

Fuff

ONCE upon a time there was a Princess who was much like other princesses, and even like other little girls who are not princesses, in respect that she had a father and mother who were fond of her, a nurse who was devoted to her, and that she was sometimes good and sometimes naughty. When she was good, her behaviour was perfectly royal, so sweet a little maid was never seen. Everybody said that, and it was really true. When she was naughty, why, then she was a little cat. I mean a real little black cat; hair, whiskers, teeth, tail, claws and all complete. She could change herself into this shape at will. She had only to put her hand upon a little locket of cat's-eyes and emeralds that always hung about her neck, and say "Fuff," and lo, she was transformed!

Of course, this had something to do with the fairies; although whether the dangerous gift was presented to the little princess first in fun or mischief, I cannot tell. All I know is that the princess made pretty constant use of it, more and more as she grew older, unfortunately. Was her face dirty or did her pinafore want changing, and did her coaxing old nurse venture to say in the most wheedling tones:

"Won't my sweet little princess come and let nurse make her pretty?"—if she was very good perhaps she would come, if not—*fuff*, she was a little black cat! And she arched her back, spat and swore and jumped through the nursery window, and ran along the tiles, and sat up behind the great chimneys, and looked down laughing wickedly, cat fashion, at the dismay and horror of her old nurse, and washed her own jet black little face with her sooty little paws. Oh, it was dreadful!

It was in vain that the king and queen, who had spoiled her all her life, came out into the courtyard far below and implored her with tears to come down. It was

in vain that the kitchen-boy perilled his life climbing along the steep roofs, trying to catch her, with a saucer of milk, which he spilt all over himself, in one hand, and the prettiest collar of blue ribbon and gold, in the other. Pussy was proof against blandishments. She climbed lightly and airily to the pinnacle of a little stone tower, where no sober cat in his senses, who had a family to look after and mice on his mind, would have dared to follow her, and there she sat! There, even, she sometimes went to sleep till she chose to come down. That might not be till sunset, or till she smelt the good fumes of the royal dinner pervading the upper air, as the hares and partridges turned upon the spits in the great kitchens. Then perhaps she would come. Not cross any more, oh dear no! Why should she be? She had had her own way, spent a delightful day, and made everyone else miserable. So she would jump back through the nursery window, and touching the little locket, which was still about her neck, with her right paw, would say "*Fuff*" backwards (not an easy thing to do), and lo, she was a princess again, smiling, mischievous, charming!

"Not little cat now," she would say coaxingly, throwing her arms round the poor nurse's neck, who, between tears and tremulousness, was reduced to something approaching a salt water jelly. "Not a bit cat now; kite good now; you may wash my face."

And the poor nurse was glad to do so meekly, and to have her back sound in wind and limb, and she would kiss her and love her, instead of whipping her as she well deserved.

So she grew up. When the days of lessons came, and the good fit was on her, she learned better, and behaved better than any two little girls put together in the kingdom. When, however, anything vexed her, she would look threateningly upon the learned professors who sat about her.

“Take care,” she would say once or twice warningly, “or I will say ‘*fuff*.’”

And if they would not be warned, and did not immediately change the distasteful lesson, she did say “*fuff*,” and then what trouble that kitten made! How it leaped upon the table, and turned over the inkstands, disarranged papers, tore lesson books, spat at the German professor and scratched the French one, leaped on the back of the learned doctor of chemistry and disarranged the wig of the professor of theology! Not one of them would stay—no one could be found to teach the princess at last. So she grew up untamed and wild, very charming, with the prettiest manners in the world when she chose; but as a cat she did not improve.

It was a sore trial to the king and queen; but when she was a princess, it was useless to remonstrate with her on the bad deeds that she committed in her cat shape, or rather, her kitten shape; for as a cat she never grew up. And as a princess must never under any circumstances be spoken of except as a princess, it was very often the painful duty of the Lord High Chamberlain to come and report to their majesties, as they sat waiting for their daughter to join them at dinner:

“Her Royal Highness the Princess Fredegonda has gone for a walk with the stable cat, and though the butler has summoned her three times, she refuses to come in to dinner.”

