story again, Perkie."

He always was rather a sharp-tempered dog, so I did not answer him. Yet the rude way in which he addressed me struck me as rather funny. I remember thinking that, perhaps, if all the world spoke dog-language, dogs would be the masters, and we human beings the slaves.

Perkie then continued:

"As I was saying----"

"No, she has put the first part out of my head, now! If I am once stopped in a story all the first part vanishes. I never was very quick at learning and all that, you know. People think that petting and cuddling are quite enough for a dog of my royal pedigree! They never consider my mind. It is true I can beg, and play at hide-and-seek with a biscuit: I can eat game, and drink real turtle-soup. And they pay great respect to my dignity and kingly grace; but as for my mental--however, never mind that, Pussy; it's not to the point! Go on with your story from the beginning, and Nelly and I will listen."

"I was going to tell Charlie of an adventure that I once had with some horrid, mongrel dogs," said Pussy. "I hate dogs, and so does my whole race, and mongrels more than any others. Now a noble mastiff or a royal King Charles" (and here Miss Perkie bowed graciously to her companion, though I fancied I could see a faint little smile curl round her lower jaw as she glanced up at me, as if to say to me that she only put up with him for my sake), "neither of them would worry a harmless cat, for they are real gentlemen, who honour weakness and timidity" (another little nod). "But to go on with my story--"

'I was out in the yard one day to see if I could not pick up a stray mouseling or so, when I suddenly came upon three brutal-looking dogs, asleep and snoring near a basket.

"I turned to flee, as quickly as I could; but the middle dog must have heard the little cry of fright that escaped me. He leaped up, gave a loud bark that awoke his

two friends, and all three set after me.

"A tall wall surrounded the yard, and foolishly I had not made for the gate through which I had come in. What was I to do? 'They will have me,' I thought, 'they must have me sooner or later!' My terror was too great for me to describe.

"Round and round the yard they chased me--round and round again! I could not see the opening of the gate for a long time, so quickly did I tear along.

"Mongrel curs are clever, though I don't know why they should be. They had sense enough--bad sense I then thought it; but now I laugh at the adventure, as it is happily over, and as I paid the dogs back in their own coin--well, they had sense enough to separate and drive me into a corner. 'Now, surely, it is all over with me!' I said to myself; but I managed to keep them off for a long while by setting up my back and spitting at them. They dared not draw nigh, they dared not touch me, for they knew my claws were all ready stretched out to scratch their eyes out.

"How long we stood thus I cannot say. My nerves were so tight-strung that I was scarcely myself at all."

"Well, and what did you do?" asked King Charlie, his big eyes almost starting from his head, and his tongue far protruded from his mouth. "Do go on! You keep one so long in suspense! Did they kill you or not?"

I could not help laughing at his silly question; but Charlie seemed mightily offended at my conduct, so I smothered my merriment as best I could.

"Shall I go on?" asked Pussy; to which we both eagerly replied, "Yes, yes, please, Pussy."

She continued: "I was in this awkward position, hissing, spitting, back up, claws shot out, when an idea struck me. The dogs were close together in a body, and it was not much of a jump for me--I sprang forward, right over their heads, and rushed away towards the gate which stood straight before me. I reached it in safety, and looked around.

"There were the three dogs, barking loudly, close behind me! 'Now for my idea!' thought I, 'now or never! Victory or death!'

"The door was only half open, and that favoured my plans. If that had not been the case----"

"Do keep to the story!" again interrupted the eager King Charles; "you are always moralizing."

"If that had not been the case, I should have been lost," continued Pussy, quite calmly, and not regarding His Highness. "Well, I jumped violently against the half-closed gate, and slammed it to with a loud bang. It just caught the first dog's toe, and I knew what had happened by the yelping and howling of the wretched cur. Ah! the tables were turned now! And, in triumph, I laid my side close up against the door, and purred as loudly as I could, until my throat ached. The dog howled still louder than before on the other side, his two brother sinners barking all the time in disappointed fury.

"A funny concert it must have been! All the animals flocked out from the farmyard close by, to see what was the matter. The turkey joined in, screeching at her loudest. The little pig grunted and squeaked, and I lay against the door, purring louder than ever.

