

The King of the Cats



Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived in a lonely house in a very lonely part of Scotland. An old woman used to do the cooking, and there was no one else, unless we count her cat and their own dogs, within miles of them.

One autumn afternoon the elder of the two, whom we will call Elshender, said he would not go out - so the younger one, Fergus, went alone to follow the path where they had been shooting the day before, far across the mountains.

He meant to return home before the early sunset - however, he did not do so, and Elshender became very uneasy as he watched and waited in vain till long after their usual suppertime. At last Fergus returned, wet and exhausted, nor did he explain why he was so late.

But after supper when the two brothers were seated before the fire, on which the peat crackled cheerfully, the dogs lying at their feet, and the old woman's black cat sitting gravely with half-shut eyes on the hearth between them, Fergus recovered himself and began to tell his adventures.

"You must be wondering," said he, "what made me so late. I have had a very, very strange adventure to-day. I hardly know what to say about it. I went, as I told you I should, along our yesterday's track. A mountain fog came on just as I was about to turn homewards, and I completely lost my way. I wandered about for a long time not knowing where I was, till at last I saw a light, and made for it, hoping to get help.

"As I came near it, it disappeared, and I found myself close to an old oak tree. I climbed into the branches the better to look for the light, and, behold! there it was right beneath me, inside the hollow trunk of the tree. I seemed to be looking down into a church, where a funeral was taking place. I heard singing, and saw a coffin surrounded by torches, all carried by But I know you won't believe me, Elshender, if I tell you!"

His brother eagerly begged him to go on, and threw a dry peat on the fire to encourage him. The dogs were sleeping quietly, but the cat was sitting up, and seemed to be listening just as carefully and cannily as Elshender himself. Both brothers, indeed, turned their eyes on the cat as Fergus took up his story.

"Yes," he continued, "it is as true as I sit here. The coffin and the torches were both carried by CATS, and upon the coffin were marked a crown and a scepter!"

He got no farther, for the black cat started up, shrieking:

"My stars! old Peter's dead, and I'm the King o' the Cats!"
Then rushed up the chimney, and was seen no more.

