A miller who had three children left nothing for them to inherit, except for the mill, a donkey, and a cat. These bequests did not take long to share out, and neither the solicitor nor the notary* were called in: their fees would soon have eaten up the whole of the miserable inheritance. The eldest son got the mill, the middle one the donkey, and the youngest got only the cat. The young man was inconsolable at being left so meagre a bequest. ‘My brothers,’ he said, ‘will be able to make a decent living if they work together; but as for me, once I’ve eaten my cat and made his fur into a muff to keep my hands warm, I shall just have to starve to death.’

The cat, who could understand what he said, but pretended not to, said in a calm and serious manner: ‘You mustn’t be upset, Master; all you need to do is give me a bag, and have a pair of boots made for me to walk among the brambles, and you will see that you are not as badly provided for as you believe.’ The cat’s master did not expect much to come of this, but he had seen the cat play so many cunning tricks when catching rats and mice,* such as to play dead by hanging upside down by his feet or burying himself in flour, that he had some hope that the cat might help him in his wretched plight. When the cat had been given what he had asked for, he dressed up smartly in his boots and, putting the bag round his neck, he took hold of the tie-strings in his two front paws. Then he set off for a warren where there were plenty of rabbits. In his bag he put bran and sow-thistles,* and then waited, stretching himself out as if he were dead, for some young rabbit, still ignorant of this world’s trickery, to come and poke its nose into it in order to eat the food he had put there. Scarcely had he lain down than he got what he wanted: a silly
young rabbit went into the bag, and instantly Master Cat, pulling the strings tight, caught and killed it without mercy.

Full of pride at his catch, he went to visit the King in his palace, and asked to speak to him. He was shown up to His Majesty’s apartments, where he entered and said, bowing low before the King: ‘Sire, I have here a rabbit from a warren, which My Lord the Marquis of Carabas’ (this was the name which he saw fit to give his master) ‘has commanded me to present to you on his behalf.’

‘Tell your master,’ said the King, ‘that I thank him, and that I am well pleased.’

On another occasion, he went into a cornfield and hid himself, holding his bag open again; two partridges went into it, he pulled the string tight, and caught the pair of them. Then he went to present them to the King, as he had with the rabbit. The King was again pleased to accept the two partridges, and tipped him some money. The cat continued in this way for two or three months, from time to time taking game from his master’s hunting-grounds to the King.

One day, he found out that the King would be going for a drive along the river in his coach, with his daughter, the most beautiful princess in the world, and he said to his master: ‘If you follow my advice, your fortune will be made. All you have to do is to go bathing in the river, at a place that I will show you, and then leave everything to me.’ The Marquis of Carabas did as his cat suggested, not knowing what his purpose was. While he was bathing, the King passed by, and the cat began to shout at the top of his voice: ‘Help! help! My Lord the Marquis of Carabas is drowning down here!’ At his cries, the King put his head to the window, and recognizing the cat who had so often brought him game, he ordered his guards to hurry to the rescue of His Lordship the Marquis of Carabas.

While they were getting the poor Marquis out of the river, the cat went up to the coach, and told the King that, while his
master was bathing, some thieves had come and stolen his
clothes, even though he had shouted ‘Stop thief!’ as loud as he
could (the cat, the rascal, had hidden them under a large stone).
The King at once ordered the Gentlemen of the Royal Wardrobe
to go and fetch one of his finest suits for His Lordship the
Marquis of Carabas. The King treated him with great kindness,
and since the fine clothes which he had just been given added to
his good looks (for he was handsome and well-built), the King’s
daughter found him much to her liking. The Marquis had only
to throw a glance at her two or three times with great respect
and a little tenderness for her to fall madly in love with him. The
King invited him to get into the coach and join them on their
outing.

The cat, delighted to see that his plan was beginning to suc-
cceed, went on ahead, and having met some labourers with
scythes cutting grass in a meadow he said to them: ‘Good people
mowing the grass: unless you tell the King that His Lordship, the
Marquis of Carabas, is the owner of this meadow you are mowing,
you will all be chopped up, as fine as sausagemeat.’