"Then the donkey came up, and looked on. He was a bit of a philosopher, and looked grave and unconcerned. Or it may have been that the clover he had in his mouth was too precious to gobble down or to drop. In fact, his attention did seem to be divided; for one ear appeared to be listening to the concert, the other to the music of his own crunching. Poor old Neddy! he thinks himself so wise and such a philosopher in human and animal things! And all the time he is such a stupid! Even I stopped purring for a moment to laugh at him.

"The kid in the neighbouring field pranced for very joy at the music. He had never had an accompaniment before; and he frisked about here, there, and everywhere, inviting even the frog beneath his feet to join him in the dance. Unequal playmates, you will say; and so thought the frog; but the kid was delighted nevertheless, though he soon forsook his partner, and went careering on.

"Out from her hutch the rabbit poked her head, with a sprig of forget-me-not in her mouth. Her ears were pricked up, and she listened. 'What can it all mean?' she asked her little ones.

"I looked towards the duck-pond. 'What lovely music!' cried one duckling to his comrade.

"'Hideous, you mean!' cried the other, and then they fought and quarrelled till scarcely a feather was left between them. This is the way with quick-tempered little ducklings: they fight for a worm, and are good friends again as soon as either of them has eaten it up. Sulky little boys and girls have a lesson to learn from them in this, so that even a duckling is a teacher at times, if we can only

read our lesson aright.

"The noise the dogs were making reached even the end of the field, where a blackbird was busily engaged with an obstinate worm, who preferred his hole to the open air. And the terrified bird forsook half his dinner, in his anxiety to get away.

"My adventure, you see," continued Pussy, "at any rate created a noise in the neighbourhood! At length the dogs' master came out with a whip in his hand. He walked up to them, and must have laid about him pretty freely, for their howling increased to something indescribable. Then suddenly they stopped, and I heard the dog-whip flung fiercely at the crouching curs. And then their master went away, as I could tell by his retreating steps.

"I was full of curiosity to see how they looked in their humbled frame of mind. So I with great difficulty scrambled up the wall. I looked over, and nearly tumbled over too, for I could hardly keep my balance, so great was my inward rejoicing at their discomfiture.

"So you are paid out, you three cruel, mischief-makers!" I cried, and leaped down again from the wall.

"They howled back their reply, which I did not wait to hear--and that is the end of my story," said Pussy.

"Thank you, Pussy dear!" I said. And King Charlie danced frantically round the room to show his delight at the way the adventure had ended.

"I hate low under-bred curs, and I am always glad to see them punished," he cried, again assuming his kingly look. He was a despot in spirit, and really thought himself King of the dogs. Poor, harmless, vain little Charlie, I loved him all the same!

"Now it is your turn to tell me a story," said Miss Perkie to him. "I will tell you something more of these three dogs afterwards."

"Very well," began King Charles, "very well; a tale you shall have, but a short one. My tail is not long, and my tales are not long," and he looked towards Pussy; then at me; but neither of us smiled: he was only a dog of small intellect, so I forgave him.

"Your story was of dogs," he went on; "mine shall be of cats. You hate dogs--I hate cats; therefore we like each other."

Pussy did not quite follow the reasoning, as I could see from her puzzled face; but since the end was true, and the argument sounded well, she thought it must be all right.

"My story is of a cat of your tribe, Perkie," he continued; "of a Maltese kitten. They are all great play-babies, you know, and I suppose you owe your earnestness of character to me. But that is not to the point! The kitten I am speaking of was called Pussy. That seems to be a common name in your family, Pussy; and it is a most extraordinary thing that all the cats and kittens I have ever known have had that name, and it is yours too, Perkie, isn't it? However, it is a very pretty name, so I won't say anything more about it. It is not to the point either! To proceed: this Pussy was a very great play-baby. A soft ball was her joy, her comfort; a saucer of milk, her greatest delight. How you cats can live on milk, I cannot understand. It's very nice in its way, but it goes such a little way, though that is not much to the point again! Well, this cat's mother was a thief--all cats are thieves--she used regularly, when she had a chance, to go to the jar of milk that was kept for me and for the family, and lap up as much as she could reach with her tongue.

