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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The King's Servant

Once upon a time, there lived a King who had a servant named Muccio, of whom he was very fond—so fond, in fact, that all the other servants disliked Muccio very much and wished to be rid of him.

At last, one day, when the King dressed Muccio in a coat of red velvet and gave him a sword to wear at his side, the servants could stand it no longer; their envy was so great.

So one of the servants went to an old witch in the woods and asked her to change Muccio into a cat.

This the old witch promised to do for a bag of gold which all the servants had to make up out of their small savings, and one day, while the King and Muccio were sitting in the garden of the palace, Muccio suddenly disappeared and a big black cat took his place. The King hunted, and the servants pretended to hunt for Muccio also, but nowhere could he be found, of course, for he had been changed into a black cat.

When the King saw the big black cat around the palace grounds, he called it to him, and when it rubbed its head against him and followed him about (for, of course, the black cat was fond of the King just the same as Muccio had been), the King ordered that it should have a red velvet cushion to sleep upon and a gold collar for its neck and should be fed on the richest cream.

The servants saw they had not done much harm to Muccio, after all, and again they went to the old witch and asked her to change the cat into a lion. For another bag of gold, the witch promised to do as they wished, and so out of their small store of savings, the servants made up another bag of gold and gave it to the witch. Then one day when the King went to the place where the black cat usually slept on its velvet cushion, he was nearly frightened out of his wits to find a lion.

But instead of being fierce, as he looked, the lion crawled along to the King for him to scratch his head, just as he had done when he was a black cat.

Then he licked the hand of the King, who was so pleased that the king of beasts should be so tame and fond of him that he ordered a gold cage to be made and a bed of purple velvet to be put in it and a gold dish for the lion to eat from.

Again the servants saw they had failed to get rid of Muccio, so they went to the old witch and told her she must change the lion into something so dreadful that the king would not want it near him.

This time the old witch asked for more gold, and it took all the savings the servants had to pay her, and this time Muccio was changed into a dreadful dragon. When the King went to the cage and saw the dragon in place of the lion, he knew some wicked spell was at work around him and he sent for the old witch in the woods. Of course, the King could give her more gold than his servants, and he asked her to find out what spell had been cast over the black cat to change it into so many different shapes, for he did not know that Muccio had



been changed into the black cat; he still thought he was lost in the woods about the palace and probably had died for want of food.

The old witch, knowing she could not get any more from the servants, told the King that for a barrel of gold, she would tell him what had

happened. First, she caused the dragon to change to the lion and then the lion into the cat; then she waved her hands and muttered a few words, and to the surprise of the King, there stood his servant Muccio before him. After the old witch had hobbled away, Muccio told his King that he was sure the servants had caused all his troubles, and the King called the servants, who now were very frightened, and they confessed all to him. Muccio pleaded for them not to be punished, and the King spared their lives but only on condition that they should have no more money to spend, but that they should work for their food and clothes the rest of their lives.

"For you are not to be trusted with money," he told them. "You need a master as well as a king, and now you shall have one."

So the wicked servants had to wait on Muccio the rest of their lives, for the King grew fonder of him than ever and never let him leave his side.