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Dinah Cat And The Witch

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Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Betty. She was an orphan, and a bad landlord turned her out of her home. The only friend she had was a black cat named Dinah. Betty was crying as she walked along the road, and Dinah Cat ran beside her, rubbing against her feet. All at once she ran in front of Betty and stood on her hind legs. "Do not cry, mistress," she said. "I'll take care of you."

Betty was so surprised to hear Dinah Cat speak that she stopped crying at once. "You poor Dinah Cat," she said, "what can you do? We must go to the city, and if I can find work we shall be able to live; if not, you must take care of yourself, for you can catch mice and keep from starving."

"You come with me, mistress," answered Dinah Cat, "and you will not need to work and you will not starve." And she put out her paw for Betty to take and walked alongside her. When they came to a path leading into the wood Dinah Cat led Betty along this path until they were in front of two very large trees which had grown together, but there was a big opening in the trunk. "We'll go in here," said Dinah Cat, and as they stepped through they were in a hall. She led Betty up the stairs to a room where there was a snowy-white bed and pretty furnishings. "Dinner will be served as soon as you are dressed, mistress," said Dinah Cat.

After she had gone Betty looked around, and in the closets she found pretty dresses which just fitted her. She put on one of them, and in a few minutes she was ready for dinner. Just then she heard a soft, scratching noise at the door, and when she opened it Dinah Cat walked in.

"How do you like your new home, mistress?" she asked.



"Very much," Betty answered. "But we cannot live in such a nice house. We have no money, and, besides that, this house must belong to some one. And this dress I have on must belong to some little girl. I should not wear it."

"The dress did belong to a little girl," said Dinah Cat, "but she cannot wear it now, and she wants you to have it. And do not fret about the house. It belongs to me. I cannot tell you any more just now, but you need not worry any more about

anything, for you are to live here, if you wish, after you have dinner, for then you will meet a boy, and you may not like him."

Dinah Cat led Betty into a room where the table was set for three persons, and when they were seated a boy about Betty's age came in and sat with them. He wore his hat, and a thick veil hung from it.

"I am sorry I cannot remove my hat," he said, in a very sweet voice, "and I will go away if you'd rather I would."

"Oh no," said Betty, feeling very much like an intruder. "I am very grateful to you for letting me stay, and I will help to do the work."

"You do not need to work," said the boy. "If you will stay we will be very glad."

Betty did not once get a glimpse of his face, he lifted the veil so carefully. And there sat Dinah Cat, using her knife and fork like any lady. Betty smiled to herself when she thought of her eating from a saucer.

Suddenly Dinah Cat slid out of her chair and crawled under it, and the little boy trembled so that his chair shook. Betty looked around to find the cause of their strange behavior, and saw standing in the doorway an old woman with a staff in her hand. She hobbled over to where Dinah Cat sat and raised the staff. Betty thought she was going to strike her.

"Don't you hurt Dinah Cat!" she cried, running toward the old witch, who was so startled that she dropped the staff, and Betty picked it up.

"Don't let her have it again," said the boy; "that is the cause of all our trouble."

Betty threw the staff in a closet and locked the door. All this time the witch was stepping backward toward the door by which she entered, and she grew smaller with each step. By the time she was out of the house she looked like a black speck, and a breeze blowing just then carried her out of sight. "But how shall we ever be ourselves again?" said the boy. "She has gone, and here we are, in this state."

"Perhaps the stick will do it," said Dinah Cat.

Betty wondered what they meant, and the boy told her that Dinah Cat was his sister before the witch changed her into a cat, and made his face so hideous that he had to wear a veil, and they had lived very happily together. "But one day the old witch came and wanted to live with us, and we let her for a while, but she was so cross and made us so unhappy we told her she must go away. Then she brought all this change upon us, and every once in a while she returns and frightens us, for we do not know what she will change us into next."

"Let me get the stick," said Betty. "Perhaps we can change Dinah Cat to your

sister again."

Betty opened the door of the closet, and instead of the stick there was a bright streak of light, and walking on it was a little Fairy who held a wand in her hand.

"You will soon be happy again," she told them. "I have destroyed the stick and the old witch will never return."

Then she walked over to Dinah Cat and touched her with her wand and there stood a little girl about Betty's age in place of the black cat.

"Now close your eyes," said the Fairy, "for I want the boy to remove his veil, and his face is not pleasant to look upon."

Betty did as the Fairy told her, but I am sorry to tell you that she peeked a very little. Betty closed her eyes tight after the first glimpse and waited for the Fairy to tell her to open them again, and when she did there stood the boy with a very smiling face. His sister ran to him and put her arms around him. "Now we shall be happy," she said, "and Betty will live with us. How can we thank you?" she asked the Fairy.

"Oh, I shall be repaid by seeing you all happy," the Fairy replied. "And now I must go."

"Will we see you again?" asked Betty.

"No," answered the Fairy. "I only appear when people are in trouble, and you will never need me again."

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