The King did not fail to ask the peasants who owned the
meadow they were cutting. ‘It belongs to His Lordship the
Marquis of Carabas,’ they said with one voice, for they were
scared by the threat that the cat had made.

‘It’s a fine estate you have here,’ said the King to the Marquis
of Carabas. ‘Indeed, Sire,’ answered the Marquis, ‘and that
meadow produces an abundant crop every year.’

Master Cat, still going on ahead, met some labourers harvest-
ing, and said to them: ‘Good people harvesting the corn: unless you
tell the King that His Lordship, the Marquis of Carabas, is the
owner of all these cornfields, you will all be chopped up, as fine as
sausagemeat.’

The King came past a moment later, and asked who owned all
the cornfields he could see. ‘His Lordship the Marquis of Carabas,’
replied the harvesters, and the King again congratulated the
Marquis. Master Cat, still going ahead of the coach, said the same thing to everyone he met, and the King was astonished to see how much land was owned by His Lordship the Marquis of Carabas.

Eventually, Master Cat arrived at a fine castle owned by an ogre, who was as rich as could be, because all the lands that the King had passed through were part of the castle estate. The cat, who had taken care to find out who this ogre was, and what he had the power to do, asked to speak to him, saying that he did not like to pass so near his castle without having the honour of paying his respects. The Ogre received him as politely as an ogre is able to, asking him if he would like to rest a while.

‘I have been told,’ said the cat, ‘that you have the gift of turning yourself into all kinds of animals, for instance, that you could change into a lion or an elephant.’

‘That’s quite true,’ replied the Ogre roughly, ‘and to prove it, watch me turn into a lion.’ The cat was so scared to see a lion standing before him that immediately he sprang up on the roof, which was quite difficult and dangerous because of his boots, which were no good for climbing over tiles. Some time later, seeing that the Ogre had gone back to his original shape, the cat came down, admitting that he had been really frightened. ‘I have also been told,’ he said, ‘but I can scarcely believe it, that you also have the power of taking the shape of tiny little animals, for instance of turning into a rat or a mouse, but I must confess that I think it quite impossible.’

‘Impossible?’ retorted the Ogre; ‘just wait and see’; and in a moment he changed himself into a mouse, which began to run about the floor. No sooner had the cat seen it than he jumped on it and ate it up.

Meanwhile the King had seen the Ogre’s fine castle as he went by, and thought that he would like to go inside. The cat, hearing the noise made by the coach as it passed over the drawbridge,
ran to meet it, and said to the King: ‘Welcome, Your Majesty, to the castle of His Lordship the Marquis of Carabas.’

‘My goodness, Marquis!’ exclaimed the King, ‘is this castle yours as well?—I can’t imagine anything finer than this courtyard with all its buildings around it. Let us see what is inside, please.’

The Marquis offered his hand to the young Princess, and following the King, who went first, they entered a great hall, where they found a magnificent banquet. The Ogre had had it set out for his friends, who should have been coming to see him on that very day, but, because they knew the King was there, dared not come in.

The King, delighted by the good qualities of His Lordship the Marquis of Carabas, just like his daughter, who loved him to distraction, said to the Marquis, seeing the great riches that he possessed, and after he had drunk five or six glasses of wine: ‘If you want to be my son-in-law, my Lord Marquis, you have only to say the word.’ The Marquis bowed deeply, and accepted the honour that the King had done him; and that very day he married the Princess. The cat became a great lord, and never chased a mouse again, except to please himself.

THE MORAL OF THIS TALE

Although the benefits are great
For one who owns a large estate
Because he is his father’s son,
Young men, when all is said and done,
Will find sharp wits and commonsense
Worth more than an inheritance.
ANOTHER MORAL

If the son of a miller, in ten minutes or less,
Can take a girl’s fancy, and make a princess
Look longingly at him, it proves an old truth:
That elegant clothes on a good-looking youth
Can play a distinctly significant part
In winning the love of a feminine heart.