"Of course I hated her for this alone; but another vile practice she had increased my dislike for her. She would, every morning after the piano was dusted, jump upon the music-stool, and thence bound on to the keyboard. She would then walk about on it backwards and forwards, making the most abominable sounds--screeching notes, buzzing notes, groaning notes; groaning notes, buzzing notes, screeching notes, worse than the railway train. I could not stay in the same room with her, and used rather to go out and sit in the cold attic.

"I never actually fought her, for I always pitied her weakness, and her claws were very long and sharp. Her daughter was just as annoying in other ways, though I must confess that her ball-games were rather pretty. But still I do not agree with frivolity being turned into a science, and her games were almost scientific in grace and action. I will try to describe to you her morning occupation.

"First of all, of course, was the mewling scene--'Mieaou--mieaou--mieaou!' 'What is it my little sweetie wants, then?' the lady of the house would ask; 'does it want its pretty little ball?' And then she would throw the miserable soft ball to her.

"I sat by and looked on, half scornful, half amused, half---- I forget what the other half was!"

"Half asleep?" suggested Pussy.

"Perhaps half asleep, but I forget. The kitten would then watch where the ball fell,

waiting till it stopped rolling. She would never touch it until it got to a considerable distance from her. Then she would suddenly dart upon a hassock or a footstool close by it, and fiercely gaze down upon it. After a while, she would stretch out one paw, and set it rolling, and, as it rolled, crawl after it, crouching low down to the ground.

"Suddenly a pounce, and a little squeak of delight: 'The ball is mine,' she thinks, and begins to play with it. She tosses it to and fro, now biting it, now patting it--preparatory, no doubt, to swallowing it.

"But do not be too sure, Miss Pussy! See, the ball flies from her, as if possessed with life. It rolls away, on and on. And Pussy, who had thought it dead, seems struck with wonder. 'Can it be alive after all?' she thinks; 'there must be a mouse inside it!' then scamper, scamper, a spring and a leap, and she has caught the ball again. Once more it escapes from her claws--once more she bounds towards it, and now it is surely hers. I confess it was rather interesting to me to look on, and more than once I nearly joined in the chase after the ball myself. Then Pussy would roll about on the floor with it, but never did she find a mouse inside it. Poor Pussy, every day she deceived herself thus! Then I would laugh to myself. Cats are such silly aimless things! They have no higher motives than a soft ball!"

"Yes," said Miss Perkie, "but isn't it time you began your story?"

"That is my story, you simpleton!" answered King Charlie.

"Oh, I did not know that: it was not much like one, you know."

"Eh? I call it a capital story. But now it is your turn again, unless Miss Nelly will tell us one?" he said, and turned to me.

"I don't know many stories of cats' and dogs' adventures; but I will describe a walk I once took with the dog I had before you, Charlie, if you like."

And I began: "His name was Tim, and he was a Pomeranian dog. Everybody liked him, and he liked everybody and everything excepting cats. He never harmed our cats, though--it was before your time, Perkie--and never used even to worry them. But he could not abide strange cats. His greatest enemy was a big black tom, that lived quite near here. He is dead now, killed by Tim, and I am going to tell you how it all happened.

"One day we were out for our morning walk--just as we go now, Charlie--when he spied this hated cat perched up on a high rock that overhung the lane. He was peering down at us, and I suppose he thought we should not see him. But 'Tim's

eyes looked everywhere when we were out together,' I used to say. At any rate, he saw his enemy up there at once, and made after him at full speed. The frightened cat did not seem to know what to do, and in his flurry did the worst thing he could have done. Behind him stretched a field of barley, and the foolish animal rushed straight into it. I called to Tim, but he did not hear, or pretended not to.

"The next thing I saw was Tim coming along, wagging his tail, the tom-cat dead between his teeth.

"I scolded Tim, and beat him; but he could not understand that he had not done a very virtuous deed. For my own part, I was not sorry the cat had been killed; he was a great nuisance in the neighbourhood, and often used to steal our chickens. So I could not find the heart to give Tim all the beating he deserved; and when he stood up on his hind-legs, half-sorrowfully, half-beseechingly, looking into my face, I felt that he had only acted according to his nature, and that what was wrong in us to do might not be a sin in him. Therefore I took the dear old dog back again into my favour, and forgave him his disobedience in not coming when I called him. The darling old fellow bore me no spite, and soon he was gambolling along again at my side, as though nothing had happened."

