



# Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

## The Marvelous Dog and the Wonderful Cat

*From "The Firelight Fairy Book" by Henry Beston*



nce upon a time there was an old enchanter who taught magic and enchantment to the younger fairies. Year after year, and morning after morning, he was to be found at his school-room in the Fairies' College, standing between his desk and a blackboard, now writing down the spell for turning noses into turnips, now changing sunflower seeds into pearls before the very eyes of his pupils.

The old enchanter liked this life of quiet and study, and doubtless would have been teaching in Fairyland to this very day, had he not been so unfortunate as to quarrel with the terrible sorcerer Zidoc, who was then Lord High Chancellor of the Fairies' College. I have forgotten exactly what the quarrel was about, but I think that it had to do with the best spell for causing castles to fall to pieces in an instant. At any rate, Zidoc, who considered himself quite the most wonderful enchanter in Fairyland, was furious at being opposed, and told the old enchanter, very angrily, that he was not to have his classes any more and must leave the college at once. So the poor old gentleman packed up his magic books, put his enchanter's wand into its silver case, and went to the country one pleasant day in search of a house.

Thanks to the advice of a friendly chimney swift, it did not take him long to find one. The dwelling was the property of the Fairy Jocapa. It stood just off the high road, close by a lane of great oaks whose shiny, fringed leaves glistened in the hot noon-day sun; it had a high roof with sides steep as mountain slopes, and one great chimney; and its second story thrust itself out over the first in the old-fashioned way. Green fields, little hills, and pleasant meadows in which red and white cows were grazing lay behind the dwelling.

Seeing the front door wide open, the enchanter walked in. It was very quiet. Only the far away klinge-klangle of a cow-bell could be heard.

"Here shall I live," said the enchanter. And he brought his possessions to the house.

Now, one autumnal morning, when a blue haze hung over the lonely fields from which the reapers had departed, and the golden leaves were wet underfoot, the old enchanter went for a walk down the lane, and finding the day agreeable, kept on until he found himself in the woods. Arriving at the crest of a little hill in the woodland, he saw below him, almost at the foot of the slope, a countryman with a white puppy and a black kitten following at his heels. The little dog barked merrily out of pure high spirits, whilst the kitten leaped and struck with its tiny paws at the passing white butterflies.

As the old enchanter approached the countryman, he happened to hear him say to the animals,—

"Alas, my poor innocents, what a pity that I should have to abandon you!"

"What's that?" said the enchanter, halting the countryman. "You intend to abandon these helpless creatures?"

"Alas, I must," replied the countryman, pulling a large blue bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and applying it to the corners of his eyes. "We are too poor to be able to feed them,

and my children love them so well that I cannot find it in my heart to do them harm. I am taking them into these woods to abandon them, in the hope that, like the wild animals, they will soon learn to shift for themselves.”

“Give them to me,” said the old enchanter, “I will bring them up.” The countryman nodded his head. “As for you, here is a golden florin. May it bring you better fortune.”

Thus did the white puppy and black kitten change hands.

Once he had led the animals safely home, the enchanter resolved to make them the most wonderful animals that had ever been seen in the whole wide world, whether in Fairyland or out of it. Being an enchanter, he could, of course, do this more easily than other people. So he taught the cat and the dog all the known languages, then history, arithmetic, dancing, social deportment, and a variety of the best magic and spells. The cat, as was to be expected, was particularly good on anything that had ‘cat’ in it; he once catalogued all the principal catastrophes; while the dog, although a good student, had a fancy for writing doggerel. Many and many a time, when the enchanter and his wonderful animals were seated in their armchairs round a blazing fire, talking exactly as any three good friends might talk, a nose would flatten itself against the panes, and the three companions would see looking in at them some stranger whose curiosity had got the better of his manners.