Or the cook would appear and say:

“Her Royal Highness the Princess Fredegonda, in company with the stable cat, stole the finest ortolans out of my pantry to-day, and upset all the cream in the dairy. Therefore your Majesties will have to be content with partridges and milk pudding.”

And so on. It was really dreadful! Still the king and queen hoped on.

"When she likes to behave prettily," the queen would say, "there is not in all the kingdoms a princess who conducts herself with more decorum, more grace or dignity. Some day she will give up these tricks of hers. Some day she will settle down and marry, and then all will go well."

"I pity the poor man," the king said; but then, he generally did pity the poor man, when anyone was married—it was one of his little ways. But the queen looked about for a husband for Fredegonda, and at last she found Prince Aribert. He was so charming that the queen almost fell in love with him herself.

"He has such a wonderfully good temper," she said, "besides being brave, intellectual and handsome. It is quite a pleasure to hear him laugh. He will look upon Fredegonda's little peculiarities as the best fun in the world. They will never annoy him, as they would some husbands."

"Well, we must hope for the best," said the king, with a deep sigh, that plainly showed he expected the worst. It is very odd how unhelpfully people use that little phrase.

But the queen not only hoped, but acted. She and Aribert's mother arranged preliminaries; the young people were to meet. Prince Aribert was to come on a visit to Grunwald, the capital of Fredegonda's parents. Fredegonda was now seventeen, not too young to marry, the queen thought, since that seemed the best way of taming her; and the king did not venture to give an opinion on the matter. He only said he hoped that Aribert's palace roofs were flat, which would have seemed rather irrelevant to anyone who was not fully acquainted with the princess's habits. Aribert was some years older than she, but this was all the better, the queen said; he would have the more patience with her.

"Patience is so necessary with young people," the queen said.

"Especially when one marries them," the king answered, with that little groan of his which he meant for a sigh.

So Aribert was to come. The city was decorated; triumphal arches were built; they were covered with branches of trees, green and flowering rushes, flags, banners, devices and mottos. They said, "Welcome, Aribert!" "Joy to Aribert and Fredegonda!" "Long life and happiness to the prince and princess!" "Prosperity to the youthful pair!" But they said never a word about cats; the city kept strict silence on that head; in fact, it was a point of honour with the Grunwaldians, who scarcely liked it to be known, that their princess, the heir to the Grunwald throne, sometimes sat among chimneys, went for walks with the stable cat and stole ortolans. It was not dignified, they felt.

The queen saw to every preparation herself. She ordered the number of fireworks, and the quantity and quality of wine that was to play in the fountains during the day, chose the oxen that were to be roasted whole, and gave out the gold leaf for gilding their horns. She was such a practical woman!

But Fredegonda was tiresome. She did not absolutely rebel in so many words against the prince's coming, but she refused to be reasonable, and to behave nicely about it. Her hand strayed often to her locket, and "*fuff*" was never very far from her lips, though it did not actually pass them. The king hoped for the best still, and trembled; the queen went on with the preparations calmly. She said she relied on Fredegonda's good sense, but she was the only person who did. Of course, the princess really had a good deal to try her at this time; the dressmakers and the milliners and the hairdressers and the shoemakers, all interviewed and worried her from morning till night. She had

to stand like a lay figure, and be laced here and padded there, and have her hair dragged away from the back of her neck and piled like a pyramid on the top, till her head felt like a flower too heavy for its stalk. Everybody talked a great deal of nonsense to her, she thought, as to how fortunate she was, and how good her parents were to give themselves so much trouble on her behalf.

