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PUSS IN BOOTS

Once upon a time, there was a young man who received a very small inheritance when his father died. His older brothers received bigger and more useful things, but he was given only a cat. At first, the young man felt sad and thought that a cat could not do much to change his life.

—What will I do with only a cat? —he said worriedly.

He looked at the animal and sighed. It seemed unfair that his brothers had received better things, while he was left with something that, in his eyes, could not change his luck. However, that cat was not an ordinary cat. He was very clever, very observant, and full of confidence.

One day, the cat looked at his master and spoke calmly.

—Do not worry, my master —said the cat—. If you give me a bag and a pair of boots, I will help you.

The young man was extremely surprised.

—A bag and a pair of boots? —he asked—. And what do you want them for?

—Trust me —the cat replied—. You will see that everything will turn out well.

Since he had nothing to lose, the young man gave the cat a bag and a pair of boots. As soon as he put them on, the cat looked very elegant. He walked with such confidence and style that he seemed like a very important person.

—Now our plan begins —said the cat with a small smile.

The cat went to the countryside, opened his bag, and waited patiently. With great skill, he managed to catch a rabbit. Then he went straight to the king's palace and asked to speak with him.

—I bring a gift for His Majesty —he announced politely—. It is from my master, the Marquis of Carabas.

In truth, his master was not a marquis at all, but the cat had invented that name because it sounded noble and important. The king received the gift with pleasure.

—What a kind gesture —said the king—. Give my thanks to the Marquis of Carabas.

The cat did the same thing for several days. Sometimes he brought partridges, other times rabbits, and he always repeated that they were gifts from his master. Little by little, the king became curious about that mysterious marquis who kept sending him such fine presents.

—He must be a very generous gentleman —the king would say.

One day, the cat ran back to his master and said in a hurry:

—Quick, come with me to the river. It is very important that you do exactly as I tell you.

The young man was confused, but he decided to obey. When they reached the river, the cat told him to step into the water.

—Stay there for a moment and say nothing —he instructed.

Just then, the king's carriage passed by, and the princess was traveling with him. The cat began to shout as loudly as he could:

—Help! Help! The Marquis of Carabas is drowning!

The king immediately ordered the carriage to stop.

—Help him at once! —he commanded.

The guards pulled the young man out of the river. Meanwhile, the cat approached the king and said:

—Your Majesty, thieves stole my master's clothes while he was bathing.

The king, who already had a good impression of the supposed marquis, ordered elegant clothes to be brought for him. When the young man got dressed, he looked very fine indeed. The princess looked at him kindly, and the young man, though still amazed by everything that was happening, greeted them politely.

—Welcome, Marquis of Carabas —said the king kindly—. Please ride with us in the carriage.

The cat, happy that his plan was working, ran ahead of the carriage. He knew he still had much to do.

As he hurried along the road, he met some peasants working in a field.

—Listen carefully —said the cat—. When the king passes and asks whose lands these are, you must say they belong to the Marquis of Carabas.

The peasants were surprised to see a cat in boots speaking so seriously, but they agreed.

Soon the king passed by and asked:

—Whose beautiful fields are these?

—They belong to the Marquis of Carabas! —the peasants answered.

The king looked at the young man with admiration.

—I see that you have very fine lands —he said.

The young man did not know what to say, so he smiled shyly.

Farther ahead, the cat did the same thing with other workers who cared for meadows, mills, and crops. Every time the king passed, they gave the same answer.

—All this belongs to the Marquis of Carabas.

Each time, the king grew more impressed. The princess also listened carefully and thought that the young man seemed kind, calm, and noble.

At last, the cat arrived at a great castle that belonged to a very rich and powerful ogre. That ogre could transform himself into different animals, and the cat wanted to win that castle for his master.

He entered with great politeness and greeted the ogre.

—Sir Ogre, I have heard that you have an extraordinary power — said the cat—. They say that you can turn yourself into any animal.

The ogre, very proud, replied:

—That is true. I can transform myself into whatever I wish.

—That seems incredible to me —said the cat—. Could you show me?

So the ogre turned himself into a great lion. The cat jumped back a little, pretending to be frightened.

—How impressive! —he exclaimed—. You truly are very powerful.

The ogre, pleased to be admired, lifted his head proudly. Then the cat added:

—But now I wonder if you could also turn yourself into a small animal, like a mouse. That would surely be much harder.

The ogre burst into laughter.

—Of course I can.

And in that very moment, he turned himself into a mouse. The cat, who had been waiting for exactly that moment, made a quick leap and caught the mouse at once.

—Done —said the cat with satisfaction.

Now the castle had no owner, and the cat hurried to prepare everything. He checked the halls, made sure everything looked grand, and got the place ready to receive visitors. When he saw the king's carriage approaching, he went out to greet it with a deep bow.

—Welcome to the castle of the Marquis of Carabas —he announced.

The king was amazed. The castle was beautiful, large, and elegant. It had wide halls, lovely gardens, and a table prepared to receive guests.

—Marquis —said the king—, your castle is truly magnificent.

The young man could hardly believe what was happening, but he understood that the cat had done all this to help him. So he began to act with greater confidence and kindness.

During the meal, the king spoke with him, and the princess also talked cheerfully. The more they got to know him, the more they liked him. The young man was simple, respectful, and good-hearted. He did not boast, and he spoke honestly, and that pleased everyone in the palace.

After some time, the king said with a smile:

—I believe my daughter and you get along very well.

The princess smiled, and the young man smiled too. As the days passed, they came to know each other better, and a very special affection began to grow between them. They enjoyed talking, walking, and sharing quiet moments in the castle.

Not long afterward, the young man and the princess were married. There was a great celebration, with music, delicious food, flowers, and much joy. The king was happy, the princess was happy, and the young man never forgot that it had all begun with a very clever cat who believed in him when no one else did.

As for Puss in Boots, he lived happily and proudly, knowing that he had helped his master through intelligence, courage, and cleverness. He always walked elegantly through the castle, and everyone looked at him with admiration.

From that day on, everyone remembered that sometimes the greatest help can come from the most unexpected friend, and that intelligence can open paths that seem impossible.

And so, among smiles, good fortune, and new opportunities, the young man, the princess, and Puss in Boots lived happily for a very, very long time.

THE END