The dog, I may say, had grown up to be a fine fellow of the short-haired, white bull terrier family; the cat had grown to be as aristocratic as a panther. When their education was complete, the animals came to their teacher and begged him to let them go away and see the world. For a long time the enchanter, who loved his charges very much indeed, resisted their request; but as they continued to press him, he came at length to yield. Calling them before him, he said to them:—

“Well, dear pupils, if you must go, you must go. I owe the Fairy Jocapa twelve months rent for this house. She is now living with her nephew, the King of the Land of the Runaway Rivers. You shall take twelve golden florins to her. Your route will take you over all the kingdoms of the whole wide world.”

So the white dog, who was the stronger of the two, took the purse with the twelve golden coins, and put it in a large wallet which he wore at his side, and then both the wonderful animals said good-bye. At the corner of the lane they turned again to look for the last time at their dwelling, and saw their old master still waving at them from the little window over the door. Then they fared over the hills and far away.

So wise, so well-bred and good-tempered were these wonderful animals, that their journey across the world was a great success from the beginning. Their fame spread from kingdom to kingdom like wild-fire. The universities, colleges, and other learned societies fought with each other for the privilege of entertaining these distinguished students. To this very day, the address which the cat made on catapults and cataplasms, before the professors of the University of Sagessa, is remembered as one of the great events of the time; while the dog’s address on dogma before the assembled scholars of the Royal Academy of Fairyland was

printed in a special book bound in gold leaf and walpus leather. Both the cat and the dog were awarded countless honorary decorations.

And so, little by little, they came to a hilly land in which all the streams raced pell-mell to the sea, and there they knew themselves to be in the Kingdom of the Runaway Rivers. A three days' journey brought them to the royal castle. Arriving in the twilight, they were somewhat surprised to find a number of torchbearers waiting for them in the castle courtyard. With great respect, these attendants conducted the cat and the dog into a little ante-room, and then retired, leaving them alone. A few minutes later, a very old woman, who, the animals noticed, was stone-blind, came to take them before the king.

“How strange!” whispered the cat in its rather meouw-y voice.

“Very,” whispered back the dog in his deeper tone.

Having opened, one after the other, three great doors with three different iron keys, the old woman, guiding herself by touching the wall with her hand, led the animals into a long dark corridor. The cat, who could see quite well in the dark, did not mind this, but the dog was not particularly pleased. The echoes of the old woman's boots went rolling along in the hollow darkness; the dog could hear his heart beat, and saw his black companion's eyes glowing like pools of flame. Then, to their mutual relief, the animals saw a point of light appearing far down the passage, and on reaching this, they discovered a second blind old woman holding a torch. The first old woman beckoned them to follow this new guide, and disappeared again into the dark corridors by which they had arrived.

The second old woman, lifting high the torch, first led her charges through three more great doors, all of which she carefully locked behind her. Soon the animals found themselves at the top of a winding stair whose end was lost in darkness. Down this stair they went, turning, ever turning, down and round, down and round, till both cat and dog felt dizzily that they must have reached the heart of the earth. Then, little by little, a pin-point of light began to glow brighter and brighter, and the animals found themselves at the foot of the stairs and opposite a little door. And there, by this door, stood another blind old woman, who held a torch and beckoned to the animals to follow.

Three more doors they passed, the last one opening on a very narrow, winding passage. In and out they turned, walking one behind the other, for a time that seemed very, very long. Suddenly a narrow door appeared in the winding wall, which opened inward as they drew near, revealing a beautiful round chamber richly furnished and hung with the finest tapestries. Beside the fireplace, in which a wood-fire was cheerily burning, sat a gray-haired lady, who was no other than the Fairy Jocapa, and in the centre of the room, reading a great book by the light of many candles, sat a young man, the King.

In spite of the enchanter's careful training in manners, the cat and the dog, I am sorry to say, almost stared for an instant at the King. Small wonder that they did so, for the unfortunate young man lay under a horrid spell, and his face and hands were not pink or white or sun-brown, like yours or mine, but bright green, like a parrot's wing!

“Welcome, O wonderful animals,” said the enchanted King. “Your fame has gone before you into every land, and it is said that there is no question you cannot answer. Listen, then, to my story and help me if you can.