“As though they did not give me ten times more trouble,” she said to herself ungratefully. “I hate all these fine dresses. It is much more fun to run along the roofs.” And when the long tails were put into her gowns, she turned a scornful eye over her shoulder at them. “They are much too stiff to run round after and play with,” she thought. “Why do princesses have to wear such things? I wish I was all cat—oh! *all* cat, nothing but cat. I don’t like my princess half, a bit. When I was little it meant having my face washed; afterwards, it meant lessons; now, it means standing up stiff and straight to have these fine things tried on, with my hair done up so that my head aches. Cats have a far better time.” And then her hand would stray up to the locket about her neck, and her eyes would turn longingly to one of the gurgoyles on the roof. They were all quite old friends of hers; she had climbed over or sat on every one of them. “I do not like being a princess at all,” she decided. But then her mother would come in rather tired and breathless, poor lady, with a little note-book in her hand, full of calculations as to fireworks, and fountains, and triumphal arches, and banners.

“We are all slaving ourselves to death for your happiness, my darling,” she would say. “I hope you appreciate it.” But Fredegonda did not think she did.

“If only they would slave less, and let me be a little happy in my own way,” she thought naughtily; but still she held her peace.

But Fredegonda stood and looked out of the windows in a temper. An hour passed. Her old nurse looked at her anxiously.

"Their majesties will be back soon," she said. "Is it not time you began to dress, my precious? The hairdresser is waiting, with his tongs hot, to curl your hair. Your own lady-in-waiting is ready to lace you. The hairdresser has brought a box of quite the most beautiful Paris patches. Every lady of fashion wears at least half-a-dozen patches now, I am told, and these are quite beautiful. How nice you will look, my darling, with a coach and horses all done in black on your left cheek, or the sun, moon and stars on your forehead. I shall love to see you."

Fredegonda actually turned round and began to smile.

"Let the hairdresser come in," she said. And the poor man entered, bowing and smiling and rubbing his hands nervously. The queen had said that the penalty of annoying the Princess Fredegonda to-day was banishment for life, so it was really nervous work to curl the hair of such a princess.

"Here, let me see the patches," said Fredegonda.

The hairdresser produced a little box.

"They are beautiful, your Royal Highness," he said. "They are the best. No lady at court has any to be compared with them. These are all quite the latest novelty from Paris, I assure you."

Fredegonda opened the box.

"What a dear little coach and horses!" she cried.

"Oh, I will have these on my forehead!"

The hairdresser and the nurse exchanged glances; matters were going beautifully.

"Your Royal Highness could arrange them whilst curl your hair, perhaps," the barber said, insinuatingly.

Fredegonda sat down before a tall looking-glass, and

At last the great day came on which Aribert was to arrive. The king and queen were to go as far as the gate of the city to receive him, but Fredegonda was not to appear till dinner. It was thought more maidenly and beseeming that she should stay at home; but it vexed her.

"I think I might have a little of the fun, too," she complained. "I should like to see the streets, and hear the people shout, and see the fountains playing red as rubies in the sun. There has not been wine in the fountains since I was born, and I don't believe I was ever taken out to see it then, or if I was, I have forgotten it. It is always the way things happen to me; I never get any amusement."

"Oh, Fredegonda," the poor queen said, "do be good. We must go at once; I cannot stay to talk to you. The king is already waiting in the royal chariot, and everything is so beautifully arranged, down to the very knots of flowers the postillions wear. I have seen to it all myself; and to-night you will see the prince. Be patient, my child."

But Fredegonda pouted.

"Oh, I can be quite patient for that," she said. "He is only a man, and I have seen lots of men, and they are all very much alike, and they don't like me when I play cat tricks with them. At least, the professors never did. But the fountains playing red! Now, that is something quite different! Oh, if you would only take me, I would be good all day! I would be good for three days!"

But the poor queen had to go; the royal programme could not be disarranged.

"I am sure you will be good as it is," she said, with a little nod and smile, and went away, feeling her best crown very uncomfortable, but putting up with the weight and the heat, as a portion of the price she must pay for dear Fredegonda's happiness.

a silken sheet was placed over her shoulders. She stuck the coach and horses on her forehead, and admired the effect for a full minute.

“What do you think of it, nurse?” she cried. “It is rather fun being grown-up, after all.”