"Quite right, quite right!" interposed King Charlie at this point; "but go on with the story."

"We walked on until we came to a farm-yard," I continued. "All of a sudden Tim rushed forward, then back again to me, barking loudly, as though mad.

"What is it, Tim? What is it? Good dog! good fellow!" I cried to him, but no good; he seemed distracted about something.

"Then I looked in the direction in which he was barking, and there I saw on the steps of the barn a large toy-lamb, which some children must have left behind them. On its back a bird was perched. The poor dickie had made a mistake; he thought, no doubt, it was a real lamb! And Tim, too, who had never seen such an extraordinary sight before, was astonished beyond measure, and resented what he thought was meant for a personal insult to himself.

"He scrambled under the wooden fence that surrounded the farm-yard, and hurried towards the terrible object.

"Come back--here, Tim--Tim!" I shouted after him, but in vain: the bird had flown from the lamb's back, and the lamb was already torn to tatters by the furious dog.

"Then he came back to me, barking 'See how I have treated the impostor!'

"But I did not see with his eyes. I whipped him again, and after having given the woman at the farm enough money to buy another lamb, I took him home. Two misbehaviours in one walk I thought quite enough.

"Poor old Tim! he died soon afterwards, and then you came, you know, Charlie. That's all my story. I love to recall my memories of dear old Tim; but I am afraid I've not interested you two much."

"No, not much, as far as I am concerned," rudely answered King Charles. I did not mean it, but I had made him very jealous by the love I had shown for Tim. I could not therefore take offence at his rude answer, especially as His Majesty had always been petted and spoilt so much.

"It is Perkie's turn now to tell her other story," he added.

"I am ready," said Pussy, and began at once: "As I said before, my story shall be about the same three dogs, and how they tried to catch a mouse. I heard it from the mouse's own lips--I'll tell you how, later on--so it must be true!

"The lazy dogs were, as usual, snoring in the kitchen of the house to which they belonged. A little mouse peeped her head out of a hole, and saw them asleep. 'Surely,' she thought,--'surely I can get onto the table without waking them.' So she tried.

"She reached the table without a sound, and the dogs still snored on peacefully. To mount the leg of the table, and to climb up among the dishes and glass were but the matter of a moment to her. Then she set to work. As she tasted the nice, fresh cheese, she quite forgot all about her enemies, the dogs. She clattered the plates, and made such a noise, that they soon started from their sleep.

"A mouse! a mouse on the table!' they cried, and rushed towards it.

"I am, anyhow, safe up here,' thought mousie, and nibbled on.

"The dogs soon grew weary of waiting below, and consulted together as to what they should do. At last they hit upon a plan. They seized the table-cloth between their teeth, and began to drag it from the table. Crash! crash! down came the dishes and plates and vases, knives and forks and all, smothering the dogs in broken bits of glass and water.

"Poor little mousie was nearly dragged down too, only she just managed to

scramble onto the table again, whence she leaped down to the ground. The dogs saw her, however, and gave chase. She climbed up the wooden partition leading to the loft; but a friend of mine sat up there in wait for her. The sly puss had expected that all would turn out as it had happened, and thought she would get a nice meal without the trouble of hunting it down. She was mistaken, though--for mousie saw her, and stopped half-way up the wall, just out of reach of the dogs. They stood below, barking at her, but could do nothing more.

"After a while mousie felt her strength giving way, so she ran a little sideways along the wall, jumped down, and scampered through the open door along the passage. Her three torturers hurried after her, and away they all went helter-skelter.

"Now, midway across the passage stood the hall-bench. The mouse sprang over it at one bound; but the three clumsy dogs were not so clever. The first one jumped too short, and he just caught the further side of the bench; he pulled it backwards, and together both came down with a crash. He limped back to the hearth-side with a lame leg, having had enough of mouse-catching. His two companions saw his fall, and followed him. All bullies are cowards!" sagely added Pussy, parenthetically.