“You see me before you, hideously changed. Until you entered here, an instant past, no eyes but those of my aunt had beheld my horrible countenance. It was she who caused this enchanted chamber to appear in the heart of the foundations of my castle; and in this chamber I have hidden since that terrible hour when the spell was put upon me. My subjects only know that I am still alive. The Lord Chancellor rules the kingdom in my stead. But hearken to my story.

“Ten months ago, as I was driving my chariot down a narrow road built along a river-bank close to the stream, I encountered a chariot being driven furiously in the opposite direction. The driver of the chariot was a tall, elderly man, wearing a wizard’s cap; his face was red as with anger, an evil light gleamed in his small malicious eyes. In order to let him pass, I turned to one side, as near to the river-brink as I dared; but the space was too narrow, our chariots locked wheels, and his was overthrown. Turning upon me a face aflame with hatred, he cried out, ‘I will teach you what it is to offend the Enchanter Zidoc’; and an instant later the wizard himself, the struggling horses, and the overturned chariot disappeared in a rumble of thunder and a great flash of flame. I turned homeward, never noticing that anything had happened to me. As I chanced to pass a roadside cottage, a little child playing about saw me and ran, screaming for fear, to the door. A little farther on, I stopped to drink of a spring. Judge of my horror when I leaned over the clear pool of water and saw that my face had turned a bright green! I waited till nightfall, stole into the castle unobserved, and sought the aid of my aunt, the fairy. You know the rest. Speak, O wonderful dog and wonderful cat, and bid me hope a little!”

And the poor King hid his bright green face in his hands.

“The Enchanter Zidoc is an old enemy of our dear master,” said the white dog, “and his power as a sorcerer is the greatest in Fairyland!”

“I have tried all my powers against him in vain,” said the Fairy Jocapa, sadly.

“But let us not despair,” broke in the cat. “Zidoc is now to be found in these dominions. His castle lies on the border of the Silver Hills. The dog and I will go there, and see if we can help the King.”

So the Fairy and the unhappy King thanked the wise animals, and sent for the blind old women to lead them back to the upper world. Early next morning, the famous pair began the journey to the Enchanter’s den. The dog’s plan was to pretend to be but an everyday stray dog, and to this end, he rolled several times in a mud-puddle; the cat, too, was to appear as a stray cat, and neglected his fine black coat in order to look the part.

Unfortunately for their plan, Zidoc had in his chamber a little enchanted bell which rang shrilly when danger threatened him. Hearing the bell ring late at night, Zidoc rose from his bed, and hurrying to the turret window, saw, by the light of the waning moon, the dog and

the cat making their way to the castle through the wood. Rubbing his hands with glee, he determined to let the two animals walk headlong into his power, and then inflict upon them some terrible revenge.

The first day the dog went indoors, and concealed himself under a sofa, while the cat remained outside. When twilight came, the dog ran out and met the cat in the castle garden.

“Did you discover anything?” asked the cat.

“Nothing whatever,” replied the dog.

“I will try to-morrow,” said the cat.

And so, when the morning came, the dog remained outside while the cat concealed himself behind a curtain. When the twilight came, the animals met again.

“Did you discover anything?” asked the dog.

“Very little,” replied the cat. “The Sorcerer Serponel is coming to-morrow to pay Zidoc a visit. One of us must hide in the room in which they will talk; for perhaps we may learn something which may help us to lift the spell from the King.”

“To-morrow it is my turn,” said the dog. And so the next morning he stole into the house and hid again beneath the sofa.

Now Zidoc knew very well where the dog had concealed himself. Moreover, he had summoned the powerful Serponel to his aid in order that the dog and the cat should have no opportunity to escape.

When Serponel arrived, both the wicked enchanters went to the room in which the dog lay concealed. First, Zidoc locked the only door with a great key and then he said to Serponel,—

“Brother, someone tells me that there is an enemy hidden under the sofa.”

“Yes, brother,” replied the dreadful Serponel.

“And something tells me that it is time to let him feel your staff.”