The nurse admired it duly. It was the height of the fashion, and therefore undoubtedly lovely. Then Fredegonda found another patch, a ship in full sail this time.

“Oh, that will go on my left cheek!” she cried; but here the hairdresser interposed.

“Your Royal Highness will find one such large patch quite enough. No lady ever wears more than one of that size.”

“I don’t care what anyone else does,” Fredegonda cried. “I will please myself, and I will have on as many patches as I like, and put them on as I please, or you shall not curl my hair!”

So the hairdresser trembled, and consented to the ship in full sail.

“There, now, I’m sure you look lovely,” said the old nurse, coaxingly. “You cannot want to wear any more of them black things, deary. Give me the box, now, do.”

But Fredegonda would not give it up.

“Wait a minute!” she cried. “Here are the sun, moon and stars. What fun! Now I’ll put these on properly, as the professor of astronomy showed me they should go. Here is the sun (she stuck it on), and the moon by its side, and all the dear little stars all round.”

“Fredegonda laughed and clapped her hands; but the nurse began to weep, and the hairdresser trembled so that the hot tongs touched Fredegonda’s forehead and burnt an ugly red mark there.

“Do let me wash your face, darling, and have those

nasty black things off," the poor nurse cried, and the new lady-in-waiting joined in her entreaties; but Fredegonda would not be persuaded.

"You annoy me by making all this fuss," she said. "And the hairdresser shall not curl my hair any more. I do not care a bit if half my head's straight, and half curly. If the prince doesn't like me so, he can go away again. And now my lady-in-waiting can lace me if she likes."

"If your Royal Highness will not allow me to finish your hair, I shall be banished for ever from Grunwald," the hairdresser said, imploringly. "And I have a wife and children."

"That is nothing to do with me," Fredegonda said sharply. "I should like to have all the hairdressers banished; then I would wear my hair as I like, and my head would not ache. And I daresay your wife and children will like a little change to another country."

So the hairdresser departed in tears. Then the lacing began, but that went badly, too.

"If your Royal Highness would hold your breath for a moment," the lady-in-waiting implored, "I could make you such a beautiful slim figure."

But Fredegonda would do nothing of the kind.

"I think it is very ugly to go about broken in two halves, and looking like a wasp," she said. "If I am to be like a wasp I shall sting."

So the lady-in-waiting pulled and panted, all to no purpose; and Fredegonda stamped and moved her shoulders impatiently up and down, and took deep breaths, and thought of the fountains playing red, and of how pleasant the palace roofs looked in the sun, and saw how ugly the patches were she had stuck all over her face, and was too proud to take them off again, and so got cross with herself and with everybody else.



Presently they heard shouting in the distance.

"The procession is approaching!" the old nurse cried, leaning out of the window. "The carriages are even now coming into the courtyard. There sits the prince! How beautiful and gracious he looks, and how charmingly he bows from right to left! Oh, what will he say, what will everybody say, when they see you looking like this?"

And then, because she was really ashamed of herself, and knew that she would be scolded and blamed, and what was worse, that she well deserved it, and that her mother would cry, and the king her father say, "It was just what I expected!" the last remnant of Fredegonda's patience gave way, and *fuff!* before they knew where they were, the royal robes were all lying on the floor, and the little black kitten was high up among the chimneys, enjoying a good view of the procession at last!

What fun it was! She forgot all about the vexation and annoyance she would cause, now that she was free from all restraint at last. She picked her way daintily across the roofs, unnoticed by anyone, and found the stable cat. She woke him up with a little sharp scratch on his nose.

"Take me down into the city," she said; "you know the way. The fountains are playing wine red as rubies in the public squares. Oh, it will be lovely! Do make haste! What a stupid, sleepy thing you are!"

She would not even give him time to brush his whiskers, a thing he seldom thought of doing, certainly, but he felt this to be an occasion.

"I thought you were to be married to-day," he said. "I have been quite sorry; we have had such fun together hunting mice."

The princess laughed at the idea of her being married out of hand, in such an easy fashion.