"And what became of the mouse?" asked the impatient Charlie.

"Why, I was there for her all ready at the end of the passage, and the dogs had done my work for me. But I did not eat her up. I promised her her life if she would tell me all about how she escaped from them, and what they had suffered--and that's how I know it all."

"Thank you, Pussy dear, for your----"

"What are you thinking about, child, calling me Pussy?" exclaimed my godmother, shaking me from a deep sleep. "I have come to bid you good-bye, as I am going now. Little girls should be more respectful to their elders."

"But, really, I suppose I must have been dreaming that----"

"Little girls should not dream foolish things. You should know better, my dear. Now, good-bye, Nelly!"

And so it was all a dream! Yes, there lay Pussy and Charlie fast asleep, too. Dear me! I wish it had been real, though!

A FORTUNE IN AN EMPTY WALLET.

IN the north of England, several hundred years ago, there lived a young knight. He was very poor, as his father had spent all his money, and the only things of value that he left his son were a white horse of wonderful beauty and a very curious old sword. Edgar--that was the knight's name--was obliged to leave his home, for he had no money to spend in keeping up a large house; and, besides, his father had been deeply in debt, and the tradesmen were clamouring for their bills to be paid, and threatening to put him in prison if he did not pay them. So, having filled two bundles with clothes and food, he mounted his horse and rode off to seek his fortune abroad.

He had been journeying along for several days, not knowing where to go or what to do, when one evening he found himself riding through a dark and gloomy forest. He was thinking to himself how dismal his future looked, and was wondering how he should be able to make a living, when all of a sudden his horse started, reared up on his hind-legs, and then stood quite still, trembling with fright.

Edgar looked around him, and saw, standing under the shadow of an old yew-tree, the figure of an aged man. His form was bent with years, and he leaned for support on a thick knotted stick. His clothes were patched and torn, his toes peeped out from his worn-out boots, while in one hand he carried an old wallet, which had been carefully mended, and which evidently contained something that he greatly valued.

As soon as Edgar's horse stopped short, the old man came near, and asked for alms.

"You have come to the wrong person," replied Edgar; "for though I would gladly help you if I could, I expect that I am quite as poor as you are, except that I still have my sword and my good steed."

The old man looked earnestly at the sword, and his eyes sparkled as he asked eagerly--

"Where did you get that sword from?"

"My father gave it to me," replied Edgar; "and he brought it home with him when he returned from the wars beyond the seas."

"Noble knight!" returned the old man, "in my wallet I have a jewel that is beyond price. That sword of yours takes my fancy, and if you like to exchange it for my wallet and what it contains, I assure you that you will not repent it."

"Let me first see the jewel," said Edgar; for although he was very anxious to get it, he wanted first of all to make quite sure that it was really there.

"Before I let you have my wallet I must have your sword," said the old man; "but if you do not like your bargain, I will give it you back again. You see I cannot possibly run away with it, for you are on horse-back, while I am on foot."

At first Edgar refused to do this, but at last he agreed; for he thought to himself that he could easily get the sword back, as of course the old man could not run as fast as his horse. He therefore handed down his sword and received the old wallet in exchange.

He opened it eagerly, but to his rage and dismay found that it was empty. In his anger he turned round so suddenly, that by accident he touched his horse with his spur. The horse at once began to gallop off, and it had carried him some distance before he could stop it.

When he returned to the spot where he had given up his sword, he at first saw nothing of the beggar, but happening to look up, to his great surprise he saw him sitting in the top of a tall tree, having climbed there so as to be out of his reach.

"Honoured knight!" cried the beggar, "forgive me for playing you such a trick, and rest assured that you shall not in the end suffer for it. This sword which I hold in my hand belonged to my great-grandfather, who was killed in the first crusade, and it has chanced to become your property in some way or other. I knew it at once by the curious hilt, of which the cross-piece is, as you know, turned up at one end and down at the other. Give me your knightly word that you will not harm me, and I will come down and explain to you how it is that I value the sword so highly. Of one thing you may be certain--I shall not deceive you again. And what I tell you will be of great service to you."