Now Zidoc had an enchanted staff whose blows were mortal, and knowing this, the poor dog, who was trapped between the wall and the two sorcerers, grew cold with fear to the tip of his white tail. Just as he was about to make a bolt into the open, Zidoc dragged the sofa swiftly aside, and aimed a terrible blow at him, which by the greatest good luck just missed its mark. He then ran out into the room, pursued by the sorcerers, who little by little forced him toward a corner.

And now, just as Zidoc, holding the staff uplifted, was about to strike the poor dog with all his force, a black shape, with flaming eyes and paws outstretched to scratch, leaped through

the open window and landed upon Zidoc's back. It was the brave cat, who had heard the fracas from his hiding-place below and had clawed his way up the castle wall to help his friend. Valiant Puss, forgetting in one instant, I must admit, all its knowledge of languages, catastrophes, history, social deportment, and agriculture, plunged instantly into the fray, and gave Zidoc a frightful scratch, which so upset him that it caused him to drop his staff, while the dog profiting by the confusion, and forgetting all about geometry, mathematics, agriculture, and dogma, managed to give Serponel a good bite just above the ankle.

The wily Zidoc, however, was not to be so easily thwarted. Uttering a magic word, he caused the room to be filled with darkness, and in the cover of this darkness he transformed himself instantly into a black cat exactly like the learned cat, while Serponel changed himself into a white dog exactly like the learned dog. At the same moment he caused the locked door to fly open.

"Now," thought he, "I will cause the cat to follow the wrong white dog, and the dog to follow the wrong cat; we shall thus separate the animals, and when we have lured them far away from each other, Serponel and I will resume our true forms, and destroy these meddling creatures."

When the darkness cleared, the hearts of the true animals fell for fear lest the sorcerer's ruse be successful; but they met the challenge readily, and instead of fleeing, stood their ground; the true dog battling with the false dog, the real cat with the false cat. Never was such a hullabaloo heard in Fairyland. Then, seeing that he was in danger of being badly scratched, Zidoc brought on another darkness, the floor of the castle shook, a noise as of thunder roared and rattled through the room. When the darkness ended, both the enchanters had been separated and the cats were confused, the real dog was chasing the real cat, thinking that he was following Zidoc, while Serponel, who had been the false white dog, was pursuing Zidoc, who had been the false black cat! Down the stairs, over the terraces and the gardens ran the true dog, pursuing the true cat, while indoors, up and down through the rooms and over the furniture, raced the false animals.

The poor cat, thinking he was being pursued by the wrong dog, grew short of breath, and, hearing the snapping at his heels, ran up a convenient tree. Hardly had he reached a point above the dog's jaws when a voice said:—

"Why, my pupils, my pupils! What a way to behave! Stop your quarreling this instant!"

The animals turned to look, and saw their master, the old enchanter. He had been worried by their long absence and had gone forth to look for them. Thus, at the same moment that the poor dog saw that he had been pursuing his friend, the cat saw that he had been escaping from his comrade.

Suddenly a noise from the castle arrested their attention, and on looking up, all saw through the windows the false dog pursuing the false cat down the hall of state.

Now, if you remember the first part of this story, you will recall that Zidoc quarreled with the old enchanter over the right spell for destroying castles. A triumphant smile shone on

the lips of the old teacher; he stretched forth his hand toward the castle and uttered a magic word.

There was a roar as of twenty thousand cataracts, and in the twinkling of an eye, the castle collapsed in a cloud of dust, burying the two wicked magicians in its ruins.

“There, I told him so!” said the old enchanter.

When the dog and the cat had recovered from the events of the day, the three friends began their journey back to the palace of the enchanted King. He came to the castle gate to meet them, for Zidoc’s overthrow had broken the spell which had so oddly disfigured him. Through the open doors, a splendid banquet could be seen waiting, and the sound of music was heard.

So the old enchanter gave his arm to the Fairy Jocapa, the Prince gave his to the white dog, and the cat followed all by himself. Then came the host of rejoicing courtiers.

When the festival was over, the enchanter and the wonderful animals went back, loaded with royal gifts, to their own little house and lived happily there to a good old age.



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