"I shall not be married for ever so long, if at all," she answered, holding up her head very high as they picked their way along the wall. "I am not entirely a cat, that my affairs should be settled so easily!"

But this remark made the stable cat cross; he felt it as an insult to his race, and it made him unpleasant, and they quarrelled.

"You are a very rude, ill-bred cat," the kitten princess said with dignity. "I shall have nothing more to do with you. I shall go back and marry the prince."

So she arched her back, and spat at him very rudely, and he forgot himself so far as to swear, and she left him, and marched back to the palace roof. From there she could see everything was in confusion. People were running here, there and everywhere.

"Princess Fredegonda!" "Puss, puss, puss!" "Your Royal Highness!" "My darling child!" So they were all calling her high and low, and she sat behind the chimney and laughed.

"Serve them right, for treating her so badly, for making her wear her hair in that ugly fashion, and for belacing and bebothering her generally!" and she tucked her little black tail comfortably round her little black paws, and went to sleep. In that position she was discovered by the telescope of the Lord High Admiral, who was called in to assist the principal astronomer in looking for her.

"There she is, to leeward!" the old sailor cried; but as the astronomer didn't know where leeward was, it took him a long time to see her too, but at last he ratified the Lord High Admiral's judgement. Yes, it was certainly the princess, and she was fast asleep, or pretended to be so, and the dinner and the prince were waiting!

They knew of old how fruitless it was to attempt to catch her, even if anybody could be found sufficiently daring

to try and climb to the spot on which she was perched. So they did the only thing they could. The Lord High Chamberlain requested the favour of a moment's audience with the queen, as she was sitting entertaining the prince with smiling lips, and anxious eyes, and a heart half ready to break, hoping every moment that her naughty Fredegonda might appear.

"Can I speak with your majesty?" the Lord Chamberlain said, and the queen knew too well why she was wanted. She rose, made her little excuse, and disappeared. She was gone a long time, and presently the king was sent for. Prince Aribert wondered. He was now quite alone, and very hungry, and a little impatient too to see his future bride. If he had not had a very good temper he might even have felt a little cross. As it was, the balcony doors stood open, and the gardens looked pleasant and cool, and presently he got tired of sitting alone, and rose and wandered out into them. The gardens looked into the courtyard, and by and by, a hubbub of voices led him there. What a sight he saw! There stood the king and queen, with the Lord High Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice, the Lord High Admiral, the Lord High Chamberlain, the chief astronomer, all the physicians of the court, and a crowd of ladies-in-waiting and courtiers, men-servants and maid-servants, down to the very cook and the little scullion, who had come running up with the spit in his hand. They all stood together, looking up tragically, anxiously, imploringly, at a small black kitten on the roof, who, in her turn, regarded them with the greatest carelessness.

"Puss, puss, puss!" their majesties, the King and Queen, the Lord High Chancellor, the Lord Chief Justice, the Lord High Admiral, the Lord High Chamberlain, and all the other dignitaries cried together.

"Puss, puss, puss!" in the most wheedling accents.

"Come down directly!" said the queen.

"Such a beautiful dinner!" said the king, feelingly.

"You need not have your hair curled!" the old nurse sobbed.

"And the prince is waiting!" the queen said again.

"Such a beautiful young man! What will he think?"

But the little kitten only stood up and arched her back, and yawned in their faces, yawned so that her little red tongue, and her little white teeth, were plainly visible in the bright sunlight, even at that height. Then she tucked her tail over her paws and appeared to be settling down to sleep. At this moment the queen lost her temper with her darling child, almost for the first time in her life.

"Fredegonda, I am ashamed of you!" she cried.

"Come down directly from behind that chimney! I wonder you are not ashamed to pretend to go to sleep there. Suppose the prince were to see you now!"

And then, as the whole court stood silent and breathless, they heard the sound of a laugh, a hearty, merry, infectious laugh. It was Aribert. His quick wit had led him to the understanding of the whole situation, and his sense of fun was too deeply stirred for him to be able to restrain his mirth.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he roared.