Edgar promised the beggar that he should be safe, and the latter began to scramble down from his uncomfortable perch. But, wonderful to relate, he was quite changed, and was now a handsome youth, though still dressed in the same tattered old clothes.

"My name," said the beggar, "is Bertram; and to you I owe a debt of gratitude that I can never repay, for by means of this sword I can win back the castle and lands of my ancestors, from which I have been lately driven to wander about in the

guise of an old beggar. Henceforth we will be as brothers, and the half of my lands shall be yours; for had it not been for you, they would never again have become mine. But let me tell you my story.

"Three years ago my father died, and I became heir to all his estates; but my step-mother was a wicked woman, and hated me with all her might. Twelve months since she married again, and both she and her husband set to work to drive me from my home. Many of their attempts failed; but at last they secured the help of an old wizard, who turned me into a beggar. Of course nobody recognized me in this disguise, and my own servants only laughed and jeered when I told them who I was, and my step-father drove me from the castle with blows that I was too feeble to resist.

"I begged him to have mercy, but he only laughed; and the wizard, who was standing by him, said, 'A beggar you must remain until you find your great-grandfather's sword:' then they slammed the door in my face.

"My father thought that he was perfectly safe to keep the castle for ever, as he believed the sword had been lost in a foreign land, and that I never could possibly find it again. But chance has brought it to me when I least expected it, and at a time when I am within a mile of my castle. Come, my friend, let us go and take possession, for I know that the wizard spoke the truth when he said that I should enjoy my own again when I got this sword, because already half of what he said has come true, since I am once more my own self, instead of being an old beggar."

Edgar took Bertram up behind him on his horse, and together they rode off to the castle, which was not far distant. Leaving the horse tied to a tree, they drew near to the gate, when they heard shouts and songs and music, from which they knew that a great feast was being held.

"This way," said Bertram; and they ran down a narrow passage, then up a steep flight of stairs which led to a platform, from which they could look into the courtyard. A wonderful scene met their eyes. The courtyard was full of people, who were eating, drinking, singing, and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. Two funny men were so happy that they were kissing each other; and in the middle several servants, with their long sharp knives, were cutting up an ox that had been roasted whole, while a number more were bringing in fresh dishes of delicacies, such as peacocks, truffles, and boars' heads.

Bertram quickly looked around, and whispering to Edgar--"He is not here," motioned him to follow, and ran down the stairs again.

They passed through many passages and rooms, meeting no one, for everybody

seemed to be helping at the feast. At length they reached a stone terrace that ran along outside the wall of the castle. They walked along this, until Bertram suddenly stopped opposite a large window, and signed to Edgar to look through.

He did so, and saw a man seated at a table with a lot of money before him, which he was paying away as fast as he could to several wicked-looking Jews with fur caps, who were putting it into bags, and carrying it away.

"The wretch!" said Bertram; "see how he is wasting my money. Let us dash in upon him through the window, so that he may see his day is over." So saying, he jumped right through the window on to the floor, closely followed by Edgar.

At the sound of the breaking of glass the Jews looked up, and seeing two strange figures coming through the window, they ran off as fast as they could, leaving their money behind, and shouting out that they had seen a spirit. His step-father fainted with terror, but the old steward at once knew his master again, and kneeling down, kissed his hand, blessing the day that had brought him back once more. Soon all the servants came running in, having heard the shouts of the Jews as they rushed away. Their delight at again seeing their young master, whom they had mourned as dead, was beyond bounds, and they brought him beautiful clothes, and took away his ragged garments, while his wicked step-father was hurried off to prison.

They then conducted him to the courtyard, and seated him in the chair of state, after which they served the banquet that had been prepared for his step-father. But amidst all his happiness Bertram did not forget his friend Edgar, who had been the means of restoring his inheritance to him. Taking him by the hand, he led him to the seat of honour, saying aloud as he did so,--

"Henceforth we are brothers, and everything shall belong to both of us equally. But for you, I should still be wandering about in the forest; so the least I can do is to share my good-fortune with you."

Bertram and Edgar lived together for many years, beloved by all; and Edgar never repented the day when he exchanged his sword for an empty wallet.