Nobody had ever seen the funny side of the princess's misconduct before; everybody had looked upon it as far too grave a subject for laughter, but suddenly the humour of the situation occurred to them all. The Lord Chief Justice's brow unpuckered; the Lord High Chamberlain bit his lip; the Lord High Chancellor blew his nose violently, which might mean anything; the ladies of the court raised their fans and tapped their mouths with them; the courtiers, who had not got fans, looked foolish, and down at their toes.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Aribert's laugh rang on. What a

side-splitting joke it was after all! A little titter began to shake the courtly assemblage, very feeble at first, and trickling as water might, through a chink, but presently the chink enlarged and the laughter gushed forth. How they all laughed! Never had such unrestrained mirth been seen in the court before. Even the king said "Ha! Ha! Ha!" dividing his laugh off into little gasps, so that it seemed to hurt him. But the queen did not smile, and as for Fredegonda, for one instant she stood looking down upon them all as they laughed at her, with her back arched and her tail erect, cat fashion, which only made them laugh the more—the next she fled. Springing from gurgoyle to gurgoyle, from gable to gable, taking breakneck leaps, clinging where a pigeon would hardly find foothold, so she fled. And before the court had had time to recover from its confusion, she was gone, hopelessly gone. When they realized that, everybody suddenly became solemn; only Aribert laughed still.

"The poor little soul!" he said. "She'll come back by and by. I am not anxious at all." To prove which, he ate a very good dinner, and slept soundly. No one else in the palace did, but for all the good it did to wake and watch, they might all have slept comfortably, for Fredegonda was gone, and she did not return. For weeks they hoped. Fabulous rewards were offered for a small black kitten, and fabulous numbers of black kittens were brought to the palace. That none of them answered to the name of Fredegonda was nothing. When Fredegonda was in her catly moods, she never answered to anything, and heaven alone knew how long this particular mood might last. A sort of menagerie or home for cats was established in the courtyard of the palace.

"It would be so dreadful," the queen said, "if by any chance the right kitten should be sent away after all." So

they all had to be examined carefully by the Lord High Chamberlain, who wore very thick gloves for the occasion, to see if in the fur of any of them the magical locket was hidden. But though the fur of many of them was black and long, it was scarcely long enough to hide that gleaming charm, and, as a matter of fact, it did not. Prince Aribert waited on patiently, enjoying himself as much as possible under the circumstances, and making himself quite at home, hunting, hawking, or fishing daily, till the last hope was gone.

"It is no use," the queen said, "my darling child is dead. We shall never see our poor, dear, beautiful, tiresome Fredegonda any more. Let the court go into mourning."

So the court went into mourning, and Prince Aribert went home.

"It is a great pity," he said to the king, before leaving: "I think I should have liked her." But the king only sighed deeply and shook his head. Then he looked over his shoulder at the queen, who wasn't listening, and whispered to Aribert:

"I think you have had a lucky escape." And then sighed again, but Aribert laughed.

As for Fredegonda, when, with the laughter of the court ringing in her ears, she rushed away from the palace, through the city, out into the wide world, she had not the least idea where she was going. She thought she would earn her own living as a cat. She had caught three sparrows in her life, and on two occasions, mice, which she had always given to the stable cat to eat, though she had enjoyed the sport. But she had a human predilection in favour of cooked food. Still, she could live on mice, she thought, and in the forest she should be free, and birds were plentiful, and she could sleep in the trees, and perhaps there

would be dear little wild cats to play with, and nobody would ever scold her, or cry about her any more. But somehow it did not work. The weather became bad, and it rained a great deal, and the wind was cold, and the holes in the tree trunks were dirty, and a wild cat she saw once frightened her dreadfully, and talked with such a bad accent she could scarcely understand him. And as for food, the little mice that were in the forest were so quick in their movements, and so cunning of eye, that she was nearly starved. But she would not go home.

"I will never go home!" she said, and she meant it.

So she wandered on and on, further and further away, growing more hungry, more thin, more ragged and disreputable-looking every day, a very lean, wretched little kitten indeed. At last she came quite to the other side of the forest, and there was a farmer's house and a big yard, in which there stood stacks of wheat and hay.

"Oh, mice!" said the poor little princess to herself. "Nice, fat, sleepy mice there!" and she dragged her weary little limbs across the road; and then, oh horror! a great dog bounded at her! His huge jaws were open, his hot breath was in her face, she felt herself already torn to pieces, dying! Her fright was so great, she could not even remember to say "*Fuff.*"

"F—f—f!" she stammered, feeling for the word.

It would have been too late to help her, she would have been past any help at all, if at that moment an old woman, who had been picking up sticks in the road, had not come hobbling quickly to her aid. She struck at the farmer's dog with her stick.

"Go away, you bad fellow!" she cried. "Get along with you! Poor little kitty! Was it a poor little kitty,

then? Bless me, how thin it is. I think I will take it home."

And the poor little princess was glad enough to lie in her apron, in company with the sticks she had gathered, and be safely carried to a tiny cottage, and there laid before the warm fire and given a little milk to drink. She even tried to purr her thanks, though she had never tried to purr before, and it gave her a sore throat. But still, she was grateful, and she wanted to show it.

"Poor little thing," said the old woman; "how funny it do purr! And what a sad, hunted look it have in its eyes, to be sure! And, bless me, what is that round its neck?"

But the princess would not let her touch that. She arched her back a little and looked at the door, as if she were going to run away, and the poor old woman, who was a little lonely, and had often wanted a cat for company's sake, let her be.

"She has been a pet cat, most likely, where there was children, and they have hung one of their doll's things on her to dress her up. Children do lead cats dreadful lives sometimes, and never mean the half of it. Well, she can bide here quiet with me."

And so she did, for weeks. Her fur grew less ragged, and she was not so thin as she had been in the forest, but still her eyes looked sad, and their human expression often troubled the good dame.

"There's something uncanny about that cat, I'm sure," she would say to herself. "But there, I shall keep it now I've got it, poor little thing!"

And the princess stayed for many reasons, the principal one being that she did not know what else to do. She

felt she could never go home again, where she had behaved so badly, and where the whole court had laughed at her. She heard the sound of that laughter even in her dreams, and would start and shiver. And she was afraid to leave the dame's cottage, either as a cat, or in her own natural shape. In the one case she might meet that fearful dog again; in the other, she would have to give a number of explanations that would be tedious and painful, and which, even if they were believed, could only end in her being sent home in disgrace. So she made up her mind to remain a cat for ever—at least, for ever, except at short times when the good dame was out. Then she would say "*fuff*" backwards and sit by the fire for a while in her natural shape, and take a pleasure in hearing her own voice again, and in weeping the tears which are denied to cats. But one day she was so engrossed in this, that she did not hear the old dame's footstep at the door, and the old woman was startled to find that, instead of a little black kitten lying down upon her hearthrug, there was a slim maiden, whose black hair hung round her like a veil, and who sobbed:

"Oh, the queen my mother, how she will cry for me; how she will bewail her poor, naughty Fredegonda! I shall never see her again, never."

"Why, bless my soul!" cried the old lady, and then Fredegonda cried "*fuff*," but it was too late; the old woman had her in her arms, good stout, sturdy, country arms, and she could not get her hand up to her locket in time.

"Let me go," she panted. "I shall scratch or bite you."

"It would not be like a princess to bite a poor old woman like me," the dame said. "Especially after all the

nice milk you have drunk since you have been here, and my giving you the warmest place at my fire."

"Oh, everybody is good to me," Fredegonda sobbed, "and I am bad, bad! Wicked!"

Then her heart softened, and she told her story to the old woman, while she was rocked and held close, almost as tenderly as her old nurse or her mother would have held her.

"Dear me! You have been naughty!" the good woman said. "Very naughty! Haven't you now? And such a nice young man as your mamma had got for you! But the only thing when folks have been naughty is to ——"

"I will never go home to them!" Fredegonda interrupted her. "Never! I swear it! Promise not to tell my father and mother, or I will say '*fuff*' and go out into the road and let the farmer's dog eat me."

She looked so desperate and so tragic, that the old woman promised, and Fredegonda was content. She stayed in her natural shape now, and would help the good dame about her house.

"I can be useful to you: I will be like a daughter," she said.

"Do you think you could keep house for me for a couple of days, while I go to the city?" the old woman asked her. "I have got a niece there I have not seen for a long time, and she doesn't like the country, but she is very pleased to have me come and visit her. Do you think you could take care of things for me while I am gone?"

"Of course I could!" Fredegonda cried, pleased to be trusted.

Then the artful old lady put on her bonnet and cloak, and took her basket, with a cake in it for the

journey, and a present of new-laid eggs for her niece, and went on her way to the city truly, but it was also Aribert's capital, though this Fredegonda never guessed. And when the old lady had been to her niece, and left the eggs she went on to the palace and told her story. And Aribert laughed very much. He seemed to think it was very funny when she told him how the princess had wandered in the forest, and found mice-catching so very much more difficult than she had expected.

"It is ever so much better that this should have happened before I married her, than after," said the Prince, but then he always looked at the best side of things.

"I will go back with you at once." So he ordered out a coach and four, and the old woman was driven back in fine style. But when they came to the bottom of the road she begged that the carriage might stop.

"If the Princess sees us she will be so ashamed at the idea of facing you that she will say '*fuff*' at once, and then who is ever to catch her again?" she said wisely. So the Prince and she got out of the carriage, and walked quietly to the cottage together, and there was Fredegonda sitting by the hearth, with her hair falling about her, sewing and singing a little song; a very simple little song that her nurse had taught her when she was a tiny girl.

Hush! little Baby. The curtains of cloud
 Close round the couch of the wandering world.
 Hush! little Darling. No wind waketh loud;
 Trail the grey banners the mist hath unfurl'd.
 Dawn is still distant, and only she may
 Draw the world-curtains and let in the Day.
 Hush! little cat.

THE DREAM GARDEN

Hush! little Baby. How wakeful thy stare is;
 What dost thou see as the shadows slip by?
 Sleep, little Darling. For only the Fairies
 All through the night are so wakeful of eye.
 Night sighs in dying—yet dawn doth delay
 To draw the world-curtains and let in the Day.
 Hush! little cat.

“Ain’t she a pretty love?” the good dame said.

“She is a little cat,” the Prince answered, as he ran in and caught her in his arms. And then how she struggled!

“How dare you?” she cried. “How dare you? Let me go! I’ll say ‘*fuff*.’ I’ll ——”

“No, you won’t,” he answered kindly. “You don’t want to be a cat again, and have to depend upon your own exertions for your living, I am quite sure; to say nothing of farmers’ dogs and wild cats, and all the other unpleasantnesses that you might meet with. I don’t believe you want to say ‘*fuff*’ a bit. I believe you want to marry me.” And when the Princess looked in his kind, merry face she believed so too.

“But I can’t keep good a bit, you know,” she said sadly. “I shall have to be a cat again some day, when the naughty mood comes on.”

But the Prince was undoing the clasp of the chain that held the locket on her neck. He held it up above her head now, and it flashed in the sun.

“Say ‘*fuff*’!” he cried, and she did, but there was no result.

Then he ran out with the locket, and threw it down a well in the old dame’s garden.

“There let it stop!” he said. “You shall have plenty of other pretty things, and I will give them to you, and when

you are so disposed you may even be a little bit of a cat to me, if I give you great provocation. But I really couldn't have a wife who went to sleep on the palace roof, or took walks with the stable cat. We must draw the line somewhere."

CHRISTINA DENING

[Years ago, when I first knew and loved *Fuff*, the author used to read it to her little daughter. Now the little daughter is grown up, and in memory of her dead mother, she has given me this story for *The Dream Garden*.—
THE EDITOR.]

